

SLUDGE

written by

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FADE IN:

INT. BASEMENT APARTMENT - NIGHT

LOUD METAL MUSIC in what looks like a dorm room past its expiration date. A man sits in front of a computer in a gaming chair that's held together by duct tape. This is CAMERON, 40, who wears all black and FURIOUSLY TYPES.

One drunken eye is closed so he can focus the open eye on:

The website is "SLUDGE CRITIC", a site for sludge metal music. Cameron responds to a thread about a band called Dastardly Skirts, their album cover of four large steampunk men with tutus and unicorn headbands. Cameron's site handle: @SludgeFucker69. Followers: 10K. Total reviews: 555.

He clicks the 1 out of 5 skull rating and types:

"If I could give them zero skulls, I would. The cover alone says it all: Fucking fags don't take sludge metal serious."

A pop-up from a grammar plug-in recommends he change "serious" to "seriously". He rolls his eyes at himself.

CAMERON

Idiot.

He accepts the grammar suggestion and presses ENTER.

A METAL RIFF chimes moments after his submission: an upvote from one of his many followers. There's a CHA-CHING sound each time someone sends him a donation.

He stumbles to his bed with a beer. Multiple METAL RIFF upvote chimes overlap with CHA-CHINGS.

DREAM SEQUENCE - INT. CHILDHOOD BATHROOM - NIGHT

A drunk woman with leathery tan skin, teal eyeshadow, and mascara running down her face lies in an OVERFLOWING BATHTUB. A memory of CINDY (40s), Cameron's mom. She laughs while swigging from a bottle of cheap vodka. She says something, but her voice can't be heard over the overflowing water.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. BASEMENT APARTMENT - DAY

The sound of OVERFLOWING WATER continues. Cameron jerks awake and stumbles to a closet with water pouring out. The carpet is soaking wet, making a SQUISH SQUASH sound with every step.

INT. BASEMENT APARTMENT - WATER HEATER CLOSET - DAY

The WATER HEATER spews WATER from the top of it.

CAMERON

No no no no.

Cameron grabs for the cold water supply line. The flow of water slows until it stops. His eyes go wide at a thought.

INT. BASEMENT APARTMENT - DAY

Cameron yanks open the accordion doors to his clothes closet.

Cameron tosses soggy items aside to retrieve a BROWN, AGED LEATHER CASE with a handle. He cradles it and stumbles back to his bed. He looks inside the case and sighs in relief.

Cameron scrolls on his phone until he finds the contact "Magic Marc / Lord of the Land." He taps the call button.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. MARC'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - SAME TIME

MARC (40s), hardcore badass exterior and snuggle bunny interior, groggily answers the phone from bed. He lies next to his pregnant wife, MISSY (30s). Missy looks vibrant and beautiful during pregnancy, and she knows it.

MARC

Butt dial or real life? It's negative o'clock in the morning.

CAMERON

Real. The water heater busted.

MARC

Ah, dick fingers. What'd you do?

CAMERON

I didn't do anything.

MISSY

What happened?

MARC

Not sure you said sorry a first time. Real-life Exorcist shit, man.

Marc pantomimes projectile vomiting and his head spinning.

MARC (CONT'D)

We're ripping up the carpet anyway. Something called nesting. Maybe some of that troll moola can buy a fancy-ass crib for the lil alien.

CAMERON

I'm not a troll --

MARC

-- I'm fucking with you. You know you can stay here as long as you need til you get a real job.

CAMERON

It is a real job.

MARC

You could sell pictures of your weird hobbit feet for all I care. As long as you pay rent.

Marc opens Cameron's beer and hands it to him.

MARC (CONT'D)

The only place I found is an hour away. It's a motel called Hidden Nook or Secret Garden or some fairy shit. The cleanup will take a couple of weeks here. Hot water heaters take a while I guess.

(beat)

Hello? You listening?

CAMERON

It's a water heater. Not hot water heater. You don't heat hot water.

Marc squints, then punches Cameron in the shoulder. Cameron nods like he deserved it.

CAMERON (CONT'D)

Sorry. Thanks.

MARC

Yep. K. I gotta go get paid a shit pile of money to be trusted with other people's shit piles of money.

Marc tosses his beer can in the trash can, which sits directly next to a recycling bin. They do a "bro" handshake and Marc walks around the side of the house.

A fancy expensive CAR STARTS and DRIVES AWAY.

Cameron finishes chugging his beer and looks at the house.

A very pregnant Missy stares down from the window. Missy's stance screams, *I could have been a professional ballerina if I didn't get knocked up*. Cameron waves at her. She puts her hand over her belly, shielding the fetus as she flips off Cameron. She spins on her heels and walks away.

CAMERON

Yea, fuck me.

Cameron tosses his can in the recycling bin.

INT. BASEMENT APARTMENT - DAY

Cameron grabs his laptop. It has a giant sticker of a hand with its middle finger up. He shoves black clothes in a faded black backpack. He tenderly fetches the brown leather case and holds it under his arm. He puts a flask in his pants pocket and grabs what's left of a 24-pack of beer.

INT. CAMERON'S CAR - DAY

Cameron drives his SQUEAKY CAR and wears a sweat-dried hat that was once black. The duct-taped RADIO is stuck on and only plays a SPANISH channel. We hear a COMMERCIAL for Dragon Con. The laptop is in the passenger seat, middle finger up.

The brown leather case sits on the floor of the backseat.

EXT. HIDDEN NOOK MOTEL - DAY

Cameron pulls into a motel parking lot and parks his car.

There's a handwritten, misspelled sign in the check-in window of the motel that says "Hourly Rates Availible."

An ELDERLY COUPLE walks out of the front lobby. The woman grabs the man's ass. She looks at Cameron and winks.

Cameron's eyes are wide as he grips the steering wheel.

INT. HIDDEN NOOK MOTEL - FRONT DESK CHECK-IN - DAY

The DOOR'S BELL RINGS as Cameron walks in, SLAMMING SHUT behind him. This doesn't faze ANDI (30s), the androgynous customer service rep who wears ripped jeans, a pleather jacket, and an aura of unconditional love and sarcasm.

Andi sits behind the desk and sketches a picture of a unicorn with a machine gun riding in a biplane. Their hands are covered in black from drawing. Behind them is their younger brother, BRYAN (20s), who has a mullet and wears a shirt that says, "Show me your titties." He's playing an old XBOX.

