

WE BOUGHT A ZOO

BENJAMIN MEE

Is dressed in a protective Hazmat suit. He is covered in Killer Bees. We hear the voice of a 14 year-old boy, Benjamin's son. His voice cracks with adolescence.

DYLAN'S VOICE

My dad is a writer who specialized in adventure.

Benjamin speaks into a tape-recorder.

BENJAMIN

I've got hundreds, maybe thousands of Killer Bees all over me, right now. If I wasn't wearing this suit, I'd be dead in an instant.

A PASSPORT

Each page, covered in stamps.

DYLAN'S VOICE

He interviewed dangerous dictators.

HUGO CHAVEZ

Speaks emphatically to Benjamin Mee.

CHAVEZ

(in subtitles)

Take this message back to America!
I have a ten billion-dollar oil
loan from China -- deal with it!

ON A SWIRLING MASS OF ANGRY CLOUDS

A plane surges through a lethal hurricane.

DYLAN'S VOICE

He even flew into the center of Hurricane Charley. It was a Category Four storm.

IN THE COCKPIT

Benjamin, bouncing wildly, looks completely alive.

DYLAN'S VOICE (CONT'D)

He knew the ins and outs of strange and exotic adventure... backwards and forwards. But nothing prepared him for this one.

INT. BENJAMIN MEE'S KITCHEN -- MORNING

We see a young girl's feet in Reindeer slippers. Then Dylan's sneakers, hand-drawn with artwork. Then Benjamin's bare feet. Their dog, LEON, winds through the morning chaos. Dylan's sneakers step on his tail. The dog yelps.

Benjamin Mee tries to negotiate breakfast as a single father. His lively daughter, ROSIE, is 6. DYLAN, 14, looks like a young Tim Burton.

ROSIE

Daddy! I can't have this milk.
I'm lactose intolerant.

BENJAMIN

I know that --

ROSIE

Mom always gave me Almond Milk.

DYLAN

These waffles are not gluten free.
Dad, you didn't read the label.

BENJAMIN

Did anybody say "good morning?"

INT. BENJAMIN'S CAR -- MORNING

Benjamin is late, he's got Subway sandwiches in the car, stuffing them into lunch-bags as he drives.

BENJAMIN

So what are you telling me, Dylan?

DYLAN

I didn't do the work.

BENJAMIN

You have to focus. If you focused
on your homework like you focused
on your artwork, you'd have it all.
As it is --

ROSIE

Hey Dad --

BENJAMIN

(to Dylan)

-- you're going to get an F!

Dylan drops a truth bomb.

DYLAN

Dad. Nobody's going to give an "F"
to a guy whose Mom died six months
ago.

EXT. FRONT OF SCHOOL -- MORNING

Benjamin unloads. A wheel comes off Dylan's pack.

BENJAMIN

Shi...

ROSIE

Owe me a dollar!

Benjamin is barely able to balance the swirling duties.

BENJAMIN

I didn't complete the word --

DYLAN

I got it, Dad. I got it.

ON SCHOOL MOTHERS

Watching nearby. They share a look at each other, evaluating Benjamin's lack of parenting ease. One holds a Hello Kitty bag. Another wears the perfect sweats and Jackie O shades. They have mothering down to a designer-accessorized science. One of them is sentimental. She holds a Pyrex dish as she watches Benjamin get his kids through the school's front door.

SENTIMENTAL MOTHER

Mr. Mee! I thought maybe...

She pushes the Pyrex towards him.

SENTIMENTAL MOTHER (CONT'D)

... Lasagna.

Benjamin takes it and thanks her silently. He looks at the Pyrex dish. She sees he still wears his wedding ring.

BENJAMIN

Thank you so much. I'll get this
dish back to you --

SENTIMENTAL MOTHER

-- in time. In time.

He nods. It's the sympathy conversations that he finds hardest. Rosie waves to him, knowing somehow that wave was exactly what he needed, at that exact moment. He waves back.

EXT. SAN DIEGO STREET -- DAY

Benjamin and his brother, DUNCAN, 30's, walk the business courtyard near Duncan's office. It's lunchtime busy. Duncan and Benjamin have a unique way of speaking. Somehow, long ago, they settled on a rhythm of offering noble pronouncements to each other.

DUNCAN

Benjamin. I have arrived at a
thought.

BENJAMIN

Tell me, Dunc.

DUNCAN

I think you should call that girl
we met at Jamba Juice.

Benjamin looks slightly horrified.

DUNCAN (CONT'D)

Benjie, she was a stunner.

BENJAMIN

She wasn't beautiful like my
Katherine.

Duncan has stopped. Their favorite donut place is closed.

DUNCAN

"Closed temporarily for
renovations." Bernie's hungover
again.

BENJAMIN

A "stunner?" Really?

Benjamin scoffs.

DUNCAN

All right, let's think, there's...
well, how about Neal's?

Duncan indicates a place nearby, on the corner. It's Neal's, a coffee shop with cool wooden booths. Benjamin stiffens noticeably, won't even look at the place.

BENJAMIN

Duncan.

DUNCAN

Look, the world is going to get
very small if you don't go to any
places where you guys used to go.

BENJAMIN
I met her there.

DUNCAN
Oh Jesus, I'm sorry. That's right.

BENJAMIN
I gotta get back to work anyway.
We'll go out later this week.

DUNCAN
Okay then.

Benjamin starts to go, but Duncan grabs his arm.

DUNCAN (CONT'D)
Benjie. Let a little sunlight in.
Human interaction is a good thing.
It'll help you start again. You
need to start again.

He holds his fist out for a bump.

DUNCAN (CONT'D)
Come on. It's the new "high-five."

Benjamin reluctantly bumps.

BENJAMIN
I miss the high-five.

DUNCAN
You "miss" everything. Stop it!

BENJAMIN
(courtly)
I will attempt to "start over."

DUNCAN
I love you, my brother.

They hug. And they do love each other. A lot.

BENJAMIN
Thanks man.

Benjamin strides away.

DUNCAN
Benjie!

Benjamin turns. Duncan spreads his arms, it's a beautiful day. He demonstrates the art of "basking."

DUNCAN (CONT'D)
"Sunlight!" "Human interaction!"

Benjamin bows. I got it.

DUNCAN (CONT'D)

"Joy!"

Benjamin pauses to admire his brother -- who roots for "Joy" like it's a football team. He smiles and turns.

INT. SAN DIEGO UNION ELEVATOR -- DAY

Benjamin stands in the workplace elevator. He looks over at a WOMAN, who nods with sympathy. He nods back. Then at ANOTHER WOMAN. She nods, with understanding sympathy. He returns a small smile. Then he looks at a MAN, who looks at him with obliging sympathy. It's getting to be too much.

INT. COPY DESK -- DAY

Benjamin meets his editor, DELBERT MCGINTY, 50's. McGinty is old-school, patches on the elbows of his coat. Last of a dying breed.

BENJAMIN

Alright, McGinty, so get this. I go to the Volcano eruption site. And I take the kids. And I write about... the end of the world, from the point of view of the generation that will save it. And we do a whole thing about life being elemental, and all the software and laptops and apps in the world can't change it, and the piece is called, get this... i-Pocalypse.

MCGINTY

Wow. Just... wow.

BENJAMIN

I see it as a series. Like the Killer Bees.

MCGINTY

That is bold stuff.

BENJAMIN

You're not going to say "yes" are you?

MCGINTY

(immediate, truthful)

No.

BENJAMIN

Right. Okay.

MCGINTY

Listen, I think we should give you an online column. That way you're protected. If the paper goes down, or gets sold, you're still safe. You'll be virtual, you'll be "viral"...

BENJAMIN

Don't keep me around out of...

MCGINTY

I'm not --

BENJAMIN

... out of sympathy. I hate sympathy. I'm sick of sympathy.

MCGINTY

(sympathetic)

I know.

BENJAMIN

You know what --

MCGINTY

Bad things happen. You just keep going.

BENJAMIN

-- I quit.

MCGINTY

Benjamin.

BENJAMIN

No. I'm not going to sit around here and spin my wheels and live in a state of... of sponsored pity.

MCGINTY

Please, just let me lay you off so you get the benefits.

BENJAMIN

That is more sympathy. No! I resign. And I love you, and your patched elbows, and I salute you, and all our good times together, and I quit.

His cell-phone rings.

EXT. SCHOOL -- DAY

Benjamin moves importantly up the stairs.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE -- DAY

Benjamin sits in the chair next to his son. Together they stare straight ahead. A breeze blows the hand-crank window back and forth. Squeak, squeak, squeak.

BENJAMIN
Classy. Real classy.

DYLAN
They left the cash box right out on the counter. Kinda their fault if you think about it.

BENJAMIN
Three suspensions in one semester. That's got to be some kind of record.

Benjamin stares at the squeaky window.

DYLAN
Maybe I'll get a prize.

BENJAMIN
Was that a joke? Could you possibly be making a "joke" right now? Because if you think --
(re: the window)
JESUS, that's annoying.

Benjamin gets up and walks over to the window. Dylan watches him work at it. The PRINCIPAL walks in. Sees Dylan sitting alone. Dylan gestures to the window. Benjamin has already got the window unhinged and is working on it. He looks up. They're staring at him.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
The window frame was loose.
Tightening it for you. Just... one second...

He uses his car-key screwdriver.

PRINCIPAL
I'm fine with my squeaky window, Mr. Mee.

Benjamin abandons the window.

PRINCIPAL (CONT'D)
Besides today's theft, there is a darkness here that we should deal with. Mr. Devereaux, Dylan's art teacher, wanted you to see his wall mural.

EXT. SCHOOL WALL -- DAY

They walk along a pleasant row of large-sized student murals. Sunflowers. A portrait of Bob Marley. A treatment of the word "Love," and then... a very dark portrait of humanity that only Francis Bacon could love.

PRINCIPAL

Guess which one is your son.

Benjamin stares at this horrible portrait.

PRINCIPAL (CONT'D)

We are a three strikes school, Mr. Mee. Today was his third strike. I'm sorry we have to expel Dylan. But as one parent to another. I would examine his inner life.

EXT. PARKING LOT -- AFTERNOON

They walk in silence. Benjamin barely keeps a lid on.

DYLAN

It's like he was expelling me for my artwork.

BENJAMIN

No. He wasn't expelling you because of your artwork. I can almost live with the artwork. I mean, if Charles Manson needed a personal muralist, you would definitely have the job... if the devil himself came back and started a singing career, walk away, this would be his album cover, but no... no, he wasn't expelling you for your artwork. He was expelling you because you stole. You stole.

INT. KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Benjamin takes the sad dish of Lasagna and opens the refrigerator. The dish joins stacks of dishes of Lasagna and other sympathy food gifts. Nearby, Rosie is making peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches for tomorrow. She has taken on "wifely" duties -- even at 6.

ROSIE

One day you're going to have to eat some of that Lasagna, Daddy.

BENJAMIN

Honey...

ROSIE
Or throw it away.

Benjamin sits down and sighs. He watches her carefully putting the sandwiches in Ziploc bags.

BENJAMIN
... what happened to your playdate?
Why didn't you want to go to
Sadie's?

ROSIE
No reason. Just lots to do here.

BENJAMIN
Hey Rosie. Am I doing anything
right?

ROSIE
(thinks)
You're handsomer than the other
dads. A lotta them don't have
hair. So that's good.

BENJAMIN
What if I go bald?

ROSIE
We'll call those numbers on the
t.v. ads, where the men grow bald-
guy hair.

BENJAMIN
Good. I'm gonna take baldness off
my list of stuff to worry about.

ROSIE
Good!

She checks an imaginary box. He smiles. She labels the lunches in her 6 year-old scrawl.

INT. DYLAN'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Benjamin looks in. Asleep, Dylan looks much younger and more serene. Benjamin moves to his kid, pushes aside the mod hair, and kisses his forehead.

INT. ROSIE'S ROOM -- NIGHT

He kisses Rosie's forehead. Rises up. Stuffed animals are piled around her, she looks like one of them.

INT. BATHROOM -- NIGHT

Benjamin washes his face before bed. He sees the other wash-basin in the bathroom. It's Katherine's basin. Her skin creams. Her brushes. Her medicine. All still there. A note in her handwriting, the hours and times to take medication. He holds onto the sink basin and can barely stand up straight.

ROSIE (O.S.)
Daddy, I can't sleep... The
neighbors again.

He turns to face her, smiling and calm.

BENJAMIN
Aw honey...

He goes to the window. The Neighbors. Their music is loud. Their laughter is loud.

ROSIE
Their "happy" is too loud.

He turns to her. An idea has arrived.

INT. CAR -- NEXT MORNING

A long-faced REAL-ESTATE MAN attempts small talk.

REAL-ESTATE MAN
We have a full day of house hunting
planned, and I think you'll be very
excited at what's available --

BENJAMIN
... we need "new". New schools,
new opportunities. New.

REAL-ESTATE MAN
I think you'll find that in our
current economic environment, the
buyer is King.

ROSIE
King Daddy!

Rosie is still in her pajamas.

REAL-ESTATE MAN
(humorless)
Where to first, "King Daddy?"

BENJAMIN
I'd like a big yard, something
substantial, some rolling hills,
just whatever comes to mind when I
say "new."

REAL-ESTATE MAN
Rolling hills might be hard in the
city.

BENJAMIN
They don't even have to roll. They
can be stationary hills. Right,
Rosie?

Rosie has a seat-belt on her stuffed dinosaur. She's eating
animal crackers, leafing through the real estate binder.

ROSIE
I wish Dylan had come with us!
This is fun!

The Real-Estate Man remains humorless.

REAL-ESTATE MAN
Our adventure begins.

ON A HOUSE

Not quite right.

BENJAMIN
No.

ON ANOTHER HOUSE

Very not right.

ROSIE
No!

ON YET ANOTHER HOUSE

Perfect, white-picket fence. (We are getting more rural.)

ROSIE (CONT'D)
Mmmm. No.

ON STILL ANOTHER HOUSE

With overgrown lawn.

BENJAMIN/ROSIE
No. Not quite.

The Real-Estate Man is unamused. Benjamin and Rosie's
repartee is not his style.

REAL-ESTATE MAN
We are now running out of options.

ROSIE
Dad.

Benjamin turns to see that Rosie has found a flyer from deep in the back-seat binder. She presents it grandly.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE -- LATER DAY

We are definitely out of town.

INT. CAR -- LATER DAY

Benjamin clutches the listing with growing excitement.

BENJAMIN
... what would we do with 18 acres?

REAL-ESTATE MAN
I have to be honest. The Rosemoor property has some challenges.

BENJAMIN
What doesn't?

REAL-ESTATE MAN
True, but this situation is, I'm going to offer this word -- "unique"...

Benjamin sees the road leading to the property.

BENJAMIN
Wait a second. Is that it?

REAL-ESTATE MAN
Yes. And --

BENJAMIN
Rosie, look.

Their faces press against the car window. Music. A small tingle, a single instrument playing a melody -- our Theme.

EXT. ROSEMOOR PROPERTY -- LATER DAY

We pass through a tree-lined entrance. It's enticing... an artfully run-down American Colonial house... rolling hills... a property gloriously in need of love... maybe even them. In here is a masterpiece. As music continues.

EXT. DRIVEWAY -- LATER DAY

Benjamin, holding Rosie (and her dinosaur and a small purse) on his shoulders, looks at the property.

REAL-ESTATE MAN
Mr. Mee, we need to talk...

Benjamin ignores the Real-Estate Man, moving closer to the house. Above him, Rosie reaches for her purse and withdraws a small kiddie camera. Music grows, their hearts pound. He feels destiny.

BENJAMIN
You don't have to take a picture,
Rosie.

ROSIE
Why not?

BENJAMIN
(very simply)
Because we're going to live here.

EXT. DOORWAY -- LATER DAY

The Real-Estate Man fiddles with keys.

BENJAMIN
This is exactly what we've been
looking for.

REAL-ESTATE MAN
Well, let's not get ahead of
ourselves...

The door opens, and Benjamin and Rosie bound past him. The house is musty, but crackles with promise.