The siblings do an unspoken "it's your turn" mental battle.

Cameron clears his throat. Andi doesn't respond, so he walks toward the counter and moves toward the call bell.

 ANDI
 (without looking up)
Don't.
 (to Bryan)
 Seriously?

 BRYAN
 Busy.

Cameron backs up and nearly sits down in a lobby chair when:

 ANDI
 And who are you? Think closely
 before you answer.

 CAMERON
 My name is Cameron.

 ANDI
 Shhhhh. Tut tut tut.

Cameron's face scrunches, looking confused. Andi does the "come hither" motion, beckoning Cameron closer. He leans in.

 ANDI (CONT'D)
 Did you see those horny teenagers
 that just walked out of here?

 CAMERON BRYAN (O.S.)
I saw an older couple. Don't scare the customers.

 ANDI
 Here, they're horny teenagers.
 Here, you can be anyone you want.
 Leave your old life behind.

CAMERON

I just want to check in.

Andi scoffs, grabs a room key, and ungracefully climbs over the front desk rather than using the swinging desk door.

ANDI

Let me get a look at you.

BRYAN (O.S.)

Why are you such a weirdo?

Andi canters around Cameron in a slow, dressage-like way.

CAMERON

Uh. My name is Cam --

Andi smooshes their finger on Cameron's lips, reaches over the counter to grab the drawing, shoves it in Cameron's face.

ANDI

Have you ever seen anything like this before?

Cameron shakes his head no.

ANDI (CONT'D)

Exactly! That's exactly my point.

Andi does a twirl as they spin the "OPEN" sign to "I'LL BEE BACK" with a drawn picture of a bumble bee version of the Terminator underneath. Andi holds the door open for Cameron.

ANDI (CONT'D)

M'lady.

Wide-eyed, Cameron walks out. Bryan whisper yells at Andi.

BRYAN

Hey!

ANDI

(to Cameron)

Give me one moment.

(to Bryan)

What? No. Absolutely not. Don't.

BRYAN

Look at the guy. Come on.

Andi mouths "no" in a final way only an older sibling can.

EXT. HIDDEN NOOK MOTEL - ROOM 5 - DAY

Andi and Cameron walk up to the door of room #5. The door has a chewed piece of pink bubblegum stuck to the peephole.

ANDI

And that's how airplanes fly.

(beat)

I'm just kidding, I have no idea
how airplanes fly. Here ya go!

They toss the room key to Cameron. He fumbles and catches it.
Andi gets a little too close to Cameron's face.

ANDI (CONT'D)

You're a god damn majestic
machine gun unicorn and don't let
anyone tell you differently.

Awkward beat as these two impossibly different people stare
at each other, standing impossibly close to each other.

ANDI (CONT'D)

Wanna dance, pony boy?

CAMERON

W-What? No. I don't. I'm not --

Andi laughs and hands the drawing to Cameron. Cameron inches
away from Andi, unlocks the door, and slides into the room.

INT. HIDDEN NOOK MOTEL - ROOM 5 - CONTINUOUS

Cameron closes and locks the door, making sure it's locked.

ANDI (O.S.)

Let me know when you figure it out!

(beat)

You're welcome!

Cameron opens his mouth to say something, but doesn't.

EXT. HIDDEN NOOK MOTEL - ROOM 5 - DAY

The curtain of the motel room window allows Andi to
nonchalantly peek into the room, to see Cameron tossing
Andi's drawing to the side without looking at it.

Andi chews on the inside of their cheek.

ANDI

Fuck.

Andi calls someone on their cell, walking away from the room.

ANDI (CONT'D)
 (into phone)
 This is the last time. I mean it.

INT. HIDDEN NOOK MOTEL - ROOM 5 - NIGHT

Cameron sits on one of the two queen-sized beds, scrolling on his phone. There's an old thriller movie playing on a box TV. The room has floral wallpaper stained from old cigarette smoke. The paintings have tacky gold frames. A bug trap decorates the corner of the room.

Cameron presses PLAY in his SLUDGE CRITIC app and hears the first few riffs of a song. He rolls his eyes, typing "garbage" into the comment section. He selects "garbage", deletes it, and changes it to "Garbage." He stops the music.

A follower quickly responds: "Ruthless! LOL!" Cameron smirks.

The band's account responds: "Do you have any actionable feedback? We waited two months. Fuckin bullshit, bro. Poser!"

Cameron clicks the three-dot menu icon next to the band's comment and selects "REPORT COMMENT FOR ABUSE" and moves on.

There's a loud SMASH and GLASS BREAKING outside of Cameron's room. He jumps up and looks through the door's peephole.

CAMERON'S POV - PEEPHOLE

The view is blocked by chewed pink gum. Outside, there are MUMBLED VOICES and SCREECHING TIRES.

EXT. HIDDEN NOOK MOTEL - ROOM 5 - NIGHT

Cameron opens the motel door. The passenger window of his car is shattered. He grabs his keys and rushes to the car.

Everything is missing, including his leather case.

Cameron paces. Andi runs up.

ANDI
 Oh shit! Not again.

CAMERON
 Not again?!

Cameron suddenly seems taller and bigger, towering over Andi.

ANDI

Well... There's a sign.

Andi points to a HANDWRITTEN SIGN beneath the "Hourly Rates Available" sign. This one says "Not laible for stolen stuff."

Andi smiles as if they did a *good*.

CAMERON

It's not even spelled correctly!
Fuck. Fuck! They fucking took it.

Cameron paces, doing OCD movements with his hands.

ANDI

Wow.

CAMERON

What?!

ANDI

Yea I honestly never noticed the misspellings before.

Cameron silently shakes his fists and kicks a tire.

ANDI (CONT'D)

(seemingly unfazed)

Kind of embarrassing, honestly.
What'd they take, anyway?

CAMERON

My laptop and... this antique case.
(shaky voice)
It was my grandma's.

Andi fidgets, unable to meet Cameron's eyes.

CAMERON (CONT'D)

Sorry. I'm not. I don't --

ANDI

-- Eyeball sweat happens, man.

Andi grabs Cameron's hand and guides him toward the lobby.

ANDI (CONT'D)

We'll find it, Shy Guy. I'll drive.