INT. BEDROOM -- LATER DAY

Benjamin and Rosie are in the master bedroom. Rosie peers out the window at the landscape, her head just clearing the sill. The Real-Estate Man joins them.

BENJAMIN
It's perfect. Why didn't you tell
us about it earlier?

REAL-ESTATE MAN
It's a bit complicated.

BENJAMIN
Complicated is okay. Complicated
can be great. We love complicated,
don't we, Rosie?

Rosie nods, as if she had any idea what that meant.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
So what's so complicated about this
place?

REAL-ESTATE MAN
You see, it's... it's um...

The Real-Estate Man hems, not quite sure how to put it.

REAL-ESTATE MAN (CONT'D)
... frankly, it's...

We hear a loud, bone-rattling crushing ROAR. So loud, so
intense, it sounds like it's in the same room with them.

REAL-ESTATE MAN (CONT'D)
... it's a zoo.

EXT. LION ENCLOSURE -- LATER DAY

The Real-Estate Man, Benjamin and Rosie stand in front of
SOLOMON. Solomon happens to be a large African lion with a
majestic mane, standing at attention, studying these
strangers suspiciously. Benjamin and Rosie stare at the
awesome animal. Separated only by a small moat, alone in a
zoo, the relationship between man and animal gets a little
more... personal.

Solomon ROARS again. And this one, close-up, rips our heads
off. They collect themselves. Mournfully:

REAL-ESTATE MAN
It was a fully functioning zoo
until two years ago and then it was
shut down. The estate is
maintaining it for now --

BENJAMIN
But can't I... I mean, if we bought
this place, we could just relocate
the animals, right?

REAL-ESTATE MAN
Actually, the estate is selling it
with the stipulation that whoever
buys this place has to continue
caring for the animals. And
... the remaining staff.

(MORE)

REAL-ESTATE MAN (CONT'D)
If it doesn't sell soon, the
animals... will probably be...

He looks at Rosie, and Benjamin, as in -- "put down."
Benjamin shares a reality-look with Rosie.

BENJAMIN
Well, thanks. I don't know
anything about zoos and animals.
It's a great property, but no one
is going to buy it under those
conditions. I mean it's a --

REAL-ESTATE MAN
-- exactly, and that's why it's
been on the market so long. And
why I didn't show it to you.

Benjamin looks around, disappointed. His eyes fall downward.
He can no longer look at Solomon.

BENJAMIN
Well, it's just... it's too bad.
Alright. We'll keep looking. Come
on, Rosie, let's...

He doesn't see Rosie. For a moment, panic.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
Rosie!!

No sign of her.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
Perfect. I keep her home from
school one day and she gets eaten.

The Real-Estate Man takes a few steps, and spots her in a
nearby clearing. He points.

ROSIE

She's surrounded by a small crowd of peacocks and peahens,
spreading their fans in the air. She's in the middle,
delighted, feeding them her animal crackers. Relaxed, happy,
carefree, a kid. Music returns. It's Rosie's Theme.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
Boy, it's a shame that we can't
just...

BENJAMIN

Shot pushes in. Pure joy has returned to his life, in some
small way. He watches his daughter's spontaneous romp with
these scrappy peacocks. Her happiness is breathtaking. He
sits down on a nearby stump, quietly overwhelmed.

There is no one to share this feeling with. The Real-Estate Man is already trudging up the hill. Benjamin looks around for someone, for Katherine, for anybody. He is at the crossroads of a powerful life decision. He turns and finds an understanding pair of eyes.

SOLOMON

The Lion stares at him with ancient wisdom. His eyes say... yes. Yes is the answer.

INT. DONUT SHOP -- DAY

Benjamin and Duncan hang at their donut place. He addresses his brother carefully, like a jumper on a very tall ledge.

DUNCAN

I said... "human" interaction.

BENJAMIN

It's destiny, Dunc. The owner died, the place fell into disrepair, and the estate's had trouble unloading it. I'm telling you, we can get a deal on it, too.

DUNCAN

A "deal?"

BENJAMIN

Yes.

DUNCAN

You've been through a difficult stretch. This is what people do when they have a you-know-what happen in their life. They lose their way a little bit, you know, they go "hey -- I think I'll quit my job and try something new with my life." And then they wake up later and say, "Wow. I'm really glad my brother didn't let me blow dad's inheritance to ... "

Duncan leans forward, tired of playing along.

DUNCAN (CONT'D)

"... buy a broken down zoo in the country, nine miles away from the nearest department store."

BENJAMIN

But that person you're talking about, they didn't see this place.

(MORE)

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

By the way, there's even a semi-functioning restaurant on the property. It's called The Jaguar.

Duncan adjusts his brother's coat. He is tender again.

DUNCAN

It's not your life, Benjie. You got kids.

BENJAMIN

According to the seller's estate, you don't need any specialized knowledge to run a small zoo. Just a lot of heart.

DUNCAN

And CASH. All your cash.

BENJAMIN

I've always wanted to run my own business. Katherine and I talked about it.

DUNCAN

Wait a second. Wait.

BENJAMIN

The zoo makes 75 percent of its revenue in the summer. All we have to do is get Rosemoor open again by Memorial Day and --

DUNCAN

You're losing it. I gave you a pass when you freaked out about going to Neal's.

BENJAMIN

Hey. This isn't about Katherine.

DUNCAN

Please, I beg you. Do what others do. Go to Vegas, lose a lot of money. Travel through the stages of grief -- but stop before...
zebras get involved.

BENJAMIN

No zebras. Just a Lion, a Jaguar and 47 other animals, 7 endangered species. All of them, saved, when we make this deal.

Duncan knows the die has been cast. He's horrified and concerned and distraught.

DUNCAN
Holy Jesus. That's all I have to
say. Holy, and Jesus.

BENJAMIN
I haven't doubted this decision for
one second. Isn't that crazy?

DUNCAN
Yes.

BENJAMIN
The kids will be so psyched.

INT. MEE'S KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Rosie is serving dinner to the two men in her life.

DYLAN
You're freaking kidding me.

BENJAMIN
Don't say "freakin" to me. Show
some respect.

DYLAN
You're kidding me.

BENJAMIN
It's called the Rosemoor Animal
Park and it's 18 acres and wait
until you see the animals.

DYLAN
My friends are here, our life is
here!

BENJAMIN
I'm surprised at you. What did we
talk about, a new start, a new
place...

DYLAN
That's what you want. That's not
what I want. But you're not asking
me, are you?

Rosie sets down a dish. Excited and enthralled.

ROSIE
We bought the zoo?

DYLAN
No -- we didn't. He did.

Dylan pushes back his chair and exits. Benjamin sighs, looks at Rosie, her face lit up.

ROSIE
We bought a zoo!!!!

Benjamin and Rosie laugh with joy. Leon barks, cheerful.

INT. MEE'S BEDROOM -- DAY

Benjamin packs. He's powered by destiny, can't move fast enough. He dumps a handful of clothes into a box marked for Goodwill. Rosie walks over, looks in the box and fishes out... a tattered college sweatshirt that says: USD. She holds it up to him -- really?

ROSIE
Mommy used to wear this sometimes.

BENJAMIN
Yeah, it started out as mine, but
it's all ripped up now so --
(off her look)
I know, it's hard to throw stuff
out sometimes.

They regard the shirt.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
I know. Keep it, right?

Benjamin looks at Rosie. She understands what this means.

ROSIE
It's time. Let that sweatshirt
start over.

He throws the sweatshirt into the Goodwill box. And then holds up a severely tattered stuffed monkey.

BENJAMIN
I couldn't find the little Converse
shoes that he used to wear...

ROSIE
Never. That we're keeping.

BENJAMIN
(immediately)
Okay.

Benjamin laughs and throws the monkey on the keep pile.

INT. MOVING VAN -- DAY

Benjamin is at the wheel of the moving van. Dylan draws in the backseat, lost in his headphones, as Rosie bounces happily. Benjamin intentionally drives past... Neal's Coffee Shop. He catches a view of the corner booth, disappearing into his past. He says goodbye with a simple gesture that only Rosie sees.

HIS MEMORY

Brief, just a glimpse. A woman in the booth, turned away.

ROSIE (O.S.)
We're here!

EXT. ROSEMOOR ENTRANCE -- RAINY LATER AFTERNOON

They turn down the driveway, and gain their first family view of the Rosemoor property. In this gray rainy afternoon light, it looks much less appealing. More scary and decrepit than beautiful. Leon whimpers, and yelps. Dylan lets out a long judgmental whistle. Benjamin doesn't notice. He only sees the beauty. He will not be deterred. In fact, he's enthralled. He drives a victory lap around the property.

BENJAMIN
Look. The Jaguar Restaurant.

ON THE JAGUAR RESTAURANT

A place on the outskirts of the property. A girl, 15, (LILY) arranges the letters on a small "do-it-yourself" neon sign in the window. It reads: WELCOME BRAVE NEW OWNERS.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
How great is that!?

He honks. Dylan notices the girl, who waves to them.

EXT. HOUSE -- RAINY AFTERNOON

Benjamin, Rosie and Dylan help FOUR MOVERS unload the Mee's Van. Wolves are howling in the distance.

INT. BACK KITCHEN DOORWAY -- NIGHT

They open the door to the back kitchen entrance. This side of the house needs a lot of work. They are hit with an overwhelming smell.

BENJAMIN
Right, this is the storage side of the house...

He consults a small "owner's manual" for the home.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
... this is where they stored the
snake food... dead rats...
stillborn chicks, that sort of
thing. Been reading up on
everything -- whew...

DYLAN
I miss our home.

Benjamin nods gamely. Shoves open the main residence door.

BENJAMIN
Alright! We're in!

EXT. ZOO -- MORNING

The STAFF is lined up at the entrance. They look at Benjamin like an exotic species of animal. We meet the RAGGED CREW of Zookeepers.

ELLIS, 65, is a tall man with a beanie and white beard.

ROBIN, 30, a worker. From Orange County. And their spokesman is...

KELLY, 28, Head Zookeeper. Pretty, with to-the-bone communication skills. She has a strong grip. Humans are not her thing. She's an animal person.

KELLY
I'm Kelly Foster, Head Zookeeper,
and over here is Robin, and Ellis.
Robin is our craftsman. Ellis is
our Visionary. He built the
enclosures that set the standard
for modern zoos all across America.

ELLIS
(attempting modesty)
And the world.

KELLY
And the world. Yes, and he and
Robin do... well, basically
everything. And this is my cousin
Lily. She's fifteen.

Lily has already met eyes with Dylan, who looks away quickly.
(She's a rural beauty, he's a city curiosity.)

KELLY (CONT'D)

She can't legally work here so we pay her cash under the table out of my salary. She lives on the property, works out of the Jaguar. And that's... basically it. It's just us, Mr. Mee.

BENJAMIN

Great to meet you guys. I'm Benjamin. This is Rosie, and this is Dylan, my eldest. And, this is our zoo now, I guess.

They look at him oddly. Not a particularly rousing speech. He presses forward, searching for connection with them.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

So I declare us all... Modern Day Adventurers... and Sponsors of Animal Greatness!

It's not quite killing 'em. He claps his hands together.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

Okay! Onward!

EXT. ZOO -- DAY

Benjamin, Rosie and Dylan walk through the zoo with the STAFF. Rosie looks at everything with wonder. Dylan follows, hands dug deep in pockets. Lily is an extrovert, she sidles up to Dylan, sizing him up.

LILY

How old are you?

DYLAN

Uh, fourteen, I guess.

He feels comfortable and uncomfortable, at the same time.

ROSIE

Where are the otters? I'd love to see the otters and the snakes and the monkeys.

KELLY

(to Benjamin)

Listen, when you get a chance. There are a few things we wanted to go over with you about our upcoming inspection.

Benjamin flips through the paperwork, a quick study.

BENJAMIN
That would be the -- the USDA
inspector. Walt Ferris.

ELLIS
I'll kill him! I'll --

KELLY
Ellis. Stop.

Ellis stops. She has strange control over this white-haired firecracker of a man.

The peacocks cross their path, several raising their fans and displaying feathers.

BENJAMIN
It doesn't get old, does it?

ELLIS
What, the peacocks? Dumbest
animals in the place. And we're
overrun with 'em. In the old days
we used to feed the extra ones to
the bears.

ROSIE
No!

ELLIS
(unconvincing)
Though nowadays that sort of thing
is frowned upon.

Rosie looks distraught.

KELLY
Speaking of which, if I'm you, I'm
keeping your dog --

BENJAMIN
Leon.

KELLY
Leon needs to stay away from the
snake habitat. He's got "lunch"
written all over him.

BENJAMIN
Got it.

He makes this note on his notepad. (The same red notepad he used as a reporter.) Lily lingers to walk next to Dylan, still sizing him up. He tries to act casual, awkwardly.

EXT. ANOTHER PATH/BEAR ENCLOSURE -- DAY

They arrive at the Bear Enclosure.

KELLY

And that's Buster, a 650 pound North American Grizzly. He was 770 but he's been stressed. He's moody. We had him on Paxil, but we can't afford it anymore so he's a little depressed occasionally.

BENJAMIN

Hey Buster. Missing the meds?

Buster swipes at the air, viciously.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

I'm on the natch too.

The Animal Keepers share some looks.

Lily leans over to Dylan, confiding privately:

LILY

Talking to the animals has to be done in a super specific way. He doesn't have it yet. He'll learn.

Dylan nods. She's so interested in Dylan.

LILY (CONT'D)

Where did you get your shoes and how much did they cost?

EXT. STILL ANOTHER PATH/OTTERS -- DAY

We pass the Otters and the Monkeys.

KELLY

Walter Ferris is a creep.

Benjamin shuffles through paperwork, makes a note.

BENJAMIN

"Ferris -- Creep."

KELLY

You can just talk to me, you don't need to make notes. Ferris shut us down once before. We'd gotten a little behind, as you know, with this small staff...

They pass an enclosure with a homely creature who looks like a large dark brown pig with an elephant snout. Rosie points.

ROSIE
Who's that?

KELLY
That's a tapir -- Ronnie.

Ronnie looks over at them. He locks eyes with Benjamin.
It's a baleful, sincere look.

KELLY (CONT'D)
Poor guy. We've brought in female
tapirs but they won't have anything
to do with him.

ROBIN
Think he might be ugly for a tapir,
but it's kinda hard to tell.

Ronnie, eyes still on Benjamin, reaches his snout through the
fence. Benjamin reaches toward him, curious. Ronnie looks
at him, thoughtfully.. and methodically wipes tapir snot all
over Benjamin's hand.

BENJAMIN
Ronnie... a pleasure.

Rosie laughs. Kelly offers a towel from her back pocket.
Dylan backs away, horrified at this new life. Behind him,
Lily is still riveted on this new kid from the city.

ROSIE
Can we see the tigers?

EXT. TIGER ENCLOSURE -- DAY

They stand across the moat from three tigers -- two young
females and an older male, grizzled around the whiskers.
There is a weathered elegance about the older male. He is
SPAR, and he walks gingerly across the exhibit, a bit creaky,
but filled with a grand sense of supremacy. Everyone, even
the keepers, view these tigers with a sense of awe. Even
Dylan draws closer with interest.

ROSIE
I thought they would roar. Like
Solomon the Lion.

Kelly is slightly annoyed by this constant misconception.

KELLY
Tigers and Lions -- very different.
Tigers don't really growl or roar,
they "chuff."

Kelly skillfully demonstrates, making the sound, which sounds
like blowing a raspberry, using her top lip.

KELLY (CONT'D)

You chuff at them, they chuff back.

She chuffs to the tigers. The tigers gently chuff back at Kelly. Kelly turns to Rosie.

KELLY (CONT'D)

You do it.

Rosie tries. Nothing. Then tries again. Spar looks over at her, and chuffs back. Rosie's eyes go wide.

KELLY (CONT'D)

That... is Spar, the oldest. He's 17. He's a Siberian Tiger. You know, tigers have special sensors along the front of their two-inch canines. They can detect the pulse in your aorta. When they attack, they bite you, take your pulse with their teeth, reposition those suckers, and boom, there goes your carotid.

ROSIE

Wow!

Boom. We hear the sound of a gunshot.

BENJAMIN

What was that --

KELLY

One of our Lionesses. Lung cancer. The vet said -- it's time.

Benjamin looks around. No Ellis.

BENJAMIN

Ellis did that?

KELLY

(nods)

Life around here is pretty elemental.

DYLAN

Can we go back to the house, now?

EXT. ZOO -- DAY -- MINUTES LATER

Benjamin, Rosie and Dylan walk up the hill. Kelly joins.

KELLY

-- there are a few decisions you'll have to make right away, Ben.

BENJAMIN

Benjamin. Ben was my dad.

KELLY

Spar, who you just met, the tiger, is going to need some extra care. We need to have him seen by the large animal vet from San Diego, and he's a fortune to get here --

Benjamin feels his budding altruism.

BENJAMIN

Fine. Set it up.

KELLY

-- it's expensive.

BENJAMIN

He's sick, he needs a doctor, so --

KELLY

He's also very old, Ben.... jamin. Truth is, we don't know how much longer.

BENJAMIN

Get the doctor. I'll pay.

She's impressed.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

What's next for today?

KELLY

(brightening)

Okay, we've got massive problems with plumbing, antiquated wiring, inadequate refrigeration for storing the carcasses for the big cats -- you don't want to be there on a hot day, you'll pass out from the smells --

BENJAMIN

Got it. Keep going.

KELLY

Rickety posts. Beak rot on the tortoises. A weak enclosure between the Jaguars and the Tigers. They don't get along. And --

BENJAMIN

Okay, enough. We'll start with the cages.

KELLY
The... what?

She glares at him, incredulous.

BENJAMIN
Posts in the cages.

KELLY
Cages? They're not cages. They're enclosures. No one has called them a cage in about a century.

BENJAMIN
Alright then --

KELLY
My brief marriage? That was a cage.

BENJAMIN
Not mine.

And now Kelly stops walking. She lets the others continue on. She turns to him, dead serious.

KELLY
I have a question.

Benjamin looks at her, ready for anything.

KELLY (CONT'D)
You're some random guy, no one in the zoo community has ever heard of you. You know nothing about animals, you've moved into a dump. What regular person just up and buys this place? Especially some one with kids. Why?

He doesn't answer.

KELLY (CONT'D)
You have no idea what we've been dealing with here. We used to have three times this staff. They quit. I'm 28, I never go out, I'm here all the time. I'm here every day. I had to move back with my mother. I couldn't pay my mortgage. No one gets paid, Ben... jamin. We're so understaffed. We need volunteers.

He is stunned by her raw devotion to these animals.

KELLY (CONT'D)
We need someone to really take
charge of this place. Or we, and
all these animals, are gone.

BENJAMIN
So your question is --

KELLY
(simply)
Why'd you buy this place?

BENJAMIN
Why not?

He smiles and moves on. She stands still.

EXT. BENJAMIN'S OFFICE -- NIGHT

A gentle wind whips at the trees by the window. At his seat at Katherine's old family table, Benjamin looks at the bills spread out before him. The weight of it all hits him.

EXT. PORCH -- NIGHT

Benjamin stands on the porch. He hears what few of us ever hear. The sounds of a zoo, alive, at night. It's a gorgeous cacophony, instruments in a symphony. He's falling in love with his new life. And in the distance, the gentle sound of laughter.

INT. DYLAN'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Dylan is still awake, listening to the unfamiliar noises too. Carefully, he reaches under the bed and fishes around until he finds what he's looking for. A picture frame. It's a photo of Dylan, Rosie and their mother, Katherine. (Her face is obscured in the darkness.) He cradles it with everything he's got, and waits for sleep.

EXT. ZOO -- NIGHT

Benjamin squishes down the hill, through some mud, heading towards the laughter.

INT. JAGUAR RESTAURANT -- NIGHT

The restaurant at night is the hub of the place. It's the staff's hang-out, their clubhouse.

Lily works on the letters for tomorrow's sign in the window. The restaurant is filled with artifacts and curios, including a dartboard with a vain-looking man's face on it. (It's Walter Ferris, the USDA Inspector. His face is also on an ancient COFFIN in the corner.) Ellis, holding a whisky and nursing a toothache, launches darts at the board. He speaks to a few workers, as he pulls darts out of Ferris' face.

ELLIS

Walter Ferris. I'll kill him. I will. I'll cut off his head with a sword -- I'll kill him without a thought. And, he borrowed \$500 from me in the 80's, and claims he doesn't remember. Crook!

Kelly is playing chess with Rob at the bar counter. She's heard it all before. A few odd locals are here too. An old-school big screen projection TV plays satellite soccer. A stereo plays an old garage rock song from the 60's. Ellis wails along with it, as if it were a sea-shanty.

The door opens. Benjamin stands there, witnessing the party he hasn't been invited to. All stop and stare at him. He decides to join them, uninvited, walking a few steps into the place. It's an awkward moment.

Until Ellis pulls out an empty chair with his foot and shoves it Benjamin's way.

ELLIS (CONT'D)

(a bit drunk)

It's the most dangerous animal in the forest! The Adult Boomer Male!

Benjamin smiles, tips an imaginary hat, and sits down. Kelly points at her beer -- want one? Benjamin nods. He sings along to the old song, along with Ellis.

Camaraderie continues, wordlessly, as they return to their previous behavior. Kelly brings over the beer.

KELLY

Here you go, Boss.

She sets it at his table.

KELLY (CONT'D)

Welcome to your zoo, Benjamin Mee.

She moves on with a smile.

EXT. ZOO -- DAY

Benjamin, wearing new tool-belt and boots, takes a look around the zoo. He takes a deep breath. A lot of work.

INT. PORCUPINE ENCLOSURE -- DAY

Benjamin walks purposefully into the Porcupine enclosure. He replaces a crumbling wooden post. Two PORCUPINES watch calmly. He speaks to them, in a voice still slightly too folksy and self-aware.

BENJAMIN

Hey Guys. You are going to love your new enclosure. Look at the quality of this new post --

Benjamin calls over to Robin, carrying feed.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

They're so docile!

ROBIN

Not at night.

Benjamin BANGS down a new wooden post.

BENJAMIN

So you get wild at night, huh?

In a flash, one of the Porcupines wheels around and in reverse, begins charging him with razor-sharp quills bared. Benjamin HOPS the enclosure, pronto. He falls over the fence, into a thicket of nettles. Nettles. Worse than quills. Benjamin begins picking them out, painfully.

ROBIN

(laughing)

You don't talk to them correctly, Boss. Be real with them. They can tell the difference.

Benjamin speaks to the Porcupine who shot him. He's pissed.

BENJAMIN

You -- I'm never talking to you again... you little glorified rodent.

ROBIN

(without looking over)

Now you're talking to him...

Benjamin is getting it, and loving the journey.

INT. BACKYARD -- DAY -- SAME TIME

Dylan is drawing on his sketch-pad in the backyard, and Lily shows up with a basket of sandwiches.

LILY
Whatcha doing? You want a
sandwich?

DYLAN
(shy)
No, that's okay.

She invites herself to sit next to him. He pretends to be casual. She looks at his drawing, and at him.

LILY
You got a nosebleed.

DYLAN
I know.

He continues drawing, and she uncomfortably studies his work.

LILY
How'd you get the nosebleed?

He looks up at her.

DYLAN
I slipped on the roof and banged
it.

LILY
It's a weird house.

She stares at his drawing.

LILY (CONT'D)
I like your drawing.

DYLAN
Thanks.

LILY
It's a little dark. Where's the
sun?

DYLAN
There's no sun in the Underworld.

She nods.

LILY
I'm off at 4.

DYLAN
Cool.

She gets up to return to work.

LILY
Alright so I might come back later.

Dylan remains focused on his work.

DYLAN
Okay.

She exits. He looks up. Already he misses her. Music.

ON BENJAMIN'S MUDDY NEW BOOTS

Hitting the ground.

INT. BENJAMIN'S OFFICE -- DAY

A mountain of paperwork is stacked in the middle of the desk. It's so tall, it obscures most of Benjamin's body. Skinny RHONDA THE SECRETARY, 20's, drops off another billing sheet.

EXT. BACKYARD -- DAY

Dylan draws. A clock by the backyard says 4:10 PM. Here comes Lily with a basket of sandwiches. She drops one off for him, and exits. He opens it up and sees a note. It reads: "Hi Dylan" along with a sunny drawing.

INT. BENJAMIN'S OFFICE -- NEXT DAY

The mountain of paperwork is now even bigger. We can only see the top of Benjamin's head. Rhonda drops two more billing sheets onto the top of the stack.

EXT. BACKYARD -- DAY

Dylan opens up the sandwich. There is a note for him. It reads: Hi! Have fun in the Underworld! L

BENJAMIN'S BOOTS

Broken in. Music ends.

INT. HOUSE -- NIGHT

Benjamin cooks dinner for his family. He serves corn on the cob and potatoes.

BENJAMIN
I forgot to buy butter.

ROSIE
That's okay, Dad.

BENJAMIN
How important is butter to this meal? I'll take a vote. Just keep in mind, it's nine miles each way to the grocery store. Is butter worth your dad driving 18 miles? Okay let's vote.

They look at him. They miss butter.

EXT. DRIVEWAY -- NIGHT

Benjamin exits car, having driven 18 miles, returning with a grocery bag. He sees Kelly, still at work.

KELLY
Long day for you, Ben?

BENJAMIN
Long day for you. You should go.
We'll take over -- we're good.

She looks at Benjamin, a dish-towel over his shoulder. Dylan mopes out from the porch. Benjamin holds up the grocery bag like a trophy.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
18 miles for butter!

Dylan bows, thank you.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
Where's your sister? Is she with the peacocks?

Dylan points. Of course she is. Rosie ambles up the driveway, followed by her peacocks.

ROSIE
Dad, Kelly, guess what? I gave everyone a name.
(pointing to each peacock)
This is Lucy, and Wes, and Peaches and Coco, and Doctor Lou, and Jackpot.

KELLY
That's great! "Jackpot."

BENJAMIN
Honey, that's great. What a great name.

(MORE)

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

But I'm talking with Kelly here,
she needs to go home and get some
time to herself. Just tell us
whatever we can do to finish up.

KELLY

(shrugs)

Are you sure?

He looks at her. Yes, sure. Kelly continues, in one breath.

KELLY (CONT'D)

Okay - so you need to put some
water in the tiger habitat -- Spar
has some new medication, it's in
his food, make sure he finished it.
Then turn off the lights in the
reptile enclosure. We got a big
shipment of African garter snakes,
you can leave those in the travel
crate, they'll go into the exhibit
tomorrow.

She's so relieved to have remembered everything.

KELLY (CONT'D)

Oh, and the monkeys need fruit.

BENJAMIN

Kelly. Have fun, go out. Go into
the city...

KELLY

Think I'll just go to my pillow.

BENJAMIN

Goodnight.

KELLY

You too Benjamin.

She stops.

KELLY (CONT'D)

I forgot that thing you wanted me
to remember for you.

BENJAMIN

Go home!

He is touched by her determination, as she finally exits. He
stands tall on the porch.

EXT. ZOO -- NIGHT

The kids follow Benjamin across the zoo - Rosie happily, Dylan begrudgingly. Doing chores.

DYLAN

... I have a sick amount of homework tonight.

BENJAMIN

Yeah. Unhuh. Let's go. Rosie and I are going to give the tigers some water... Dylan you head over to the snake enclosure and make sure the lights are off in the side room. They need darkness.

INT. TIGER ENCLOSURE/BACK ROOM -- NIGHT

This is where the tigers sleep at night. Rosie watches Benjamin put water in the tiger enclosure. Benjamin looks at Spar. He talks to the animal soothingly, with growing skill.

BENJAMIN

You take your meds, Old Man?

(he checks)

Good. Gotta keep taking those pills, or Kelly'll drive ya nuts.

He leans forward, tells him a secret.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

I think she likes you guys more than she likes people. Whaddya think?

Spar lazily blinks his eyes at her. Rosie laughs softly, appreciating them both.

ROSIE

He looks tired, Dad.

BENJAMIN

He's going to be okay.

Spar looks at Benjamin.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

Aren't you, Buddy?

Spar blinks. He rolls over slightly, stretching happily.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

See? He likes us.

ROSIE
Dylan really loves you, you know.

BENJAMIN
I know.

ROSIE
He's just mad that his friends
don't visit him here. He thought
they'd all visit and nobody came.

Benjamin nods to himself.

EXT. REPTILE HOUSE -- NIGHT

Dylan walks in, looks around. The room is filled with life. The reptiles perch on fake trees and watch him, curious. He's about to switch off the lights in the back room when he sees the plastic travel crate. From the grated side he can see -- dozens of snakes, waiting to be put into the habitat. It's marked: AFRICAN GARTER SNAKES, NON-VENOMOUS.

Dylan slowly opens the box and looks inside. The box is alive with flicking tongues and anxious slithering garter snakes. It's one thing to draw them, another to see them up close. Yeesh. He shuts it quickly, leaving it mistakenly ajar. He turns off the light, and exits. The room is crackling with life, as snakes begin to drop from the crate, onto the floor.

INT. ROSIE'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Benjamin puts Rosie to bed. She nestles in among the stuffed animals, and pillows. Some fans are blowing.

ROSIE
Could you possibly point another
fan at me?

BENJAMIN
Rosie, you have three fans blowing.

ROSIE
I like it!

BENJAMIN
I'm serious here. All this wind
blowing. When does Beyonce step in
and start shooting her next video?
In your bedroom.

Rosie is delighted.

ROSIE
You're funny.

BENJAMIN
 And you. Lost in those pillows.
 We have to get Ellis! And Rob and
everybody to burrow down there and
 pull you out. Guys! Help!

She burrows down deeper, laughing, can't get enough.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
 Your "happy" is too loud!

She squeals!

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
 Where did you go? I can hear you,
 but --

He reaches into her stash of pillows and finds... the old USD
 sweatshirt that belonged to Katherine.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
 -- well how about this? Our old
 friend.

ROSIE
 Just thought we should keep it.

Benjamin decides to speak honestly to her, too. Just as with
 the animals, he is finding his voice in every way.

BENJAMIN
 You are so much like your mother.
 I hope she knows what we're doing
 here... she does, right? I know
 we're helping Dylan. Right?

He worries he's shared too much, and then realizes... she's
 already asleep. He reaches down to kiss her.

INT. HOUSE -- NEXT MORNING

Benjamin and Rosie pack lunches and backpacks. The morning
 drill. Dylan ambles in.

BENJAMIN
 We gotta go! We gotta go!

Dylan yawns. Way behind, and not worried about it.

DYLAN
 I wish it was Saturday night.

BENJAMIN
 Me too. Unfortunately it's Monday
 morning. Can we move it?

DYLAN
(mutters)
You're funny with other people, but
never with me. Which I find funny.

BENJAMIN
Here's what's not funny. I have to
drive you 40,000 miles to your
school. Move.

Dylan sleepily reaches for Orange Juice.

ROSIE
Dylan likes Lily.

DYLAN
(older brother wisdom)
Please. She's way older than me.
It doesn't work that way.

Shutting the refrigerator door, he looks out the window. He
is very suddenly awake. He freezes at what he sees.

DYLAN (CONT'D)
I'm a dick.

BENJAMIN
(sharply)
Dylan --

Benjamin moves to him, then sees what he sees.

POV -- BENJAMIN AND DYLAN

Garter snakes are moving in force across the front lawn.

EXT. FRONT LAWN NEAR DRIVEWAY -- DAY

Rosie watches from the porch, fascinated and more than a
little creeped out. Benjamin, Kelly, Robin... and Dylan
chase snakes across the lawn. The snakes are sneaky and fast
and hard to catch.

BENJAMIN
I don't get it, Dylan. How do you
let this happen?

DYLAN
There is nothing you could say to
me that would be as harsh as what
I'm saying to myself, Dad.

BENJAMIN
Oh I disagree.

Dylan shakes his head. Benjamin feels instantly rotten.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
 I just want you to be happy.
 Unless you don't want to be happy.

DYLAN
 What's so great about being happy?

BENJAMIN
 (isn't it obvious)
 That you're happy!

DYLAN
 I'm sorry I effed up the box of
 snakes. Whatever.