INT. HIDDEN NOOK MOTEL - FRONT DESK CHECK-IN - NIGHT

Andi gathers their stuff and flips the CLOSED sign. It says "NOTICE: WE ARE PRESENTLY NOT OPEN BECAUSE WE ARE CLOSED. Need help? Call me, maybe." Followed by Andi's cell number.

ANDI
Hey, you want a drink?

CAMERON
Fuck yes.

Andi awkwardly climbs the counter. They grab something from the fridge and toss it to Cameron. He fumbles to catch it.

It's a bottle of green vegetable juice.

CAMERON (CONT'D)
What's this?

Andi climbs over the counter and slides off the other side.

ANDI
A drink. Shake it first. Tastes like pond water if you don't.

Silence that's awkward for Cameron but not for Andi.

ANDI (CONT'D)
Let's make like a baby and...

Andi points to Cameron for him to finish.

CAMERON
...Head out?

ANDI
I was gonna say "shit our pants and mourn our decision to reincarnate." But "head out" works, too.

EXT. HIDDEN NOOK MOTEL - NIGHT

Cameron waits for Andi. There's a toy-like HONK of a HORN.

Andi rides up on a scooter and offers Cameron a white helmet customized with a rainbow mane and unicorn horn.

CAMERON
What are you doing? What is that?

ANDI

Finish that first. Javier doesn't approve of drinking and driving.

CAMERON

Javier? Are you Javier?

ANDI

No, silly. I'm Andi. And this...

Andi pats the scooter and smiles big. Javier is the scooter.

CAMERON

I'm not riding on that.

ANDI

He's a him, not a that.

(to Javier)

It's okay, Javi. He knows not what he says.

(to Cameron)

Come on. It'll be fun. He likes when men ride him.

Andi laughs and HONKS Javier's HORN as if he is laughing too.

CAMERON

You don't have a car?

ANDI

Oh I do. I don't have a license.

CAMERON

I'll call an Uber.

ANDI

I'm an excellent driver! Just not after chewing pain pills and chugging vodka, it seems. No worries, my shy man friend. Javi is my DUI bike. No need for a driver's license for anything under 49 CCs. He's 48.9 CCs. Tiny, but mighty.

Andi pats the seat, beckoning Cameron to sit on Javier.

CAMERON

I said no!!!

ANDI

(unfazed)

How come?

CAMERON

It's not safe. And I'll look ga --

Cameron barely stops himself from saying "gay." Andi raises their eyebrows. Cameron's eyes are wide.

ANDI

You'll look what? Gaaas efficient?
You'll look gas efficient?

Andi smiles at Cameron in an, "I just saved your ass" sort of way and HONKS Javier's HORN.

Cameron looks at the drink and then at Andi. He chugs it.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Andi drives the scooter with a unicorn helmet-clad Cameron on the back. They're moving at the speed of a feisty grandma on a motorized shopping cart.

Cars HONK and swerve to pass them. Andi has a giant smile.

ANDI

I feel pretty, oh so pretty! I feel
pretty and witty and gas efficient!

Each time a car passes, Cameron turns his head away, as if someone will recognize him. He spots the brown leather case discarded on the side of the road. He points.

CAMERON

There! Pull over! Back there!

EXT. SIDE OF ROAD - NIGHT

Cameron runs to the leather case. He kneels and embraces it. A buckle is broken and the case is scuffed. He quickly yet carefully opens it and looks inside. He softens.

Andi catches up, breathing heavily.

ANDI

Is your laptop in there?

CAMERON

I don't care about the laptop.

ANDI

Yea, fuck technology. Fuck the man!
(beat)
What is it? What's in the booooox?

Cameron sits, hugging the case, trying to fix the buckle.

ANDI (CONT'D)
It's a head, isn't it?

CAMERON
Do you mind?

ANDI (CONT'D)
I knew it. I knew you were special.

Andi shrugs, eyes something, and walks OFF SCREEN.

ANDI (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Wow, these are beautiful...

Cameron sees Andi leafing through a beaten-up sketchbook. He snatches the sketchbook and grumbles back to the scooter.

EXT. HIDDEN NOOK MOTEL - ROOM 5 - NIGHT

Cameron and Andi arrive at the motel. They're both silent. Cameron shoves the helmet back to Andi and speed walks back to his room. Andi watches until the DOOR SLAMS. Beat.

The door cracks open the tiniest bit.

CAMERON
Hey, uh. Thanks. For helping.

He moves to close the door.

CAMERON'S POV - THROUGH DOOR CRACK

Suddenly, Andi's face smooshes into the crack. Cameron yelps. Andi pushes their lips and cheek through as far as possible.

ANDI
(smooshed)
My pleasure. I still say that from my Chick-fil-A days. In there good.

INT. HIDDEN NOOK MOTEL - ROOM 5 - NIGHT

Cameron goes to shut the door but can't. Because Andi's face.

CAMERON
Okay, goodnight.

ANDI
(smooshed)
Goodnight.

CAMERON

Bye.

ANDI

(smooshed)

Bye.

CAMERON

You have to-I can't close the door.

EXT. HIDDEN NOOK MOTEL - ROOM 5 - NIGHT

Andi twirls away from the door.

ANDI

Bbbyyye!!!!

Andi waits for the CLICK of the motel DOOR. They fondle something in their pocket, take it out, and look at it.

It's a SCUFFED-UP SEWING PATTERN of a STUNNING GOWN.

They look toward Cameron's room with tender, curious eyes.

INT. HIDDEN NOOK MOTEL - ROOM 5 - MOMENTS LATER

Cameron sits on the bed and unlocks the working buckle on the leather case. He walks to the door to make sure it's locked.

He opens the case. Inside is a VINTAGE SEWING MACHINE. He pets the machine, gently. He lets out a huge exhale.

His CELLPHONE PINGS and SLUDGE CRITIC notifications pop up: 321 comments, 12 donations, 1 account notification.

He glances at the phone, opens the account notification, and sees that the comment he reported was approved for deletion.

He smiles a snarky, know-it-all smile.

SAME - NEXT DAY

Cameron snores, wearing clothes from the night before. The case and sketchbook are hidden out of sight. Outside, a SHOP VAC WAILS along with loud FOLK MUSIC.

He sits up, bracing himself for the typical wobble of a hangover. He stands with surprisingly great balance. He tries to peek through the peephole.

CAMERON'S POV - PEEPHOLE

It's blocked by the damn pink gum.