BENJAMIN
Hey. You don't say "effed" up with
 me. Okay? We don't "hang out,
 man." I'm your father.

DYLAN
 Okay, got it. Whatever.

Kelly watches all.

Nearby, on the porch, Rosie looks down. There is a snake at
 her feet. She SHRIEKS.

EXT. BARN -- DAY

Benjamin and Kelly load Spar the Tiger's dinner of fresh
 carcasses into two wheelbarrows.

KELLY
 I don't think we lost any snakes,
 Ben. Jamin.

BENJAMIN
 I think we got 'em all.

KELLY
 And hey. Pretty sure this is none
 of my business... she said, butting
 into his business...

BENJAMIN
 We've captured snakes together, I
 think it's okay.

KELLY
 What do I know? I'm 28, and I live
 with my mother, but...

BENJAMIN
 Say it.

KELLY

I know he's your kid and you love him, and all.

BENJAMIN

Yes, it's my legal responsibility to love him.

KELLY

But if I talked to my father the way he talks to you... he would have throttled me into next week.

BENJAMIN

Mine too. And I would have understood why.

KELLY

What happened to manners, man?

BENJAMIN

Look, the kid is fourteen. He's been through something no kid should ever have to go through. I gotta give him more time before he...

KELLY

... knocks over a 7/11? Come on. Everybody's got excuses.

He gives her a look. A line she should not cross.

KELLY (CONT'D)

Just fire me. I won't leave, but you can fire me.

BENJAMIN

I'm not going to fire you.

KELLY

You can't fire me. You haven't even paid me.

BENJAMIN

Well -- that's true. But I will by Friday.

KELLY

(imitates Dylan well)
"Whatever."

Benjamin smiles quietly.

BENJAMIN

We have arrived at the epicenter of your sense of humor.

KELLY
See -- it's there.

She is appealingly self-aware. They arrive at the Tiger Enclosure. Benjamin prepares himself, uses his key to enter.

BENJAMIN
You sure they're in the pen?

KELLY
Put 'em there myself, this morning.

INT. TIGER ENCLOSURE -- DAY

We see SPAR, in the small pen at the side of the enclosure, sitting in the shade. He blinks his eyes lazily as he watches Benjamin and Kelly look up at a large tree in the middle of the habitat.

BENJAMIN
There must be an easier way to do this.

KELLY
It's better for them if they hunt for their food.

They regard the tree.

KELLY (CONT'D)
I'll do it if you want.

BENJAMIN
No, I'm a quick learner.

Benjamin climbs the tree. Spar watches, looking amused.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
(to Spar)
Hey.

Benjamin hangs over the enclosure, the animal looking up with amusement and hunger.

KELLY
I'm going to recommend not falling.

The other Tigers whine and moan, ready to pounce.

BENJAMIN
And if I were to fall?

KELLY
Toast.

BENJAMIN

Got it.

KELLY

Some say the big cats are the most
finely tuned killing machines in
the world.

BENJAMIN

(immediately)

Okay, enough.

Kelly reaches into the wheelbarrow and hands Benjamin a large
slab of animal carcass. He wedges it among the branches.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

There you go, Spar.

KELLY

A little higher in the tree,
Benjamin.

Benjamin shimmies up higher. Almost slips, recovers
artfully. Spar rises unsteadily on his creaky legs.

BENJAMIN

(perfect voice)

Hey Spar. You want to see what
we're doing?

Amazingly, Spar lumbers closer, seemingly connected to
Benjamin's invitation.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

That's right, Bud. Soon all of
this will be yours. Minus the
"me" part of course.

The animal chuffs.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

How about that, Kelly? He listens
to me more than my own son...

Kelly is suddenly not paying attention. In the distance, she
sees A DARK VAN pulling up into the front courtyard.

KELLY

It's the Feds. Walter Ferris.

INT. JAGUAR RESTAURANT -- DAY

Lily on the walkie-talkie.

LILY

Mayday... Mayday...

INTERCUT:

EXT. TIGER ENCLOSURE -- DAY

Benjamin is still in the tree, as Kelly whips out her walkie.

BENJAMIN

I thought the inspection was a week
before we open --

KELLY

(eyes narrowing)
Looks like a "hello" visit.

BENJAMIN

We're not even close to ready.

KELLY

Just be yourself. He drinks a lot
of coffee -- and you must ignore
his angry stomach. In case it's
loud today, you do not mention it.

BENJAMIN

Okay. Got it.

KELLY

And... most importantly...
(into walkie)
Keep Ellis away from him. We don't
need bloodshed today.

Kelly prepares for battle, exiting to the gate.

BENJAMIN

Hey give me a hand here...

She's already marching to meet Ferris.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

... I'll get down somehow.

He edges his way down.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

Enjoy your lunch, Spar. Minus the
"me" part, of course...

And he almost slips out of the tree, hopping onto the fence
and over the enclosure with stylish flair. The zoo life
becomes him. As Spar heads for lunch...

EXT. FRONT YARD -- DAY

WALTER FERRIS, 45, exits the vehicle. He wears a blue-suit, stylish tie. Benjamin rushes to meet him.

FERRIS
Benjamin Mee? Walter Ferris.

BENJAMIN
Pleasure.

Ferris smiles, looks around. Feels the wind. Creating tension is a pleasing activity for Ferris.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
Our official inspection happens a week before we open, according to my information.

Ferris leans forward. His stomach growls loudly. So loud it's jarring. Benjamin ignores it.

FERRIS
I'm here for a "pop by," Mr. Mee.

BENJAMIN
Good, let's schedule a "pop by."
We just got here, Mr. Ferris. But we'll be ready by September.

Ferris shakes his head arrogantly. The wind blows his unfortunate hair. He looks around, as if waiting for one more person.

FERRIS
"Pop bys," Mr. Mee, are by their very nature... a surprise.

Ferris whips out his notepad.

Benjamin whips out his own notepad. It's on.

FERRIS (CONT'D)
I'll be making notes today, in preparation for the actual inspection. But we're responsible for the upkeep, not just the granting of licenses. Welcome to the business of maintaining live animals, Mr. Mee. It's a real fun party. Where's the Zookeeper?

KELLY
That's me Kelly.

Ferris looks her up and down. A touch salaciously. His stomach growls loudly. Several exchange looks.

FERRIS

My notes have you as The Assistant,
with no formal training.

KELLY

I moved up.

Ferris scoffs to himself, and is about to head down the hill.
He stops, and turns to Benjamin. With child-like derision
and a healthy regard for his own magnificence:

FERRIS

Why would you buy this place?

Ferris shakes his head. The lack of wisdom in the world
frustrates him sometimes.

FERRIS (CONT'D)

I just can't get...

He makes a showy "lifting" gesture.

FERRIS (CONT'D)

... a handle on it.

Ferris turns and heads down the hill, humming to himself.
Kelly looks at Benjamin. Here we go.

EXT. ZOO PATH -- DAY

Benjamin and Ferris walk toward the enclosures. Kelly
follows.

BENJAMIN

I started right in with the posts
in the ca...

(catches himself)

...gein... closures. And we took
care of the beakrot in the
tortoises, which you know, I
thought was major...

FERRIS

I'm not a tortoise man. Too
prehistoric for my taste.

BENJAMIN

Interesting. Well, my daughter
loves the peacocks. She has names
for them. Lucy, Wesley, Peaches,
Coco, Jackpot...

Ferris turns to Benjamin. His stomach growls. Out of the
rumbles, comes a short loud blast.

FERRIS
They're not zoologically
significant. Consider donating
some to other zoos.

Leon follows, barking.

FERRIS (CONT'D)
Domestics are strongly discouraged
on the property. I've noted the
Coon Hound, and now this creature.

BENJAMIN
Well we live here, so it's tough --
go back, Leon.

Leon sadly heads back to the house. Ferris pops a Tum's.

EXT. PATH -- DAY

They walk by one of the fields. Benjamin and Ferris,
followed closely by Kelly.

BENJAMIN
My five year plan is to bring a
giraffe here one day. Once we open
and get some revenue in --

Ferris laughs to himself. His stomach rumbles softly.

FERRIS
A giraffe eats 40 pounds of leaves
a day. Do you have the trees? Do
you have the resources, or even the
space? I'd study the Sloane Animal
Park. They're smart. They come to
me for advice. You see... I am
used to successful operations.

He walks out of frame. Kelly whispers to Benjamin.

KELLY
I don't know how you keep your
cool.

BENJAMIN
(focused)
I keep it, because he wants me to
lose it...

KELLY
Good work. How about that stomach?

EXT. MONKEY HOUSE -- DAY

Ferris exits the Monkey House, making more notes.

FERRIS

So far, your first priority is the Monkey House, the holes in the mesh... and the inadequate dumpster fencing... reptile house, water pressure insufficient... excessive mulching in holding pens...

His stomach squeaks loudly.

EXT. LION ENCLOSURE -- DAY

With arrogant flourish, Ferris whips out a tape measurer, and shoots the tape across the moat. He's like a fly fisherman with his tape.

BENJAMIN

You know, a lot has been written about the innovative design of this enclosure. Built by Ellis --

FERRIS

I know all about Ellis. I've been coming here long before you. And I know what's in the Jaguar.

He zips tape back up.

FERRIS (CONT'D)

Eight inches short.

KELLY

That's regulation.

FERRIS

New guidelines are being raised this year. And we raised the barrier heights too. I'd make that First Priority as well.

Benjamin makes a note. Ferris gazes at Kelly and lingers a moment too long.

FERRIS (CONT'D)

I see that one of these tigers is 17 years of age --

BENJAMIN

Yes, Spar had a bout with kidney disease, but it's in remission, now we're just dealing with some hip dysplasia --

FERRIS
Have you begun to draw up an end-of-life plan?

Benjamin looks taken aback.

FERRIS (CONT'D)
Part of the humane care of an animal is planning for the --

BENJAMIN
He's fine. We had the vet come over from San Diego, take a look at him, we're all good there.

FERRIS
The end game on a big cat can be quite costly.

BENJAMIN
I understand. He's not going anywhere soon, but thank you for your concern.

Ferris pauses, looks around. His stomach growls deeply.

FERRIS
I guess I just don't get how you could call this "a home."

BENJAMIN
(directly)
Like this. It's our home.

The directness shuts Ferris down.

He considers Benjamin a moment, then walks away. Benjamin lingers behind. Spar looks at Benjamin, sympathetic.

INT. JAGUAR RESTAURANT -- DAY

Ferris sweeps into the Jaguar.

FERRIS
Where is my friend Ellis?

ROBIN
Somewhere.

Ferris looks around the place. The coffin no longer has his picture on it. The dartboard doesn't have his face on it. He looks almost disappointed.

INT. HALLWAY --- DAY

Lily stands in front of a back-room door. There is a knocking from inside.

LILY
I'm sorry, Ellis. The door is stuck!

INT. GIFT SHOP -- DAY

Ferris stands in the gift shop. A large PARROT CAGE is nearby. The Parrot SQUAWKS LOUDLY.

FERRIS
Noise. The Macaw is far too loud for a public room this size. I'd make that First Priority too.

BENJAMIN
I agree. We're building a new housing for him.

FERRIS
(shuts book)
Do you have the budget to make these changes?

BENJAMIN
Yes.

Ferris gives him a look of disbelief.

FERRIS
You know this won't be a success.

BENJAMIN
We disagree.

FERRIS
I understand what you're trying to do here...

Ferris shakes his head.

FERRIS (CONT'D)
I just can't get a...

He makes the theatrical "lifting" gesture again, pumping his hand up and down.

FERRIS (CONT'D)
... a handle on it.

He exits.

MACAW PARROT
 "Can't get a handle on it." "Can't
 get a handle on it."

EXT. ZOO -- DAY

Dylan has found a nook behind an unoccupied guest home on the property. He's drawing.

LILY
 Found you.

Dylan looks at his watch. It's 4 'o clock.

DYLAN
 Hey.

She brings him a sandwich.

LILY
 Whatcha drawing?

She looks at it.

DYLAN
 You like it?

LILY
 So much bloodshed.

DYLAN
 I know.

LILY
 I gotta go. I have to feed more
 people, and then the otters.

She exits. He opens up the sandwich. There is a drawing of a girl (her) and a bubble that says: "Hi Dylan. I can't draw as well as you." He laughs to himself. Throws it away.

EXT. DRIVEWAY -- ZOO -- DAY

Ferris disappears down the driveway, spewing gravel.

BENJAMIN
 Twelve items are First Priority.
 Two are Medium Priority. All of
 them need to be fixed before he
 returns in a month.

Ellis appears.

ELLIS
Where is he?

KELLY
He just left.

ELLIS
I'll kill him.

BENJAMIN
(ignores Ellis)
How much does this look like to
you, Rob?

Robin looks at the notepad.

ROBIN
Well, I'd have to take a look, go
through it in an itemized way. But
you're gonna have to put some more
skin in the game.

BENJAMIN
Robin. How much?

ROBIN
I'd say you're looking at a buck-
fifty.

ROSIE
Yay! A dollar-fifty. I have it!

BENJAMIN
(darkly)
Good. We'll need it.

Rosie claps.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
I'm going to take a little walk and
wrap my head around all this...

He gives them a "thumbs up," and walks down the path, looking
at his notepad. Privately, Robin approaches Kelly.

ROBIN
Ferris lusts you.

KELLY
Well, I sure ain't gonna take one
for the team, if that's what you're
getting at.

ROBIN
I ain't getting at anything.
Believe me.

KELLY
I heard that.

ROBIN
Shame about Boss, huh? He just got
here and now he's thinking about
quitting.

KELLY
Quitting? Where do you get that?

Robin points out Benjamin, down the road.

ROBIN
That is the posture of a quitting
man.

BENJAMIN -- THEIR POV

Set against the beautiful backdrop, he looks stooped and
worried. Flipping through pages of his notebook.

Kelly watches him, and damnit. She realizes how much she
does not want him to leave.

INT. CAR -- DAY

Benjamin and Dylan ride together silently. Not speaking.

BENJAMIN
How do they send someone home early
for "moodiness?"

DYLAN
(moody)
I don't know man, it's a sensitive
school.

Benjamin sighs deeply. He rounds the corner, and stops at a
stop sign near the zoo. While he's stopped, a surreal sight
plays out in front of their car.

It's a MASSIVE BROWN BEAR meandering across the road, like a
Pedestrian crossing in front of them. The bear stops, and
lumbers up to the window, stares at Benjamin, and then
continues.

Buster is loose.

Benjamin and Dylan continue staring straight ahead, bone
straight. Slowly, like the bear is in the car with him,
Benjamin carefully withdraws his mobile phone.

EXT. ZOO HILLSIDE -- DAY

Kelly springs up the hill towards the bear enclosure
clutching her cell phone, followed by Lily.

KELLY
Buster... BUSTER!!!

They don't hear anything.

KELLY (CONT'D)
Robin was up here, working on the
drainage, maybe he tripped the
latch --

She pulls out her walkie-talkie.

KELLY (CONT'D)
Robin! Ellis, come in --
(clicks off)
BUSTER!!!

We hear music, as we follow...

BUSTER

Roaming free, happily. We're on his back as he moves down the road. He is blissed out, moving fast. Out in front of him, we see another car spot Buster fifty feet ahead of him, slam on the brakes and make the fastest U-turn in history.

FOUR TRANQ GUNS

Three are pulled off the rack.

EXT. HILLSIDE -- DAY

Ellis, Robin, and Kelly move across the hillside, like a ragged Wild Bunch. Music continues.

EXT. DRIVEWAY -- DAY

Benjamin and Dylan screech into the driveway. Benjamin runs upstairs.

INT. ROSIE'S ROOM -- DAY

Benjamin enters, wild-eyed. His daughter is composed and sitting on her bed.

BENJAMIN
Don't leave your room.

ROSIE
(casually)
I know. Buster's loose. You'll
find him.

EXT. GAS STATION/CONVENIENCE STORE -- DAY

A bored CLERK watches as Buster passes by one of the windows and disappears. The Clerk squints. Huh?

And then, across the next window, much closer to the Clerk, Buster reappears with a spare tire around his neck and another one in his hand. He hurls it away with incredible force, and disappears.

EXT. HILLSIDE -- DAY

Buster on the hillside, waving his arms in joyful freedom. And then, like a man with much to accomplish, he moves on.

EXT. HILLSIDE -- DAY

Benjamin blasts through the brush with the fourth Tranq Gun. Others nearby. He heads deeper into the brush.

BENJAMIN

(to others)

I'll take this side of the hill!

KELLY (O.S.)

I called the Vet from San Diego!
He'll be here with the Big Van...
but it'll be expensive!

BENJAMIN

(running, shouting)

I'll pay whatever it takes! We
sure don't need the publicity of an
escape... !

He suddenly stops. He sees what we don't. And then, camera drifts around to reveal... Buster is eight feet away. Staring at him. Suddenly, all is calm. We hear the yelling voices of the others, but there is utter silence between man and animal here.

It could go either way.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

Buster.

Buster looks at him curiously, and then starts to move closer, sniffing the air. The scent is guiding him towards Benjamin. Benjamin begins speaking in a very calm voice.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

I'm not going to hurt you. Yes. I
had some lunch. Pizza.

Buster sneezes. And puts out his arm to the side as if demonstrating something.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
Gesundheit, buddy.

Benjamin demonstrates the same behavior. For a moment, it's like two mimes showing off their moves. Buster looks entertained by Benjamin. He's comforted. Benjamin feels deeply connected...

BENJAMIN -- PROFILE

As Buster inches into frame, we truly grasp the explosive power and size of the animal.

KELLY
(nearby shouting)
Confirmation! He broke the latch
on the enclosure!!

Buster ROARS loudly.

BENJAMIN
I understand. I feel that way most
of the time.

We are now on the hair-trigger precipice of real violence. This is not a "fun" bear. This is the real thing. And deep inside, Benjamin feels like this may be the end.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
I don't care about me. But you'll
make my kids sad.

Buster looks at him understandingly, and what looks to us like a depth of feeling.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
Well... one of them for sure.

Something passes between them. And then...

BAM

BAM BAM. BAM.

Buster gets a dazed look and crumples to the ground.

The others swarm closer, and all are suddenly on cell-phones. We can hear the chatter.

ROBIN	KELLY
Benjamin was doing some hypno- voodoo stuff on him --	Benjamin contained him. He's okay.

Benjamin shrugs it off. He's still in shock, really. He looks down at the tranquilized bear who was, just moments earlier, communicating deeply with him.

ELLIS

He was toying with you, my boy.
That's what they do before you
become chips and salsa.

BENJAMIN

No, I think we were dancing.

ELLIS

The last dance.

Benjamin ain't buying it. He turns to Ellis with a thought.

BENJAMIN

I saw him on the hillside. Utterly
free...

ELLIS

You're lucky.

BENJAMIN

Ellis. I want to make his
enclosure bigger.

He exits. Ellis turns to Rosie and Dylan.

ELLIS

Your Dad just faced down a 750
pound North-American Grizzly Bear.

ROSIE

(wide-eyed)

I was supposed to stay in my room.

Dylan looks across, to Lily. Lily has begun to dress more darkly, and wear make-up.

EXT. BEAR ENCLOSURE -- AFTERNOON

Kelly, Robin and Benjamin secure the completely unconscious Buster into his enclosure. Dylan and Rosie watch from a safe distance. The SAN DIEGO VET officiously withdraws a leather case. With much fanfare, he withdraws a "field" credit card machine. And presents Benjamin with a bill.

VET

I take Visa. I prefer Mastercard.

Benjamin is still staring at the bill. The Vet puts a reassuring hand on his shoulder.

VET (CONT'D)
Hey. Nobody died.

Benjamin looks at him -- good point -- and slowly withdraws his Zoo credit card. The Vet snatches it with an elaborate flourish, runs in through the machine, gets the signature, and leaves Benjamin with a receipt, all in a swirl of pomp. He tucks the card machine into the leather case. It is his ritual. The Vet exits. Benjamin feels drained, in almost every way. He mumbles: "The World's Most Expensive Vet..."

ELLIS
If you're serious about extending
the enclosure, I can start
tomorrow.

Benjamin lets out a quiet whistle.

BENJAMIN
Why not.

He has no idea where the money will come from. Ellis exits, leaving Benjamin alone with Kelly. Kelly is impressed.

KELLY
You're getting a...

She makes the "lifting" gesture.

KELLY (CONT'D)
... handle on it.

ON THE JAGUAR COFFIN

Ferris' face back on it.

INT. JAGUAR RESTAURANT -- NIGHT

Benjamin is a hero. Ellis, already pleasantly high on Scotch, salutes him while playing darts. Ferris' face has returned to the dartboard too. Camaraderie grows. Benjamin gains strength from his growing family. Dylan watches, feeling excluded. Lily notices. She gestures to him. Benjamin notices them exit.

EXT. HOUSE ROOF -- NIGHT

Lily and Dylan sit on the roof.

LILY
I love that you were named after
Bob Dylan.

She looks at him, so impressed by him. He's not used to this kind of attention.

EXT. ZOO -- NIGHT

A deep blue night. Just the lights on from the Jaguar.

EXT. PARKING LOT -- NIGHT

Benjamin and Kelly walk to her truck. Both have had a beer or two. She reaches into her pocket for her keys, as they crunch across the gravel parking lot. Walking silently.

BENJAMIN

I'm worried that Lily is going to hurt Dylan.

KELLY

Oh no. It's going to be the other way around.

BENJAMIN

How do you figure that?

KELLY

She's a farm girl, Ben... jamin. He's like this exotic creature from the city.

BENJAMIN

My son? Exotic?

KELLY

Yeah.

BENJAMIN

I was worried you thought he was a little bit of a jerk.

KELLY

I'm guessing that Rosie was more like your wife, and Dylan is more like you. That's why you're so hard on him, right?

He laughs ruefully. It's starting to rain, and this conversation has grown too personal.

BENJAMIN

I want you to know. I think you're pretty. Please don't be offended if I don't hit on you.

KELLY

I'd be offended if you did.

BENJAMIN

Good.

KELLY
I'm a big fan of people being
exactly who they are.

BENJAMIN
Exactly.

KELLY
We think alike.

BENJAMIN
We do.

KELLY
If I wanted to be kissed by you,
you wouldn't have a choice.

BENJAMIN
(polite, pleasantly
buzzed)
I have no doubt...

KELLY
See you.

BENJAMIN
See you.

They exit in opposite directions.

EXT. PORCH -- NIGHT

Benjamin stands on the porch, looking out at the zoo.

INT. DYLAN'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Dylan lies in bed, thinking about Lily.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Benjamin peels off his wet clothes. Throws them on top of the giant pile of laundry overflowing a basket in the corner. He pulls on a pair of sweats. He pulls open a dresser drawer -- not much in there that's clean.

A beat, then Benjamin finds something. The old USD sweatshirt. He laughs, still a little woozy from the day and the beer. He pulls it on. Then promptly goes over to the bed and tosses himself across it, exhausted. He shoves his hands into his pockets. And then...

He withdraws something. A piece of paper. He looks at it carefully. He is instantly sober.

INT. JAGUAR RESTAURANT -- MORNING

Rhonda the Secretary has gathered the Staff together.

RHONDA
I've been checking his bills.
People, I hate to tell you this.
The Zoo Account is empty. He has
no more money.

They look at each other.

RHONDA (CONT'D)
He's going to end up selling this
place to somebody cheap, for the
land alone. I'm warning you now.
Behind that front... is a front.
He's a fraud!

INT. DUNCAN'S ACCOUNTING OFFICE -- DAY

Benjamin is still wearing the USD sweatshirt. Duncan passes.
Stops.

DUNCAN
Benjie?

BENJAMIN
Hey Bro.

DUNCAN
What are you doing here?

Benjamin produces a manila envelope.

BENJAMIN
You need to look at this. I found
a deposit slip. It didn't make
sense. So I opened this --

INT. DONUT SHOP -- DAY

They sit across the table. Duncan holds a formerly-sealed
manila envelope in his hand.

DUNCAN
You never opened this package?

BENJAMIN
No. I mean, no.

DUNCAN
Bro.

BENJAMIN

I couldn't open an envelope that said, "open in case of death."

DUNCAN

(shakes his head, off
deposit slip)

You are the Michael Jordan of Denial. The... Moses of Avoidance.

BENJAMIN

Can we not talk about it?

DUNCAN

No -- talk about it. Look at this. Do you realize what this woman did for you? She knew exactly what you'd do. She knew you'd make some bad investment, try to run away, and need a cushion. She had your cushion ready. \$44,000. She calls it your circus money. This woman is still looking out after you. Well, this part is unfortunate, she says, "Listen to your heart, not your brother."

BENJAMIN

She liked you. She just liked me more.

DUNCAN

Well. I can see why you still burn the torch, man.

BENJAMIN

It's been six months. I've gotten to the other side.

Duncan decides not to bust him.

DUNCAN

You're free. You realize that.

BENJAMIN

I do.

DUNCAN

You know you've got to give up the zoo. It's undoable, Benjie. This money is your ticket out.

EXT. OTTERS GULLEY -- DAY

Dylan looks at his watch. 4:02.

Lily shows up. He's grown used to her visits.

LILY
Hey Dylan.

DYLAN
Hey.

LILY
Here --

She gives him a sandwich.

DYLAN
Thanks.

LILY
I hear you may not be staying here
much longer.

DYLAN
Seriously?

LILY
Yeah, I mean, it's expensive and...
I hear there's some money stuff.

Dylan instinctively brightens.

DYLAN
We're going home? Wow!

Lily wilts at his excitement over leaving. He doesn't notice her disappointment.

LILY
Yeah, but if you still want to be
friends, I'll still be your friend.
I mean, you know, there's cars and
all.

DYLAN
Of course. Are you for real with
this?

She nods quietly.

DYLAN (CONT'D)
This is fantastic!

Her face falls further.

LILY
Hey, listen, I gotta go. Don't
tell anybody what I heard, okay?

DYLAN

Sure. Hey, take care... you don't have to... uh, leave so fast.

He has no idea he's hurt her so much.

INT. CAR -- DAY

Benjamin returns. He passes Lily's Message-Sign in the Jaguar window. It reads: FOOD HAS NOT ARRIVED DUE TO RAIN.

EXT. ZOO -- DAY

Benjamin exits the car. Robin meets him immediately.

ROBIN

You've been summoned to the Jaguar.

BENJAMIN

I heard, the food delivery.

ROBIN

No. Rhonda the Secretary is leaving for a job in Mexico. She's turned everybody against you. She says you have no money. She says you're a fraud.

INT. JAGUAR RESTAURANT -- NIGHT

The Inquisition.

Everybody is here, and staring at Benjamin with yearning eyes. Benjamin takes a look at his notepad, and then puts it away. He decides to speak from his heart. And here he finds his own voice... with people.

BENJAMIN

Well. I want to say that it has been an amazing experience here. And each one of you, I've come to know in some small way --

SHOTS OF THEIR FACES

Preparing for the news. Arms crossed. Each one powerfully invested in his every word.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

But the financial climate being what it is, I think no one thought this was... I don't know how to say this... but...

(MORE)

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

I've been an adventure addict my whole life, without a big regard for cost, basically I was just an observer, and a writer. But this is my first real adventure...

SHOTS OF THEIR FACES

Where's this going?

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

And I just want to say that... this has been the best one of all because it's personal. And thanks to my wife Katherine, the money came in -- so I don't know what you've heard. But I am able to say... though I don't have a lot, I have enough to get us by. And if you stick with me, I will give this everything, but I will need everything from you, and we are going to re-open this zoo. It's the best job in the world but it will take everything to make it work.

THEIR FACES

Shocked. Rhonda had told them all he was going to bail out.

KELLY

Well, that's good enough for me.

They all clap... except for Rhonda.

BENJAMIN

And I wish you well in Mexico, Rhonda. Adios.

EXT. ZOO -- DAY

Music. The level of these zookeepers' game has been raised, if possible, even higher. There is new inspiration.

Ellis continues expanding Buster's enclosure.

Kelly hauls meat in a bucket.

Robin replaces the fencing.

Benjamin does business in his home office. He looks at a bill Robin has just delivered.

BENJAMIN

Eight hundred dollars for a sewage drain in the bear enclosure?

ROBIN
 Buster is a big bear, Benjamin. He
 generates... PROPELS, really... an
 enormous amount of waste... the
girth alone...

Benjamin consults his list.

BENJAMIN
 (interrupting)
 Okay, so we've done all the First
 Priorities. Let's do the new
 lighting in the tiger's night
 enclosure...

EXT. BACKYARD -- DAY

Dylan looks at his watch. It's 4:15. No Lily. He's
 disappointed.

INT. TIGER ENCLOSURE -- DAY

In his nighttime area, Spar dozes. The light flickers over
 him. Benjamin works behind a protective wall, reaching over
 and unscrewing the bulb.

BENJAMIN
 I'll take care of this, buddy.

Spar looks at him, blinking like he's listening.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
 You like the new straw we got you?
 You know, alfalfa provides more
 insulation. I know this because
 I've been online, keeping up with
 the --

(as he unscrews)
 -- wildcat insulation community
 where alfalfa is a very sexy topic
 my friend.

Spar blinks.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
 Alright, I have the wrong bulb
 here, I'll have to go to Home Depot
 and get you a new one. Eighteen
 miles, baby. I've got it down to
 two songs, each way.

He turns, sees Kelly looking at him.

KELLY
You get the part where they don't
talk, right?

Benjamin smiles.

BENJAMIN
He talks.

INT. HOME DEPOT --- DAY

Benjamin picks out the proper small fluorescent fixture,
socket and bulb. Rosie is picking items up from the opposite
aisle. Both shopping.

ROSIE
Nice one, Dad. You pick good
bulbs.

BENJAMIN
Thanks Rosie. Anything else we
need while we're over here in the
land of people?

ROSIE
Nope, I'm good.

She sees a group of city kids, just about her age, wandering
by, looking prematurely mature. Benjamin hurries her along.

ROSIE (CONT'D)
How come you don't tell stories
anymore?

BENJAMIN
Because we're living the story.

ROSIE
I wish we could tell Mom.

BENJAMIN
You don't think she knows?

ROSIE
I know she knows...

INT. REGISTER -- DAY

Benjamin and Rosie lean across the counter in the same
fashion. The spritely CASHIER moves into shot.

CASHIER
74 dollars and 36 cents.

Benjamin shakes his head.

CASHIER (CONT'D)

I don't come up with the prices.

Benjamin nods, of course. He hands over a much-used credit card to the Cashier, who looks at it curiously.

BENJAMIN

It's a little worn.

CASHIER

No, it's just... it says Rosemoor Animal Park..

BENJAMIN

That's the one.

CASHIER

You work there?

BENJAMIN

I do. And I also own it. Strange but true.

ROSIE

(loves saying it)

We bought a zoo!

CASHIER

I love that place. We used to go there all the time. Is it going to open again soon? We miss that freakin' zoo.

BENJAMIN

Seriously?

CASHIER

No, I'm busting your balls for fun. Of course I'm serious.

Benjamin breaks into a big smile.

BENJAMIN

We're close. Planning to open the beginning of this summer.

CASHIER

Well, then, we will be there. Reserve me nine tickets, we'll bring my in-laws, maybe feed a couple of 'em to the tigers.

BENJAMIN

Well, that's... that's just great. Thank you. Thank you very much.

He pumps the Cashier's hand, very pleased, and moves on with a bounce in his step.

CASHIER
Mister, your bulbs.

He returns for the bag. Excitedly.

BENJAMIN
Thank you. Thank you.

INT. TIGER ENCLOSURE -- DAY

Benjamin puts up the new light fixture, in good spirits.

BENJAMIN
You want to hear something crazy?

We see he's talking to... Spar.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
I think we're going to be okay,
buddy.

Spar seems especially lackadaisical. Benjamin looks down and notices that Spar's food sits uneaten in a corner of the enclosure.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
(concerned)
Come on, man, we talked about this.
You gotta eat all the food to get
all your meds.