BACK TO CAMERON

He scoffs, opens the door, looks outside, and walks out.

EXT. HIDDEN NOOK MOTEL - ROOM 5 - DAY

Andi VACUUMS up all the glass using a SHOP VAC. They wear sea-foam green kitchen gloves. Thick clear plastic is duct-taped where the car window used to be. Andi sings an ADLIB song off-key. Cameron SWITCHES OFF the SHOP VAC.

ANDI

(operatic; off-key)

And that's how airplanes fllyyy!

(to Cameron)

Just kidding, I have no idea how airplanes fly.

CAMERON

Thanks for this.

ANDI

It's redneck-rigged but it'll get the job done. I'm sorry again.

CAMERON

Not your fault.

Andi's CELL PHONE RINGS. They look at it, decline the call, and put it back in their jacket pocket.

Andi pulls patterns and loose leaf sketches from their pocket and hand them to Cameron. Cameron swats them away.

CAMERON (CONT'D)

Those aren't mine.

Andi sits on the curb and pats next to where they sit.

ANDI

I used to do that. Exhausting.

CAMERON

Do what?

ANDI

Pretend to be someone else.

Andi's CELL PHONE RINGS again. They decline the call.

Cameron finally sits down next to Andi.

CAMERON

Where'd you find them?

ANDI

I know people.

(to themself)

Thought I'd feel cool saying that.

I don't. I feel like a chode. Huh.

Cameron leafs through the patterns, counting under his breath. He catches himself smiling and sets them aside.

Andi lays back on the cement walkway and looks at Cameron. Cameron takes a beat, lays down, and looks at the sky.

Long beat that's awkward for Cameron but not for Andi.

CAMERON

Did you mean what you said?

ANDI

Probably. Which thing?

CAMERON

(quietly)

I can be anyone I want or whatever.

Andi perks up and smiles.

ANDI

I did. I do!

CAMERON

Is "not me" an okay place to start?

ANDI

You're surprising. You know that?

Andi plays a DRUM BEAT on Cameron's BELLY, startling him.

ANDI (CONT'D)

Let's go on an adventure.

Andi hops up and puts their hand out to Cameron. He hesitates, then grabs it. Andi's surprisingly strong and pulls him right up. Cameron puts the patterns in his pocket.

ANDI (CONT'D)

You're driving this time. Javier's back hurts.

Cameron chuckles. Andi starts texting on their phone.

ANDI (CONT'D)

Where we're going is super exclusive. Gotta get permish.

Andi finishes the text and grabs the passenger door handle.

CAMERON

I have to do my morning stuff. And I got some work to do.

ANDI

Big tough Shy Guy cares about hygiene. The plot thickens!

Cameron opens the motel door and walks inside.

INT. HIDDEN NOOK MOTEL - ROOM 5 - CONTINUOUS

Andi nonchalantly walks in right behind Cameron. Cameron has his phone out, scrolling through SLUDG CRITIC comments.

CAMERON

Don't you have work or something?

ANDI

Bryan's working today.

(beat)

That's my little brother. It's a family-owned sitch. Well it was. Not sure what it'll be now.

Cameron types a rude comment on his phone. Cameron nods in an "I'm not really listening" kind of way.

Andi hops on the bed and bounces on their butt.

ANDI (CONT'D)

That's who keeps calling. He's a pain in my tuchus. What do you do for work?

CAMERON

Music critic.

Andi tries to look over Cameron's shoulder, to no avail.

CAMERON (CONT'D)

Not sure it'd be your thing. It's heavy metal music.

ANDI

Like...

Andi does "devil horns" with their hand and aggressively head bangs while screaming a guttural metal scream.

CAMERON

Something like that. A sub-genre called sludge. Doom metal and punk. I have to do a certain number of reviews a month to get paid. I really should get some work done --

ANDI

-- You gonna' show me or what?

Cameron puts the phone to his chest like he's been caught.

CAMERON

Show you what?

Andi looks at Cameron's crotch and raises their eyebrows. Cameron's eyes get big. He stumbles backward. Andi laughs.

ANDI

The sewing machine, silly bear.

Cameron scrunches his face at Andi, putting his phone away.

ANDI (CONT'D)

That's what it is, right? Come on, you're not that sneaky.

Cameron pauses, as if doing an equation in his head, then nods, grabs the case from under the desk, and tenderly places it on the bed. He unlocks the buckle and opens it.

CAMERON

Look, but don't touch.

Andi holds their hands up, staring in awe at the machine. Cameron walks into the bathroom to get ready.

ANDI

You any good?

CAMERON (O.S.)

Huh?

ANDI

At sewing. Can you make stuff too?

Cameron pops his head out of the bathroom. He has a toothbrush in his mouth.

CAMERON

Wasn't in the cards for me.

Andi looks toward the bathroom, then back at the sewing machine. They see the sketchbook and pick it up.

ANDI

You should bring all this today.

CAMERON (O.S.)

Why?

ANDI

Why not? You like money?

CAMERON (O.S.)

You're kinda weird.

ANDI

Kinda? I need to up my game.

Andi sees a response on their phone.

ANDI (CONT'D)

YUS! We're in. Hurry! Just wipe the stinky areas. Pits, tits, and bits.

INT. CAMERON'S CAR - DAY

Andi has their feet up on the dashboard, dancing to a SONG playing in SPANISH. Andi tries to turn down the music. It stays the same volume. They both speak over the music.

CAMERON

It's stuck like that.

Andi puts their feet down and kicks something under the seat.

ANDI

Makes it challenging to have an intimate conversation when you can't hear yourself think.

CAMERON

Exactly.

Andi reaches down and pulls up a laptop charger.

ANDI

Hey! Look! Not all is lost!

Andi goes up for a fist bump and Cameron meets them with a high five instead. Andi makes a turkey gobble sound since their hands together look like a turkey. They both laugh.

They ride silently for a bit, aside from the music.

ANDI (CONT'D)
I wanted to be a pilot.

CAMERON
What?

ANDI
That's -- I asked you who you want to be. That's mine. Or, was.

Cameron nods. Andi motions to their body and their brain.

ANDI (CONT'D)
I don't fit in their tiny box of what's acceptable and trustworthy. Apparently, my wiring is a flight risk. They think I'll...

Andi uses their hands to pantomime an airplane falling to the ground, then crashing, making sounds to match.

ANDI (CONT'D)
Which I totally wouldn't, probably. As long as I took all my meds and no one smacked gum next to my ear.

Long beat.

CAMERON
So you lied.

ANDI
What? Lied? About what?

CAMERON
You do know how airplanes fly.

Andi exhales and smiles a cute, squinty, dimpled smile.

EXT. VINTAGE CLOTHING STORE - DAY

Cameron and Andi pull into the parking lot of a quaint, hand-me-down thrift/vintage store. They park.

INT. CAMERON'S CAR - DAY

Cameron looks around for another store. There isn't one.

CAMERON
A thrift store?

ANDI
And so much more.

CAMERON
"Exclusive", huh?

Andi gets out of the car and canters toward the store. A beautiful, very tall Black man walks out and embraces Andi. This is SHERLOCK (40s-50s) in makeup, a sparkly suit, and stilettos. Holds himself with the confidence of Beyonce.

Cameron hesitantly gets out of his car.

SHERLOCK
Cameron, I presume?

CAMERON
Yea.

Sherlock extends his hand to Cameron, who goes to shake it. Sherlock twists his hand and pushes it toward Cameron's face, beckoning him to perform a hand kiss.

Cameron backs up and does an awkward handshake instead.

SHERLOCK
I see...
(to Andi)
And you! Where have you been?

Andi hops on Sherlock's back. He gives Andi a piggyback ride, effortlessly cantering away in his stilettos.

CAMERON
Should I come with, or?

No response. Cameron looks around, puts his hands in his pockets, and follows Sherlock and Andi.

INT. VINTAGE CLOTHING STORE - DAY

Sherlock, Andi, and Cameron walk to the back of the store to a door marked "Employees Only" into the employee break room.

Behind the front counter is a wall of polaroid pictures of various people with shocked looks on their faces. The top of the wall says DOUCHE WALL, made with hand-cut bubble letters.

INT. VINTAGE CLOTHING STORE - BREAK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sherlock and Andi enter. Cameron walks in and stops in his tracks. His jaw drops. Fabric, twill, sequins, and more.

SHERLOCK

Don't. Touch. Anything.

ANDI

This is where the magic happens.

Andi and Sherlock walk OFF CAMERA, hand in hand. Cameron stands still, like a camera crew may jump out and catch him.

A woman (30s) sits down at a work table. This is CAROL. She wears a white tank top with no bra underneath, and mermaid-pattern leggings. She looks like one of those fierce tiny woman who'd surprise you with advanced martial arts.

CAMERON

Did you, uh, did you make these?

No response. She looks up and offers a polite smile.

SAME - LATER

Cameron is about to open the Employees Only door to leave. At the same time, the door bumps into Cameron as Andi pushes it from the other side. Cameron stumbles backward and Sherlock catches him. Andi scurries behind them out of Cameron's sight, sneakily holding Cameron's brown leather case.

CAMERON

I'm gonna wait in the car.

SHERLOCK

You'll need a lot more resolve than that to make it in this industry.

CAMERON

Make it? I'm staying at Andi's motel until my house is fixed.

Sherlock crosses his arms. Andi skips back toward them.

SHERLOCK

Oh? For a second there, I thought you were a grown ass man living in your grown friend's house, making your passion your side bitch.

Cameron cuts his eyes at Andi.

ANDI

Was it supposed to be a secret?

SHERLOCK

Guess my facts got mixed up.

ANDI (CONT'D)

You gotta tell me if something's secret.

Sherlock and Andi wrap a pink feather boa around Cameron and use it to lead him back to the work table. Carol sits cross-legged on top of the table, working on her design. To her left is a cheesy romance novel with a bookmark sticking out.

ANDI (CONT'D)

This is Carol, the brains.

Sherlock dramatically gasps. He and Andi laugh.

CAMERON

We met. Well, kind of. I'm Cameron.

He holds his hand out to her but she doesn't look up. Andi puts their arm around Carol and smooches her cheek.

ANDI

(in Sign Language)

What's up, slut?

Cameron's face turns red when he sees them signing.

CAROL

(in Sign Language)

Working. Who's the awkward cutie?

ANDI

(signing and speaking)

This is Shy.

CAMERON

(to Andi)
It's Cameron.

ANDI (CONT'D)

(to Cameron; not signing)
Shy, this is Carol.

Carol and Cameron shake hands, smiling at each other.

CAMERON (CONT'D)

(loudly and slowly)

HI. IT IS NICE TO MEET YOU.

Sherlock leans back with an, "Are you serious?" face.

ANDI

Uh, yea. She still can't hear you.

CAMERON

Oh, sorry. I'm sorry.

Carol chuckles, then does the sign for "sorry." She keeps doing it and nods at him. He matches the movement.

CAMERON (CONT'D)

Is this "sorry"?

She nods. He signs "sorry" to her again. She smiles. He shoves his hands into his pockets and looks at the floor.

CAROL

(signing to Sherlock)

Hang on. Is this that guy?

Sherlock nods to Carol and holds his finger to his lips. Carol's demeanor moves to icy cold RBF (resting bitch face).

SHERLOCK

Come with me. I'll keep you safe from these savages.

Sherlock leads Cameron toward his office.

INT. VINTAGE CLOTHING STORE - SHERLOCK'S OFFICE - DAY

Sherlock walks in and turns on the light. Cameron follows, hands deep in his pockets. There are framed photos of Sherlock's drag persona, Sherly Dimples, as well as magazine clippings and trophies of drag contests she's won.

CAMERON

Do you own this place? All of it?

SHERLOCK

Mmhmm. Got the gray hairs and wrinkles to prove it.

He motions to Cameron's case and sketch pad on the desk.

CAMERON

(chuckles)

She doesn't give up, does she?

SHERLOCK

"They." Andi refuses to be held captive by the limiting confines of societally-induced gender definitions. So, "they." Not she.

CAMERON

Ah. Snowflakes, am I right?

SHERLOCK

Come again?

CAMERON

A snowflake, you know? The younger generation of entitled kids who are so unique that the world must shift on its axis to cater to their little specific baby needs.

Cameron talks in a matter-of-fact way as if he's speaking facts, not insults. Complete lack of awareness.

SHERLOCK

Younger generation?

CAMERON

Yea. What are you, 50?

Sherlock's entire demeanor shifts from flamboyant extrovert in a sparkly suit to a 6 feet tall ex-football star in a sparkly suit. He closes the door.