He leans in closer. Spar looks at him.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
There is a major buzz waiting for
you inside that meat. I'm telling
you. That's gonna jack you up.
Your neurotransmitters will be
sending signals to the moon and
back. You're gonna be dating 7
year olds, man. You're gonna have
housecats lined up from here to El
Cajon.

Spar rolls over. Bored and old. Benjamin is concerned.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
Buddy. If you don't eat the food
and don't get the meds, it can all
go downhill fast, I'm telling you.
Next thing you know "they" will be
saying --

(imitation)
(MORE)

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
 -- "we don't know what else we can
 do for you" --

Spar makes a disinterested noise.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
 We've made it this far. We're
 almost there. You gotta stick with
 me, okay? You gotta. We've got
 opening day coming up.

He turns. Sees that Kelly is at the other side of the enclosure, behind him, listening to everything. He moves past her.

EXT. TIGER ENCLOSURE -- DAY

Kelly follows. Benjamin anticipates the subject -- Spar.

BENJAMIN
 He's okay, he's fine!

KELLY
 Benjamin, that's not what's
 happening here.

BENJAMIN
 What's happening is we've actually
 started to fix this place. We're
 gonna ace the next inspection, and
 we're going to open Rosemoor on
 time.

KELLY
 You are hurting that animal.

She is beyond passionate. This is her world. She's emotional. He ignores her. She rushes to catch up to him.

KELLY (CONT'D)
 You can fix this place up all you
 want, but it won't bring Katherine
 back.

He stops.

She stops.

Oops. The wrong topic and the wrong time.

He turns. She's still mortified.

BENJAMIN
 This is not about Katherine.

KELLY
How would I know? You never talk
about her.

BENJAMIN
And for your information, I've made
my peace with losing her.

KELLY
Really?

He pauses. She has truly, truly gone too far.

BENJAMIN
(immediately)
End of the personal stuff!

KELLY
(just as immediate)
Makes me happy.

They exit in opposite directions.

INT. BENJAMIN'S KITCHEN -- LATE NIGHT

The kids are asleep. Finally, Benjamin sits alone at the kitchen table. He's wearing glasses. His laptop is in front of him, closed. He flips it open. He opens I-Photo. Scrolls down to the file marked -- K. Each move he makes comes with deliberation. As if each step is a milestone.

He highlights the file.

A page of thumbnail photos comes up.

He stares at it. The effect is the opposite of uplifting.

Benjamin shuts the laptop but continues staring at the place where the photos were a moment earlier.

INT. KITCHEN -- MORNING

The microwave breakfasts are ready.

BENJAMIN
ROSIE!! TIME TO GO!!!
(nothing)
Where is she?

DYLAN
No clue.

BENJAMIN
Thanks. Helpful.

EXT. FRONT YARD -- MORNING

A thicket of peacocks with their fans up. They scatter at the noise of Benjamin on the porch, revealing Rosie.

BENJAMIN

Rosie, come on! I depend on you to be dependable!

ROSIE

Dad, look.

One of the peahens is calmly perched on the ground.

ROSIE (CONT'D)

It's Lucy. She laid her eggs.

BENJAMIN

Great. In the middle of the driveway. It's going to get eaten by a wolf or a dog in three minutes flat. Rosie, we have to go.

ROSIE

(upset)

But you won't let anyone eat the eggs, will you? It's not her fault she's not smart.

BENJAMIN

Honey, she's very smart. She picked you as her friend. But we must evacuate.

ROSIE

If we don't help her, then I'm not going to school.

BENJAMIN

Rosie --

ROSIE

Won't. Go.

Rosie crosses her arms, stands firm.

BENJAMIN

Look, Daddy has a lot going on right now. Kind of a Tsunami of ... big-people stuff. Okay? You want me to stop everything, buy a fence and put it around some zoologically insignificant peafowl?

ROSIE

Yes I do.

They regard each other.

BENJAMIN

Good idea. You're not going to school today.

Dylan has been listening in.

DYLAN

You would never do that for me.

BENJAMIN

You are not going to school today either, young man. We're going to spend this day together. We're gonna build a fence.

DYLAN

(new respect)

Yes sir.

Dylan looks around for Lily. Nowhere in sight. That never used to be the case.

EXT. DRIVEWAY -- DAY

They build a fence around the peahen. Music.

EXT. TIGER ENCLOSURE -- DAY

Benjamin and Kelly check out the Tiger enclosure. They are brisk and professional with each other. Nothing personal, all about the animals. Lily is nearby. They see that Spar has climbed onto the tallest ledge overlooking the enclosure. It's a thin slab of rock, and Spar is perched on it, panting.

KELLY

He got up there and now he can't get down.

BENJAMIN

Don't we have an animal ladder?

KELLY

(dismissive)

We've tried luring him with food but he won't move. He's stuck.

She turns, the echoes of their fight still in the air.

BENJAMIN

Just give him a second. He'll be okay.

KELLY

(anguished)

He needs to come down and eat, he needs that medication and he hasn't had any water all day. Plus, he's broiling out there. We need to get him into his enclosure --

She's starting to unravel.

Benjamin walks to the gate of the enclosure. He arrives at the gate. He indicates he's going inside.

BENJAMIN

Are the other two cats inside?

KELLY

Benjamin -- be serious.

BENJAMIN

If he moves to attack me, at least he'll be moving.

(off her look)

What? I'll run. He's slow.

KELLY

It's not a bullfight, Benjamin.

Spar tries to move. He's struggling. Robin arrives.

ROBIN

Guys. I think it's time.

BENJAMIN

For what?

ROBIN

He's ready. Let's call the Vet. You're the owner, you have to okay it, man.

BENJAMIN

No.

They look at him.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

It doesn't feel right.

KELLY

Benjamin. It never feels right.

Kelly turns suddenly, as Ellis now arrives at the enclosure.

KELLY (CONT'D)

What haven't we thought of?

Lily speaks up.

LILY

Loud noises scare the big cats.
Maybe we can scare him into going
back in.

BENJAMIN

Hold on --

Kelly ignores him, turns to the assembled staff.

KELLY

Okay, good idea. When I give you
the signal, you're all going to
make as much noise as possible.
It's our only option. Yell,
scream, the more hysterical the
better. Spar'll hate it, but maybe
he'll come down.

EXT. TIGER ENCLOSURE -- DAY -- MINUTES LATER

Kelly raises her arm like a conductor. And lowers it.

Suddenly, they're all YELLING, and SCREECHING at Spar. Ellis
is shouting angry epithets. Benjamin is reluctant, but joins
in. Camera moves across their angry shouting faces. They
truly look demented.

Spar is annoyed. He raises his head.

The yelling continues.

Spar is upset by the din.

Benjamin is yelling as loud as any of them.

Spar's tail twitches, ears flattened... and a miracle
happens. He RISES to his feet and slowly, painfully, steps
down the rise towards his enclosure, tripping the door that
shuts behind him.

Instantly relieved, exhausted and red-faced, everybody stops
yelling. Except for one.

Benjamin. He cannot stop.

They stare at him. He stops. Embarrassed, he moves away.

EXT. PATH NEARBY -- DAY

Kelly finds Benjamin.

KELLY

Ben. Jamin.

BENJAMIN

Look -- I'm feeling a real lack of privacy right now. Like we're all just a little bit in each other's pockets.

She ignores his personal issue.

KELLY

Can't you see his legs? Spar's suffering. I can't stand the pain. I know him.

He says nothing.

KELLY (CONT'D)

They can't tell you. They can't tell you. They show you.

He says nothing.

KELLY (CONT'D)

It's going to happen.

BENJAMIN

I thought he was getting better. Why not let him live?

She keeps repeating it, like a mantra:

KELLY

It's going to happen.

BENJAMIN

This isn't about Spar, this is about you. I'm more concerned about you!

KELLY

It's going to happen.

BENJAMIN

You're too emotionally invested in this.

KELLY

Of course I'm invested! I've been with him 13 years. You know how it's going to end. Can you see how selfish this is? You're too smart not to.

She looks at him.

BENJAMIN

Why not let him live a few weeks longer?

KELLY
I quit. I quit.

She storms off.

EXT. DRIVEWAY/HOME -- LATE AFTERNOON

Rosie sits next to Lucy, who perches on her eggs. Lucy looks at Rosie. Rosie looks at Lucy. They've been doing this for a long time. Kelly arrives.

KELLY
Your dad around?

ROSIE
He said he was going to think. He does that sometimes.

Nearby, Dylan is on the porch, sketch-pad in hand, doing some drawings of the nighttime sky.

KELLY
You making dinner?

DYLAN
(bummed)
No.

KELLY
Why don't you let me help you?
I'll order some pizza.

DYLAN
That's okay. Dad'll be back. He's just having a mood.

KELLY
How long do his moods last?

DYLAN
(still drawing)
Couple years.

INT. KITCHEN -- NIGHT

They eat pizza together. Still no Benjamin. Rosie takes the plates inside.

KELLY
Do you miss Lily?

DYLAN
(embarrassed)
Me. No. Not too much.

KELLY
I bet you put all your feelings
into your drawings.

DYLAN
Naw. Not really. I guess I can't
talk to girls that well.

KELLY
It's pretty easy, Dylan. They'll
tell you everything. The secret to
talking --

She leans forward.

KELLY (CONT'D)
-- is listening.

DYLAN
Yeah, well, she doesn't talk to me
anymore.

Rosie returns.

EXT. HOUSE -- LATER NIGHT

From outside the window, we see Kelly herding the kids
upstairs, to bed.

EXT. PORCH -- LATER NIGHT

Kelly is alone now. She sits out on the porch. Leon at her
feet. We hear a car door slam.

Benjamin walks up the steps and sits next to her.

There is an oddly comfortable silence, as if they've spent
the entire day together.

They listen to the sounds of the Zoo.

BENJAMIN
I thought when I came out here, it
would stop.

She looks at him. Listening.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
Back home, every place reminded me
of her. Filippi's on 3rd Street by
the water. Neal's Coffee Shop.
Balboa Park. That's a big one.

He taps her arm.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

The way the air smells in May and August, when her favorite bushes grew flowers all over our neighborhood. They're triggers, man.

INT. DYLAN'S ROOM -- LATER NIGHT

Dylan hears the sound of voices on the porch.

EXT. PORCH -- LATER NIGHT

Benjamin continues. Kelly listens, afraid to even move. She loves this side of him.

BENJAMIN

I was looking at Katherine's death certificate and I couldn't make out a word next to my name, and then I was told it was "WIDOWER," a new word. Now it's a whole new thing. She was so level-headed -- she was instrumental in every financial decision. She is irreplaceable in so many ways. And for a while, it was better, it was. But the funny thing is, it turns out she's here too. I go to Home Depot, or the Target-Nine-Miles-Away, seriously, I'm avoiding half the aisles. Pasta, condiments, pastries -- she loved Blueberry Pop-Tarts, well who doesn't, but this girl could eat eight desserts and not gain a pound, or bat an eye. I turn on the radio, sad songs, happy songs, any songs, they're all her... the other night, I picked up the list of our favorite channel numbers, her handwriting destroyed me. It used to be by our bed. It's still by my bed. The numbers aren't even the same anymore. I cannot let go. And why should I?

Kelly nods. This was her revelation several nights ago. She listens, and he continues.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

Coffee is no good either. I met her in a coffee shop, it's a silly story, but I think about it all the time. The first thing she said. I sort of live by it.

KELLY

Tell me.

BENJAMIN

I don't want to. I'd have to use the past tense. And by the way, let's not mention French food. Anything French, her favorite. French people, French accents, French toast, France itself, French Fries, French's Mustard... our dishes, our books, our clock, the couch where she napped, the chair where she... stopped living.

Kelly listens, still not moving. She's alternately charmed and horrified at her lack of a chance with this guy.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

And most of all, the kids. Rosie, the little dance she does when she eats something she likes or --

Behind them, a light goes on, a window opens. Neither notices.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

-- or Dylan, his eyes, I've only seen that shade of green on one person before. And the way he drives me nuts, makes me crazy, denies me, frustrates me, looking back at me with her green eyes and none of her lightness.

She listens.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

What I figured out is that when you love someone that much, that hard, for that long, you can't get away from them no matter where you go. And why should you?

Beat.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

Half the time I feel like I'm running across the Sahara, in lead shoes, with a plastic bag over my head. I can't get a...

He jokes.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

"Handle on it."

KELLY
You're scaring me.

BENJAMIN
I was the best version of me
because she loved me. And now,
without her, I wake up every day
and think "now I gotta fool
everybody into thinking I know what
I'm doing for another day." And
Dylan, that little hardass -- he
sees right through me.

He looks at Kelly. There is power in his realization, and in her listening to him.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
I cannot let go.

Beat.

Kelly pats his knee. She sighs. She has no chance. He'll belong to Katherine forever.

KELLY
I can.

She smiles, bittersweetly, rises to exit. Gave it her best. Upstairs, a door SLAMS.

INT. HALLWAY - LATER NIGHT

Benjamin goes to check, finds Dylan defiant in the hallway.

DYLAN
I get it now, okay? I get why you
can't stand me!

Benjamin tries to herd Dylan, and the "problem" back into his room. He immediately dismisses the content of Dylan's words and it pisses him off more.

BENJAMIN
Okay -- alright --

DYLAN
(won't budge)
No! At least now I know the real
reason you hate me. I heard you
admit it to her. Like you were
talking about corn flakes... you
hate me.

He catches Benjamin's full attention.

BENJAMIN

Hate you? Come on, you're a good kid. You've made mistakes, we've made mistakes, we're working through 'em. I don't blame you for anything.

DYLAN

That is BULLSHIT. Admit it. You wish I wasn't here. With my "green" eyes. I heard you!

BENJAMIN

(embarrassed)

You mis-heard me.

DYLAN

I'm sick of it here. Can't you see?

BENJAMIN

Well, thank you for telling me that again. I'll pack us up and we'll go roaming around some more. We'll be hobos together!

DYLAN

Because you wasted our money. Some of that belonged to me.

BENJAMIN

(raw)

I thought you liked it here! I'm sorry. I'm sorry your friends don't visit you more. I called some of them and invited them myself. And I'm sorry, I thought you were friends with Lily. I thought, I thought, I thought. I thought you liked me. I thought it was a dream come true.

DYLAN

It's your dream! You can't force a dream on somebody else!

BENJAMIN

(just pissed)

Yes I can. Because I'm your father and I'm the only one you've got. The line of people who really care about you in this world... ends here.

DYLAN

(simply)

You never ask me how I'm doing.
You never even taught me to shave.

Dylan slams into his room.

BENJAMIN
 (so grateful for the
 information)
 You want to know how to shave?
I'd love to teach you to shave...

But Dylan has locked the door.

INT. OFFICE -- MORNING

Benjamin sits at his desk, in the quiet. The place is clean and orderly now and somehow feels very empty. He is still paralyzed by last night's events. The weight of this whole endeavor shows on him.

EXT. DRIVEWAY -- MORNING

Benjamin watches as Duncan's BMW arrives. Duncan steps out of his car. He pulls off a great pair of shades. He is a man with a mission.

EXT. ZOO -- DAY

Benjamin walks with his brother, past the tigers.

BENJAMIN
 -- so when a tiger bites you, he
 actually takes your pulse, through
his teeth --

DUNCAN
 (uncomfortable)
 And this stuff doesn't creep you
 out? Like when a bear escapes?

BENJAMIN
 (hands in pockets)
 You get used to it, Duncan.

DUNCAN
 Listen, Benjie, I came out here
 because --

Just then there is a sudden RUSTLING. The sound of something moving through brush.

Duncan jumps, puts his hands out, karate-style, prepared for combat defense. Benjamin turns to see what's making the sound...

... a crinkly plastic bag, tumbling its way up the path.
 Duncan wilts, embarrassed.

DUNCAN (CONT'D)

Shut up.

BENJAMIN

Are you kidding? That was classic.
I have some Ziploc bags at home
that could use a good ass-kicking.

DUNCAN

I never want to hear about this
again.

EXT. NEAR FLAMINGO ENCLOSURE -- DAY

They walk together.

DUNCAN

(a pronouncement)

I have arrived with an idea.

BENJAMIN

Uh oh.