SHERLOCK

You know, I was willing to give you a try. For their sake. But thank you. You've made it so much easier.

CAMERON

You're welcome?

Sherlock suddenly shoves Cameron face-first against the wall.

CAMERON (CONT'D)

(smooshed face)

Hey, what the fuck?

SHERLOCK

Snowflake, hm? Entitled? So very unique? Someone who can't deal with opposing opinions? Like, say, a man child who hides behind the safety of a computer, bashing people who are pursuing their passion? Hmm?

CAMERON

W-What?

SHERLOCK

Oh, honey. Don't think I didn't research you before letting you into my haven. I know exactly who you are, and exactly what you do.

CAMERON

That's different.

Sherlock spins Cameron around and pins him, face-to-face. He clearly knows how to man handle.

SHERLOCK

See? That's the problem with social media. People get away with saying whatever they want because they never get punched in the face.

CAMERON

Was it the age thing? You're not that old. We're like the same age!

Sherlock holds his fist out like he's going to punch him.

Cameron flinches.

SHERLOCK

You're not worth it.

Sherlock lets Cameron go. Cameron grabs his stuff, tries to leave, but accidentally bumps into Sherlock. His sketches fall and scatter everywhere.

CAMERON

I'm sorry for whatever I said. I don't, I don't people very well.

SHERLOCK

I had twenty different possible ways for this conversation to go. This was not one of them. I'm unprepared. How embarrassing.

Sherlock helps Cameron pick up the sketches, seeing the beautiful designs for the first time. His eyes go wide.

SHERLOCK (CONT'D)

Let's start over, shall we?

CAMERON

I say sorry and you're all good?

Sherlock points to Andi in the break room.

INT. VINTAGE CLOTHING STORE - BREAK ROOM - SAME TIME

Andi smiles while taking photos of Carol pinning a pattern.

SHERLOCK (O.S.)

That angel-in-skin sees something
in you. Begged me. I figured it'd
be a waste of time. Some are just
too far gone. I'm assuming you can
make dresses, not just doodle?

INT. VINTAGE CLOTHING STORE - SHERLOCK'S OFFICE - DAY

Sherlock holds strong in a staring contest with Cameron.

CAMERON

It's been a minute, but yea.
(softly)
Does, uh. Does Andi know?

SHERLOCK

You actually care, don't you?

CAMERON

It's whatever. Just curious.

SHERLOCK

No. It's been ages since Andi had
hope in anything, or anyone. Prove
me wrong, I'll make it worth your
while. You feel me?

CAMERON

I don't know what that means.

SHERLOCK

You're here for a week or so,
right? Think you can make these
gowns in my size in that time?

CAMERON

Probably.

SHERLOCK

Do Sherly proud, I'll keep your
little secret and pay you a hefty
wad of cash. Fuck up, no cash, and
you lose the only human who somehow
miraculously sees us both as good
people.

Cameron looks like a deer in headlights.

SHERLOCK (CONT'D)
What's the problem?

CAMERON
No one's ever asked me to do this.

SHERLOCK
Does anyone know? About your gift?

CAMERON
Some friends when I was a kid. I went to college for it, but it was out of state. My family thought I was in trade school for welding.

SHERLOCK
Well, whose responsibility is that?
(beat)
Not a rhetorical question.

CAMERON
Me-mine. It's my fault.

SHERLOCK
Fault is lazy. Fault is victimhood. Responsibility is action. It's sexy. You got two weeks. With you as my secret weapon, Sherly Dimples can finally make a proper comeback. I refuse to let these young queens force me into retirement.

CAMERON
Yea, but there's one problem.
(beat)
Aren't you a little young for a comeback?

They smirk at each other. Common ground.

Sherlock grabs Cameron's hat and shirt and peels them off. Cameron squeals and covers his nipples.

CAMERON (CONT'D)
Hey! HEY! What the fuck, man?!

Sherlock leaves, holding the shirt and hat like stinky socks. Cameron realizes he's covering his nipples and stops.

SHERLOCK (O.S.)
Hard work outdoes talent when talent doesn't work hard!

A frilly, red, collared shirt flies through the doorway and hits Cameron in the face. Sherlock pops in. He's somehow gotten an ice cream sandwich.

SHERLOCK (CONT'D)
The world is full of flattened
squirrels who couldn't make a
decision. So gather your nuts and
get a move on.

Sherlock licks his ice cream sandwich and struts out.

Cameron looks at the red shirt, his sewing machine, and the pictures on the wall. He quietly scurries out of the room.

INT. VINTAGE CLOTHING STORE - BREAK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Head down and hunched over, Cameron grasps the red shirt and beelines it toward the bathroom door. Carol rolls her eyes.

INT. VINTAGE CLOTHING STORE - BATHROOM - DAY

Cameron makes sure the door is locked.

He takes some deep breaths and frantically puts the shirt on, as if he's afraid someone will rip it off.

He looks in the mirror. His breathing slows.

CAMERON
(quietly)
What the fuck.

His eyes light up like lanterns that have been dark for years. He runs water through his hair, slicking it back.

He pops his collar up, then down, and unbuttons the top 2 buttons. He cuffs the bottom of his jeans, stands up tall, and admires himself in the mirror. He smirks, almost flirty.

Suddenly, his breathing intensifies again. He holds his chest. His face strains. Incoming PANIC ATTACK. He looks in the mirror, then at the red shirt. He grips the sink.

CAMERON (CONT'D)
It's a shirt. It's just a shirt.

Suddenly, a FLASHBACK REFLECTION APPEARS IN THE MIRROR behind Cameron. A blend of the present moment and a memory from the past: It's Cindy, Cameron's drunk mom in the bathtub, laughing at him.

But this time we see that she's talking to a YOUNG CAMERON (6ish), who's wearing a dress and red lipstick and the same messy teal eye shadow his mother wears.

YOUNG CAMERON
Don't I look pretty, Mommy?

CINDY
(distorted; hard to hear)
So you're a fag now?

She laughs and dunks herself under the overflowing tub water.

He closes his eyes tightly, then opens them. The reflection of his mom and the bathtub is gone, replaced by three elementary school-age boys pointing behind him and laughing.

He steps to the side to see the reflection of what's behind him: It's a younger version of him, crying in a corner, wearing a very vibrant crop top and homemade bell bottoms.

JERKWAD KIDS' VOICES
(overlapping)
He's a girl! I bet he likes
Barbies! My uncle is just like him
and my mom said he's going to H-E-
double hockey sticks! Careful,
he'll French you!

Present-day Cameron explodes into action.

CAMERON
Shut the fuck up!!!

INT. VINTAGE CLOTHING STORE - BREAK ROOM - SAME TIME

Andi has their ear up to the door and stumbles backwards at Cameron's screaming. They go to knock on the door. Sherlock grabs their hand and shakes his head no.

SHERLOCK
(gently)
Rebirth is painful, baby.

Sherlock puts his arm around Andi, kisses them on the forehead, twirls them under his arm, and leads them away.

INT. VINTAGE CLOTHING STORE - BATHROOM - DAY

Cameron stands in front of the cowering younger version of himself and faces the jerkwad kids.

ADULT CAMERON

Leave him alone, you miserable little cunts. Just because he likes fashion doesn't mean he's gay. Even if he liked boys or Barbies or-or whatever, so what?!

The jerkwad kids are silent with wide, teary eyes.

ADULT CAMERON (CONT'D)

(pointing to each kid)

Plus, you grow up to be a fat balding used car salesman who hasn't seen his own dick in five years. Marc, you're still a pretentious know-it-all. And, Jeremy, you piece of shit --

YOUNG CAMERON

-- Please stop being so mean.

ADULT CAMERON

Yea! Fucking pricks --

Young Cameron covers his ears at the cuss words.

YOUNG CAMERON

-- Not them. You.

Cameron scrunches his face and looks back at Young Cameron.

ADULT CAMERON

What? They were assholes.

YOUNG CAMERON

That's a cuss! Just because they're bullies doesn't mean we should be. Two wrongs don't make a right. Hurt people hurt people. Well you know.

Young Cameron pats the floor next to him. Adult Cameron crosses his arms, silently refusing to sit.

ADULT CAMERON

What's that supposed to mean?

YOUNG CAMERON

Hurt people hurt people. If you stop hurting people, maybe you'll stop hurting, too. Maybe the other way around. I dunno the order.

ADULT CAMERON

I'm fine. I'm not hurting anyone.

Young Cameron crosses his arms. *Oh, really?!*

ADULT CAMERON (CONT'D)
I haven't done anything wrong. I'm not a bad person. People want my opinion and I give it to them. The truth hurts. That's on them.

YOUNG CAMERON
So let's share that truth with your new nice friend, then.

Young Cameron goes to open the door. Adult Cameron stops him.

ADULT CAMERON
Stop.

Young Cameron looks Adult Cameron up and down, then nods.

YOUNG CAMERON
I think it's time.

Young Cameron puts his hands on Adult Cameron's head.

ADULT CAMERON
Wait. What are you --

The screen starts to FADE TO BLACK as Adult Cameron loses consciousness. OFF SCREEN from wherever this blackness is, there are UNINTELLIGIBLE VOICES from various people. TEARS. LAUGHTER. SCREAMS. A cacophony of vocalized emotions. We are witnessing EMPATHY begin to awaken within Cameron.

Adult Cameron grabs Young Cameron's wrist and yanks it away from his head. The SOUNDS of EMPATHY abruptly stop.

ADULT CAMERON (CONT'D)
What was that?

YOUNG CAMERON
The stuff you try to ignore.

Adult Cameron gets scarily close to Young Cameron's face.

ADULT CAMERON
Leave me alone. Freak.

Young Cameron nods in lip-quivering agreement.

INT. VINTAGE CLOTHING STORE - BREAK ROOM - DAY

Andi, doing the peepee dance, goes to knock on the door. The bathroom door swings open. Out walks Cameron, shoulders back.

He has his pants cuffed up, his hair fluffed into the different style, and he wears the red frilly shirt unbuttoned to his chest. He walks to Sherlock's office.

ANDI

Hey Cameron, are you okay?

CAMERON

Call me Shy.

Cameron walks toward Sherlock's office.

Andi squeals and does the floss dance until the peepee need takes over. Andi runs into the bathroom and shuts the door.

Cameron looks back to smile at Andi, accidentally COLLIDING into Carol. He grabs her arms before she can fall back. She shrugs him off her.

CAMERON (CONT'D)

Sorry! Oh, uh.
(poorly signing)
Sorry.

CAROL

(signing)
Whatever.

CAMERON

What? I don't know what that --

Carol walks away. Cameron recomposes himself, walks into Sherlock's office, and shuts the door.

INT. VINTAGE CLOTHING STORE - SHERLOCK'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Cameron is surrounded by crumpled up pieces of paper. He finishes another sketch, then rips it in half.

He rests his face in his hands. A KNOCK on the door. He frantically grabs the crumpled papers as Andi walks in.

ANDI

How goes it? Oh. Hey, don't throw those away! You're doing great!

CAMERON

Don't look. They're fucking garbage. I can do better.

ANDI

Maybe. Sherlock says we have a lot of shitty ideas in the way of our good ideas. Like clearing gunky sludge out the creativity pipes.

CAMERON

I don't think I should do this. I think-this is a mistake.

ANDI

There are no mistakes. Only happy little accidents.

CAMERON

Sherlock?

ANDI

Bob Ross. Come on. Set the happy little accidents aside. Let's go home. Future you will handle it.

INT. CAMERON'S CAR - NIGHT

SPANISH MUSIC blares as Andi and Cameron drive in silence. Andi is trying to solve a Rubik's cube.

CAMERON

You didn't have to do that.

ANDI

Do what?

CAMERON

When I was spiraling.

ANDI

That's what friends are for.

Andi points to their head.

ANDI (CONT'D)

It can get bad in there sometimes.

Cameron nods like he gets it. They ride in silence.

INT. VINTAGE CLOTHING STORE - DAY

Cameron and Andi walk in. He makes eye contact with Carol and waves. She ignores him. A bright blue shirt hits Cameron in the face from the other side of the store.

INT. VINTAGE CLOTHING STORE - BREAK ROOM - DAY

Cameron walks to Sherlock's office, buttoning the blue shirt.

SHERLOCK

Tut tut tut tut. Come here.

Sherlock sits, legs crossed, on the corner of a work table. Next to him is Cameron's sewing machine and his sketches, uncrumpled. Cameron points to Sherlock's office.