DUNCAN

Listen man. I get it. I really
do. I get the whole escape thing,
I get the whole spiritual thing
like -- "we're all in cages man," --
and I get the aesthetic. I like
the moats. I think it's a big,
kicky thing you got into.

BENJAMIN

Thank you.

DUNCAN

But you're insane.

BENJAMIN

Thank you.

DUNCAN

And more importantly, my brother,
you are wasting... thousands and
thousands of dollars out here. I
love you, but you have a big blind
spot. You like an adventure, but
Katherine knew this about money.
Money is like air. You don't know
how much you need it, until it's
gone.

BENJAMIN

This is where I'm going to put the
giraffes, by the way. I want to go
over my five-year plan with you.

DUNCAN
(carefully)
Bro. There's no five-year plan.
There's no five-week plan. You're
getting killed out here. You're
getting maimed. Now. I've heard
from the previous owner's lawyer.

BENJAMIN
About what --

DUNCAN
They're willing to make you an
offer to buy the place back. At
pretty close to what you paid.
This is... a miracle.

Benjamin nods. He's ahead of this.

BENJAMIN
So I come in, bankrupt the place,
and they can resell without the
staff and the zoo.

DUNCAN
I wouldn't say it was the plan
then... but it's the plan now.

BENJAMIN
Duncan. You give the previous
owner's lawyer a message from me.
Tell them we're opening September
25th. Tickets are 9 dollars
apiece. I've got a sick Siberian
Tiger to feed.

DUNCAN
Good. I'll tell him you'll think
about it.

INT. TIGER ENCLOSURE -- DAY

Spar, the elderly tiger, is lying on the floor, eyes shut,
very still. Benjamin and Kelly look on.

BENJAMIN
I'll call the Vet in San Diego, and
see if he can start a different
medication --

KELLY
Benjamin --

BENJAMIN
-- we don't know. There might be
something else we haven't tried.

Kelly shifts uncomfortably.

KELLY
You know how I feel.

She looks at him a moment. Then exits. Benjamin looks at Spar, who looks back at him. The same expression. Both take a long breath. Benjamin sits down on the concrete floor.

BENJAMIN
What do you think, huh Spar? What do we do now, bud?

They look at each other. A silent communication between the two. Volumes are spoken by this old Tiger whose body has let him down. He's just... plain... tired. Spar talks, alright.

And suddenly Benjamin is aware of somebody else in the enclosure. He turns, expecting Kelly.

It's Dylan.

Dylan says nothing, either. He sits down on the concrete floor, next to Benjamin.

For a moment they just sit there, leaning against the wall, looking at Spar, whose body rises and falls softly with his breath. This is the big cat's final mile.

DYLAN
You did your best, Dad. He knows that.

Benjamin nods.

BENJAMIN
What happened with Lily?

DYLAN
I don't know. I guess I didn't listen to something she told me, or something. I liked her.

BENJAMIN
I like when you talk.

DYLAN
(truthful beat)
I never know what to say to you.

BENJAMIN
I'm the same way. Maybe we should just tell each other what we wished the other guy would say --

DYLAN
 "I'm sorry I brought you out here
 to the sticks."

Benjamin nods. He turns to Dylan.

BENJAMIN
 "You're a great Dad."

Beat. They both laugh. It's been awhile.

Spar sighs contentedly. Benjamin sits quietly with his son, and a very old Siberian Tiger. Three generations of men, all at the crossroads.

EXT. TIGER ENCLOSURE -- DAY

Kelly waits outside, pacing. Benjamin and Dylan walk out of the tiger enclosure. Benjamin nods to Kelly.

KELLY
 You're sure --

BENJAMIN
 Yeah.

She nods. Proud of him. Okay. Dylan turns to Benjamin.

DYLAN
 Come on, Dad. Let's go home.

Benjamin nods. He walks back to the house, his arm around his son. Benjamin takes one last look back. A goodbye gesture. He wraps his arm around his son, tighter as they trudge up the hill. Dylan's Theme.

INT. ROSIE'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Benjamin puts Rosie to bed. He lies down on the bed beside her for a moment. And notices something. There's room beside Rosie now.

BENJAMIN
 Wait a minute. What happened to --

ROSIE
 I put my stuffed animals in the closet last night.

BENJAMIN
 You did. Huh.

ROSIE
 They're not real you know.

BENJAMIN

Rosie. Those animals are more real
than a lot of people I know.

A beat. They just lie there.

ROSIE

I think Mom would've really liked
it here, you know that?

BENJAMIN

Think so?

ROSIE

Know so.

INT. DYLAN'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Dylan is asleep. Benjamin tucks him in. His attention is
drawn to a piece of artwork on Dylan's desk.

It's a beautiful, finely wrought drawing of Spar. We hear a
noise. Click click click...

INT. KITCHEN -- LATE NIGHT

We come upon Benjamin, glasses on, sitting at his laptop,
tucked into the corner of the kitchen, click click clicking.

He's roaming through his file of photos of Katherine and the
family... when the four were together... one photo after
another... and we see flashes of the live-action seconds
before and after the photos were taken, mixed in with the
stills... Katherine's face is always obscured in what we've
seen of her in our movie... but we see it all on Benjamin's
face, and in his glasses. The memories, the sadness, the
loss, but most of all the unutterable joy of having shared a
life with this person. We hear Katherine's Theme.

EXT. ZOO -- DAY

He walks through the zoo, on his cell-phone, feeling assured.

BENJAMIN

Thank him, but it's a no.

INTERCUT:

INT. DUNCAN'S HOME -- DAY

Duncan on his porch. Writhing in pain at this conversation.

DUNCAN

Mistake.

BENJAMIN

We're going to make it, Duncan. I know we will. It's destiny.

DUNCAN

Benjie, this is a misfire. Okay? You've mortgaged everything, spent all your cash, even Katherine's bail-out money. If you don't pass this inspection, don't open on time, you're done. This is all in, man. This is what they tell you never to do. You spent all your own money. You're destroying yourself and your family.

BENJAMIN

If I turn back now, I'm just another bullshitter.

DUNCAN

No, you're a smart guy who examined his options.

BENJAMIN

Every success has a moment like this.

DUNCAN

You've had nothing but moments like this!

BENJAMIN

Disc full. I'm hanging up.

DUNCAN

When's the inspection?

BENJAMIN

Three days.

Duncan moans.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

Hanging up on your moan!

And he does.

EXT. ZOO -- DAY

Benjamin finds Kelly. She's holding a piece of paper, sighs.

KELLY

We can't do all of this before the inspection. We need more help. Lots of it.

BENJAMIN

I know. It's undoable... until we do it.

He points to the middle-distance behind him. She turns, following his gaze. A small group walks up the driveway, we see a couple of townies from the Jaguar, the Cashier from Home Depot, and even a few Moms and Dads from Dylan's school. Volunteers coming to help.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

I made some calls. It's their zoo too.

Kelly greets the group, gratefully.

KELLY

Hey guys! Let's get to work!

SHOTS

As everyone gets to work on the zoo.

- 1) Paths are being swept.
- 2) Screens replaced.
- 3) A new drain being installed. The top is popped. Three people recoil at the smell.
- 4) Enclosures being cleaned.
- 5) Ellis installs a P.A. System.
- 6) Dylan pulls a wheelbarrow across frame.

INT. ZOO OFFICE -- NEXT DAY

Fevered activity has sprouted in all areas of the house. Dylan passes. Benjamin catches up to him.

BENJAMIN

Dylan, come here. Need you to look at this --

DYLAN

Sure --

BENJAMIN

I printed this poster out, and I was wondering if you'd give it a once-over, with your artist's eye.

DYLAN

(slightly confused)

Oh. Okay. Sure.

Benjamin unfurls the poster. Under the banner reading Rosemoor Animal Park is...

Dylan's drawing of Spar. Dylan looks at it for a moment, then looks over at Benjamin.

BENJAMIN

Not bad, huh?

DYLAN

Where are you putting this?

BENJAMIN

Basically -- everywhere.

Dylan stares at the poster, moved. Rosie comes over, waving her arms and yelling for her dad.

EXT. ZOO -- DAY

The Peahen's eggs are being pecked at with tiny beaks.

Rosie hovers nearby.

They watch as the baby peacocks poke their heads out. Benjamin puts his arm around Rosie, who is enthralled, as they continue watching. There is noise, and Benjamin turns to see...

Duncan's BMW, nosing up the driveway. Benjamin shakes his head as Duncan parks and exits. He calls out to him.

BENJAMIN

Get me the tranq gun! My brother can't take "no" for an answer!

DUNCAN

Not why I'm here, Bro. I called Ellis, and asked if you guys needed any help.

Duncan points back to his car.

DUNCAN (CONT'D)

I've got a trunkful of Haddock from the city. 200 pounds worth. For Bruno.

BENJAMIN
(blown away)
Buster. Are you serious?

DUNCAN
No -- serious is the smell in my car. Jesus, and I thought McDonald's fries left a smell. I started questioning my entire being about twenty miles ago. Help me, Benjie. I'm about to be sick from the smell.

Benjamin, amazed, feels a wave of emotion. This explosion of life. Everything inching into sharper focus. Rosie sees the feelings on Benjamin's face.

ROSIE
Don't turn on the tears, Daddy!

DUNCAN
Come on, brother, we've got an inspection tomorrow.

BENJAMIN
(pronouncement)
And so we do.

EXT. ZOO -- LATE AFTERNOON

As the sun sets, we see the staff, the people from the town, Benjamin, Kelly, Duncan and the kids, all hard at work. Dylan looks at his watch. 4:15.

Lily drives by on a cart. His hope rises. She passes without looking his way.

DISSOLVE TO:

THE SUN, RISING OVER THE ZOO

Solomon the Lion roars. The sound ricochets throughout the valley.

EXT. TIGER ENCLOSURE -- DAY

Just outside the Tiger enclosure, we see Benjamin nailing a small plaque to the wall. He steps back and we see it features Spar's picture, name, and the dates of his birth and... death.

BENJAMIN
Looks good, Buddy. You in your prime. You would have done the same for me.

Benjamin stands a moment, smiles and exits.

WIDE SHOT -- THE ROSEMOOR ANIMAL PARK

It's no longer the ramshackle place it once was. It's sprawling and organized, soulfully designed and clean, with straight posts and tidy pathways, excited Zookeepers and content animals.

EXT. FRONT OF ZOO -- DAY

They raise the new sign for the front of the zoo.

EXT. DRIVEWAY -- DAY

Everyone has lined up. Benjamin, Rosie, Dylan, Kelly, Robin, and, paying little attention to Dylan, the never-more-beautiful Lily. All smartly dressed. Ellis even wears a red tie and a great suit, along with his beanie. He looks strangely serene. (He's been drinking all night.) Waiting.

Finally, Duncan joins them, walking over wearing the newest pair of boots we've ever seen. Benjamin notices, amused.

BENJAMIN
(to Ellis)
Did I look like that --

Ellis nods ruefully.

ELLIS
Worse.

BENJAMIN
Wow. That's humiliating.

Benjamin shakes his head, hands out a schedule to everyone.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
Okay. Make sure all your walkies are off. I don't want to hear about any problems. I have to keep mine on, or he'll be suspicious, but frankly, if you have a problem, I don't wanna know about it until Walter Ferris is gone. Got it?
(they do)
Here we go, and here's to us.

The USDA Van pulls up the driveway. Ferris exits with pomp and circumstance, and a new blue clipboard. Music.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
Welcome back to the Rosemoor Animal Park Adventure.

FERRIS
It's an Adventure now?

BENJAMIN
To be precise, Mr. Ferris... it
always was.

A moved look among the staffers. The Benjamin Era is on.
Ferris moves to Ellis.

FERRIS
Hello Ellis. How are you?

Ellis says nothing. Simply nods. The very minimum of
decency and manners. They exchange a strong handshake. They
enjoy disliking each other.

ELLIS
On my best behavior...

EXT. ZOO WALKWAY -- DAY

Ferris and Benjamin walk through the zoo, trailed by Dylan
and Rosie who watch at a distance. They pass the Monkeys.

BENJAMIN
As you can see, most of the
enclosures have been completely re-
done. All the locks were
replaced...

They pass a cluster of peacocks. Rosie beams as Lucy nudges
her baby peacocks. Ferris stops. His stomach growls loudly.
Several look at each other.

FERRIS
Are there more now?

BENJAMIN
One of our peahens recently hatched
a brood --

FERRIS
(interrupts)
I should remind you that the
peafowl are not edifying from a
zoological standpoint --

BENJAMIN
They may just be nice-looking
pigeons, but we like 'em. They're
staying. They're our mascots. I
wouldn't care if we have to move a
few into the house.

Ferris makes a judgmental note in his notepad.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
May I show you the expanded bear enclosure?

EXT. LION ENCLOSURE -- DAY

Kelly is putting the finishing touches on the exhibit. She reaches over to double-check the lock. And that's when she realizes, it's stuck in the open position.

Her eyes widen. She stands in front of the enclosure.

Solomon is perched on his rock. He looks over, and as if sensing Kelly's panic, and widens his eyes. Kelly covers with a smile.

KELLY
Yikes.

She picks up her walkie-talkie, and presses TALK.

KELLY (CONT'D)
(overly polite)
Hi Ellis, how are you?

EXT. BEAR ENCLOSURE -- DAY

Benjamin and Ferris are leaving the bear enclosure, as he hears the walkie-talkie crackle with Kelly's voice.

KELLY (O.S.)
Ellis, I would just love it if you could pay me a visit near Solomon's enclosure.

Ferris perks up.

FERRIS
Is there a problem?

Benjamin scrambles for an explanation.

BENJAMIN
Sounds like love to me.
(privately)
You know how it happens sometimes, working closely together...

Ferris narrows his eyes. He sniffs a problem.

FERRIS
Let's go see Solomon's enclosure.

EXT. LION ENCLOSURE -- DAY

Kelly is still standing in front of the enclosure, madly trying to jiggle the lock to fix it.

A beat. Kelly hears the low rumble of a growl. She looks up, into the eyes of Solomon, now aware that Kelly is concerned.

KELLY
Hello, fella.

Solomon looks at her, steady. Just then Ellis comes running at full speed down the hill towards Kelly.

KELLY (CONT'D)
Oh thank God. I asked you so politely I wasn't sure you'd come.

ELLIS
Are you kidding? That's why I came. You're never that nice, I knew something was up. What's wrong?

KELLY
Lock's broken. And the only thing we can do... oh God... Is jimmy it from the inside.

ELLIS
Alright. Okay. We'll just get him into his nighttime holding pen.

KELLY
That would take at least a half-hour, I'd have to go get food, it would be a whole ordeal...

EXT. ZOO -- DAY

Ferris and company are striding toward the Lion enclosure.

EXT. LION ENCLOSURE -- DAY

Ellis and Kelly brainstorm, talking over each other.

EXT. ZOO -- DAY

Benjamin instinctively stops Ferris.

BENJAMIN
Do you want something to drink?

FERRIS
No. I don't drink.

He starts to move. Benjamin stops him again.

BENJAMIN
Not even water?

FERRIS
Do you have any idea what they put
in water?

Ferris continues walking, suspicious of everything...

EXT. LION ENCLOSURE -- DAY

Kelly is leaning her whole body over the enclosure, trying to draw Solomon to her. Meanwhile over at the enclosure door, Ellis, holding a hammer, takes a deep breath, and hops the fence. Kelly watches. Dear Lord. Hear my prayer.

EXT. ZOO -- DAY

They stride closer.

EXT. LION ENCLOSURE -- DAY

Ellis uses his hammer to try and get the lock to drop, but it's frozen. Bang! Bang! Bang! He hits his thumb.

ELLIS
Sheep Farts... in Aspic...
Cocktails... ARGGGGH!!!!

Solomon is now trotting his way. Ellis faces the animal.

ELLIS (CONT'D)
Hey Boy. You don't want me. I'm
pickled in Scotch and bitterness
and impure thoughts.

Solomon licks his chops.

ELLIS (CONT'D)
So that's your thing.

Kelly stifles a scream. Ellis turns away from the beast and continues his work, fast and assured. Solomon still considers the old man as appetizer. He then yawns, and trots the other way. Ellis hops over the fence and SLAMS the door... re-aligning the lock, which pops cleanly into place.

EXT. ZOO -- DAY

Ferris sweeps up to the front of the enclosure, Benjamin closely behind. Benjamin looks at Ellis and Kelly, slightly sweaty and glowing with false nonchalance. They smile guiltily. Ferris examines both of them, very suspiciously and then back at Benjamin.

BENJAMIN
Afternoon Solomon!

Solomon's tail swishes on cue, as if he were in on all of it.

EXT. PORCH -- DAY

Near the driveway, looking somber, Ferris fills out the last page and signs the report. Behind Benjamin, we find Kelly, Robin, Ellis, Lily, Duncan, Rosie and Dylan all waiting.

FERRIS
I don't think it will be a success.

He rips the sheet from his clipboard, hands it to Benjamin.

FERRIS (CONT'D)
But good luck.

Benjamin studies the paper, and then... grins. He holds it up high in the air, victorious. A cheer goes up.

BENJAMIN
I want you here on opening day.

Ferris looks resolute.

FERRIS
I don't fraternize, Mr. Mee. I'm sure I'll get many reports.

They continue cheering. Ferris' stomach growls. He shakes his head. He just doesn't get this place. He exits.

THE SKY

A gray cloud moves across the sunlit afternoon.

INT. JAGUAR RESTAURANT -- DAY

An impromptu celebration has broken out. Lily is mixing on a laptop, Ellis dances. Everyone together. Duncan finds Benjamin looking out the window.

DUNCAN

I've got guys plastering our posters up every place within a 20 mile radius.

Benjamin nods to himself.

DUNCAN (CONT'D)

Also I checked and our website isn't getting enough hits. I called in some favors, we're linked to every other zoo-or-animal-site within a hundred-and-fifty miles.

BENJAMIN

I wish Katherine were here. You know? To see this.

DUNCAN

I wish she were here to do this.

BENJAMIN

She was the doer. I was the dreamer.

Duncan nods thoughtfully, a drink in hand. Truer words.

DUNCAN

I'm going to say it one more time. I like the animals... but I love the humans.

BENJAMIN

Dunc. What if they don't come? What if this has all been for no reason?

DUNCAN

What, did somebody just come in and hit you with the "pussy" stick? Gimme a break...you came this far.

(a pronouncement)

Repeal your pussification this instant!

BENJAMIN

(enjoying Duncan)

I repeal my pussification!

DUNCAN

They will be here. Come on, you've worked so hard. The place is great.

BENJAMIN

It is, great, isn't it?

DUNCAN
When you do something for the right
reasons, nothing can stop you.

We hear a thundercrack.

EXT. ZOO -- DAY

Rain pounds the zoo, drenching the place.

EXT. WALKWAY -- LATE AFTERNOON

Dylan is walking up the driveway with the mail. He pauses, drawing on an envelope. He passes the Jaguar, and only because he pauses to adjust his wet sock inside his shoe, does he see...

LILY'S MESSAGE WINDOW

And it reads: IF YOU LOVE ME, LET ME KNOW.

PUSH IN ON DYLAN

Whose heart is beating through his chest. He looks around. Suddenly, the whole place... everything... feels exactly like where he belongs.

Here.

INT. LILY'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Dylan races to her window. She sees him and SCREAMS, and then stifles it.

LILY
Hi.

DYLAN
Hey.

She pulls up her window.

DYLAN (CONT'D)
Am I just nuts to say that I missed
you like crazy a lot? A lot.

She shakes her head, no. Two young romantics stare at each other. One dry, and one in the rain. Lily stifles tears.

DYLAN (CONT'D)
Plus -- I wasn't named after Bob
Dylan. I was named after a dog
named Dylan.

She laughs.

LILY
Sorry about the rain.

He spreads his arms. His voice cracks with adolescence, but he gets through it just fine:

DYLAN
I love it. I loved your sign. I
love you.

ON TELEVISION

A drenched regional anchor wears a yellow raincoat.

ANCHOR
-- the precipitation tonight is
just a hint of what's coming. This
summer, Betsy, has been the wettest
summer in 100 years.

INT. BENJAMIN MEE'S HOME -- NIGHT

The sky outside is dark. Benjamin stands alone in his living room, a silhouette watching the Weather Channel.

QUICK CUTS

- 1) Rain pounds the zoo.
- 2) Zoo posters on telephone poles and kiosks, drenched.
- 3) The two remaining tigers hide from the downpour under the enclosure overhang.
- 4) Benjamin, Rosie and Dylan... even Leon look out the window at the angry sky. No end in sight.
- 5) Ronnie the unfortunate-looking tapir shivers in the rain.

EXT. MEE HOUSE ROOF -- RAINY NIGHT -- LATER

Lily and Dylan are on the roof, under a window awning, just inside the rain. Just the quiet sound of night, only rain, and the sound of not-so-distant animals.

They know they should be kissing. It's awkward.

DYLAN
I'd kiss you but it would be such a
cliché.

Lily smiles contentedly.

INT. OFFICE -- NIGHT

Benjamin sits in his office, going over paperwork. Ellis at the door.

ELLIS

You gave it everything. I just wanted you to know that.

BENJAMIN

Thanks Ellis.

ELLIS

Sorry about the rain.

BENJAMIN

Revenue comes from the summer. We picked the wrong time to open.

ELLIS

You're a success as a person, Benjamin. Isn't that the whole ballgame? Wasn't that the whole purpose? You reached down deep, where it's ugly and beautiful and you don't always win.

Benjamin nods thanks.

BENJAMIN

I appreciate you not attacking or killing Walter Ferris.

ELLIS

It has not been easy. I really, really dislike him. He shut down this zoo, and stole 500 dollars from me in the 1980's. I hate him, you know --

Benjamin laughs to himself. It's known.

BENJAMIN

Try to keep a lid on it Ellis.

ELLIS

-- but I have a soft spot for you. And I know you're just passing through, but you're a good man to your family. You made that little girl of yours happy.

INT. BENJAMIN'S BEDROOM -- MORNING

Benjamin's alarm clock goes off. He sits up. He doesn't hear anything. He gets out of bed and walks to the window as...

INT. DYLAN'S ROOM -- MORNING

Dylan flies out of bed. He runs over to the window and pulls over his curtains and sees...

It's a gorgeous sunny day. He lets out a happy yell.

EXT. BENJAMIN'S HOME -- DAY

A view of the whole house and the zoo. The sky is more than clear. It's that particular crystal clear blue that comes after a heavy rain. We see Benjamin in the window. Smiling.

INT. HOUSE -- DAY

Benjamin is finishing getting dressed when Rosie looks in. She's picked out a special dress for the occasion. Her hair is in two utterly perfect braided pigtails.

Benjamin looks at her, confused. How did that happen? The door swings open to reveal Kelly, standing beside her.

KELLY

French braids. Big in the 90's.

BENJAMIN

(smiles)

Nice... very nice...

He admires the two of them.

KELLY

They're going to be here today,
Benjamin. I know it. 10 'o clock,
this place will be packed.

He gives them a look -- it's up to fate now.

EXT. ZOO -- DAY -- LATER

Everyone has gathered at the entrance to the zoo. Benjamin cuts the tape across the entrance to cheers. He clears his throat.

BENJAMIN

Well, I tried to write a speech.
If Katherine were here, she would
have written something clever and
witty for me and I would have read
it and taken full credit.

A beat. He looks at their faces.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

It doesn't matter how the adventure
ends, that's not what an adventure
is about. So I'm going to declare
this an adventure to remember.
Worth every penny, and anything
that happens from here is a bonus.

They applaud.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

So Katherine, I will take full
credit. And I will quote her and
it was the first thing she said to
me --

ON BENJAMIN

Quick as a heart-attack, and almost as powerful... he's hit
by a completely unexpected freight train of emotion. It's
everything he's been holding back. He finds he cannot
finish. He lowers his head, and looks up, speechless.

Ellis bails him out.

ELLIS

Let's see who's here!

EXT. ZOO -- DAY

They walk tentatively down the pathway to the front of the
zoo. When they get there, what they find...

... is no one.

ROSIE

What time is it?

BENJAMIN

(off watch)

One minute after the last time you
asked. 9:59.

DYLAN

They should be here. There should
be a line. Right here.

BENJAMIN
Patience, my son.

DUNCAN
No. He's right. They should be
here.

Benjamin takes a deep breath.

BENJAMIN
Maybe it'll take awhile. Maybe
this is how it's supposed to be.

DYLAN
I don't believe that. I don't.
Something's wrong.

And Dylan starts running down the drive.

BENJAMIN
Dylan! Come back!

He doesn't. Benjamin follows.

DYLAN
I know something's wrong.

BENJAMIN
Dylan --

Dylan disappears around the corner, to the side driveway.
Benjamin follows, and sees...

Dylan standing in front of a giant tree, almost four feet
high, lying across the driveway.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
Must have gotten knocked over in
the storm --

And now Dylan has his Dad's fervor too.

DYLAN
-- let's fix it.

They work together, as everyone now catches up to them.

KELLY
Rob get the chainsaw in the garage.

ROBIN
I'll be back in a minute.

Rob runs back to get the saw.

DYLAN

They couldn't have gotten through
even if they were here --

Benjamin throws a leg over the downed trunk, and climbs up on it. When he straightens, he can see across the hillside below. We watch his face. Shocked. Barely able to process what he sees.

KELLY

Benjamin, what's wrong?

She runs over and scrambles up onto the log beside him. Everyone does the same, Rosie requiring a boost from Lily. Kelly stands beside Benjamin. We see what he's looking at...

POV BENJAMIN -- THE ROAD IN

A long line of cars, waiting patiently for the zoo. Cars backed up a city block long. Music begins now, the Zoo Theme, at first tentatively.

People are now starting to leave their cars parked by the side of the road, and walk up the path to get there.

They've brought strollers. And kites. And coolers. And friends. And family. Music adds instruments... as the frames fill with the color of the dress, the laughter, and the energy of these happy visitors.

EXT. ZOO -- DAY

People pour into the park. From every direction now. Down the hillsides, around the bend. With strollers. Backpacks. Kites.

The ANIMALS can feel the excitement of the crowd.

Kelly leads a tour of the big cats, who bask in the attention...

KELLY

They know we're all here today.
They're showing off!

NEAR THE PEACOCKS

Rosie shows off her brood. Music continues, adding instruments.

ROSIE

... this is Lucy and Wesley and
Peaches, Jackpot, and Coco, and
these are the babies....

The group of Visitors listen, riveted.

ROSIE (CONT'D)
Peafowl are very resilient animals.
Some have escaped from captivity
and have established wild
communities. However, due to the
fact that there are so many
peafowl, some people consider them
to be a zoologically insignificant
animal.

She smiles.

ROSIE (CONT'D)
We ignore those people.

AERIAL SHOT

The Zoo is alive.

ON ROB

Who stands in his work boots and directs traffic.

ON KELLY

Standing in the human traffic, tears in her eyes. It's so
real to her, and she feels it so deeply. Music continues.

EXT. BUSTER'S ENCLOSURE -- DAY

Buster enjoys his expanded world, delighting the "bear"
people. (Note: We will notice in this sequence, that many
people are drawn to the animals they most resemble.)

ON OUR ZOOKEEPERS

People who don't normally hug, hugging now.

BENJAMIN

Is congratulated by strangers, every few steps.

STRANGER
Well-done.

The simplicity of the compliment moves him.

ON DYLAN

He gives Lily a sandwich. She opens it. Inside is a
drawing. It's the Underworld drawing, and in the corner, a
sun. She laughs. He shrugs, still not sold on the sun, but
happy she's happy. Guess that's a relationship.

In the distance we hear...

MACAW PARROT (O.S.)
 "Can't get a handle on it. Can't
 get a handle on it."

THE ZOO

Alive with the sound of voice and laughter.

P.A. SYSTEM
 (Ellis' voice)
 Good afternoon. We invite you to
 visit our Jaguar Restaurant and
 Gift Shop complete with a Coffin
 and Dartboard for the kids.

Several turn and look at the PA System quizzically.

BENJAMIN AND DYLAN

Stand for a picture by Rosie. Arms around each other. They
 look... in their own still-finding-their-way manner...
 comfortable together.

ROSIE
 This one's for Spar!

Snap. With joy:

ROSIE (CONT'D)
 And mama!!

Snap.

ON KELLY AND LILY

Who regard Benjamin and Dylan, the two men in their lives,
 with careful evaluation. Kelly is still a Pretty Tomboy,
 Lily looks completely different in make-up and older-girl
 clothes.

LILY
 If you had to choose between people
 or animals. Quick. How would you
 choose?

KELLY
 (wistful)
 Animals.

LILY
 (lustful)
 People.

ON PARROT ENCLOSURE

Now out front, by the entrance. He's very loud.

MACAW PARROT
 Can't get a handle on it.
 Can't get a handle on it...

ON WALTER FERRIS

He shows up with his two kids, looking slightly uncomfortable. Rosie takes him by the hand, and brings him over to the peacocks.

ELLIS

Approaches him.

ELLIS
 So are we all good?

FERRIS
 We're good. You have all the
 accreditations. It's filed with
 the state.

Ellis immediately launches into him, holding him in a headlock.

ELLIS
 Where is my money??? Where is the
money??

It's broken up.

EXT. TIGER ENCLOSURE -- DAY

Benjamin stands at the highest point in the zoo, from which he can survey as much as possible. Can't believe what he's seeing. Duncan joins him. He makes a courtly gesture, in their wheelhouse of unspoken communication -- you actually did it. Benjamin repeats the gesture -- with your help.

BENJAMIN
 (can you believe it?)
We bought a zoo.

They laugh at the sheer beautiful absurdity. Music.

THE ZOO

Pull back to reveal the whole place, bustling under the blue sky.

ON THE KITES

Flying in the air. One red one standing out. Katherine's Theme.

ON BENJAMIN

He watches that single red kite.

ON KELLY

Watching him. How many years will it take for him to get over this woman? She calculates in her mind. Three? Five? Ten?

Damn it!

She smiles to herself and returns to the animals.

EXT. SAN DIEGO/CITY STREET -- DAY

A perfect Summer day in the city. Rosie and Dylan walk down the street with Benjamin. We're back in Benjamin's old neighborhood. He leads them around a corner, going somewhere specific at a clip. He arrives at...

EXT. NEAL'S COFFEE SHOP -- DAY

Benjamin leads them into the Coffee Shop.

BENJAMIN

She was sitting right there.

ON THE BOOTH

Sunlight falls on it. This booth has soul and warmth. It always will.

ON BENJAMIN

Who turns to Rosie and Dylan.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

This is the very moment you guys both became a possibility...

ROSIE

I love that you're telling us stories again.

BENJAMIN

This is the story before the story... this is where the adventure... and you both... begin. This is where I met Katherine. That very booth. I walked up to her, on instinct, and I'd never done this before...

And we see something miraculous...

INT. THE BOOTH -- DAY -- 17 YEARS EARLIER

KATHERINE, a dark-haired soulful beauty, is looking the other way. It's the same memory we glimpsed earlier, now come to rich and nourishing life.

BENJAMIN, seventeen years ago, sweeps up to her table with a nobility he never knew he had.

BENJAMIN

Why would an amazing person like
you talk to a stranger like me?

Katherine turns. It's our first real look at her. And in her face, we can see a whole lot of Dylan. And all the sparkle and manner of Rosie.

ON BENJAMIN, ROSIE AND DYLAN -- TODAY

A Threesome just looking wondrously at that booth.

PUSH IN ON KATHERINE

Who says the perfect thing, changing all their lives forever. It applied then, and it has applied in every Mee Family adventure to follow. With simple elegance, she says:

KATHERINE

Why not?

We hold on her for a moment, and then...

CUT TO BLACK

TITLES:

The Dartmoor Zoo in England, on which this story is based, is an acclaimed zoo whose methods are studied Worldwide. The Park is open to faithful followers year-round. Benjamin Mee and his two kids still live on the grounds. Next year, they plan to add Giraffes.

CREDITS -- MUSIC

The Animals, with full-screen callbacks, share the credits with the Actors.

THE END