CAMERON

Am I not...

SHERLOCK

That's my office, honey. I gave you space yesterday, but today I'm throwing you to the wolves. The best way to learn.

Sherlock hops up and puts a lollipop in his mouth. He pats the pile of sketches.

SHERLOCK (CONT'D)

Not bad. Keep going.

Cameron sits down at the work table, grabbing Sherlock's arm before he can walk away.

CAMERON

Hey. Uh. Does Carol hate me?

SHERLOCK

Oh yes. Who do you think looked you up? You don't think I'm doing online stalking with these nails, do you? It'd take me ages.

Sherlock shows very long, beautifully manicured nails.

CAMERON

Oh.

SHERLOCK

Get to work.

INT. VINTAGE CLOTHING STORE - BREAK ROOM - NIGHT

Carol works on a sewing machine and Andi lies on the floor, drawing wild pictures of their Converse. Cameron, wearing a Hawaiian shirt unbuttoned to show chest hair, walks up to Andi and Carol. He shows them his drawings.

CAMERON

You, uh, wanna see? They're rough.

Carol gives a polite nod and thumbs up. Andi gasps.

ANDI

Shy! You've been holding out on me!
These are beautiful! Or, wait. Is
that not manly enough? Uh. Badass!

CAMERON

Beautifully badass?

ANDI

Yea. Wow. Sherly will LOVE-uh.

OFF SCREEN is the sound of the store's FRONT DOOR being slammed shut, followed by the grumbling and drunken laughter of a GROUP OF DOUCHEBAG DUDES.

SHERLOCK (O.S.)

Good evening, gents. We're closed.

DOUCHE #1 (O.S.)

Is this where all the queers shop?

Andi and Cameron stop what they're doing and look toward the Employees Only door. Cameron gently puts his hand on Carol's shoulder. She looks at him like, *Excuse the fuck outta me?*

Cameron puts his finger to his mouth in the "Shh" motion.

DOUCHE #2 (O.S.)

Hey. We're talking to you.

SHERLOCK (O.S.)

And I'm choosing to ignore you. You
know the way out. Goodnight.

Silence, followed by a LOUD CRASH of CLOTHING RACKS FALLING.

Cameron leaps into motion, running through the Employees Only door. Andi's right behind him. Carol stumbles after them.

INT. VINTAGE CLOTHING STORE - NIGHT

Cameron, Andi, and Carol run toward the front desk.

SHERLOCK

Stop! Get off of me!

DOUCHE #2 (30s, male, the alpha of the douche pack, wearing boat shoes with no socks) and DOUCHE #3 (20s, male, timid, looking like he'd rather be home playing Dungeons and Dragons) stand by the front desk.

DOUCHE #2

That's what you get for ignoring us, pussy! Get his nasty ass nails!

DOUCHE #1 (20s, male, wrestler who lost his scholarship due to drugs, reeks of daddy issues) rips off one Sherlock's fake nails. Sherlock screams in pain, but doesn't fight back.

DOUCHE #3

Come on, guys. That's enough.

CAMERON

Hey! Get off of him! Why don't you pick on someone your own size?

Cameron's face shows that he feels silly for what he said since Sherlock is taller than he is, but he sticks with it.

Douche #1 looks up at Cameron, then to Douche #2 for permission. Douche #2 nods. While making eye contact with Cameron, Douche #1 rips off another of Sherlock's nails.

Cameron LAUNCHES forward as he tackles Douche #1. Andi leaps on the back of DOUCHE #2 and rides him like a bucking bronco. Carol walks up to the timid DOUCHE #3 with fire in her eyes, holding a mannequin arm as a weapon.

DOUCHE #3 (CONT'D)

Fuck this.

Douche #3 runs out of the store. Cameron and Douche #1 roll around, allowing Sherlock to crawl free, one stiletto missing. Cameron has the upper hand until Douche #1 pulls out grappling skills that only wrestlers or black belts in jujitsu would know, then punches and elbows Cameron's face.

Douche #2 flails around and flings Andi toward Carol.

DOUCHE #2

Get off of me, you freak!

Carol dodges Andi's body like Keanu in The Matrix and walks toward Douche #2 with the ferocity of someone 3x her size.

DOUCHE #2 (CONT'D)

(to Douche #1)

Kick his pansy ass, Craig!

Craig (Douche #1) pops up from beating shit out of Cameron.

CRAIG (DOUCHE #1)
 What the fuck, man? Don't say my
 name!

DOUCHE #2
 My bad --

A loud BONK as Carol WHACKS Douche #2 in the head with a
 MANNEQUIN ARM. As he stumbles to the floor, she sits on his
 back, twisting his arm behind his back. She's in control.

Cameron coughs and groans, barely conscious.

CRAIG
 Scottie, you okay?
 (beat)
 Scottie?

The familiar sound of a SHOTGUN being COCKED makes Craig's
 eyes go wide. The muzzle of the shotgun is on Craig's head,
 held by a bloody Sherlock, still wearing only one stiletto.

Craig puts his hands up and looks toward Sherlock. Sherlock
 slaps Craig hard in the face.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
 Ow! Fuck.

SHERLOCK
 You owe me for a manicure, you
 emotionally stunted man child!

Sherlock flips off Craig, showing the missing nail.

SAME - LATER

Sherlock and Carol lead Craig (Douche #1) and Scottie (Douche
 #2) out the front door. Through the window, we see Sherlock
 and Carol push the douches against the store window.

Carol holds the shotgun and poses in front of the Douches as
 Sherlock takes a polaroid picture for the Douche wall.

Inside the store, Cameron crawls up to Andi, who's hiding
 under a clothing rack holding their knees to their chest.

CAMERON
 You okay? What hurts?

ANDI
 (sobbing)
 I'm a freak.

SHERLOCK (O.S.)
 Craig and Scottie just got
 their asses beat by a bunch
 of queers!

CAMERON
 What? Don't say that.

Andi collapses into Cameron's chest. Cameron holds them.

Sherlock and Carol walk in. Carol skips to the Douche wall and pins the picture up. She writes "Craig & Scottie" with a doodle heart underneath.

SHERLOCK
 Oh, honey. You okay?

CAMERON
 (quietly)
 Andi's okay. A bit shaken up --

Sherlock puts his hand to Cameron's face.

SHERLOCK
 -- I'm talking about you, baby. My
 god, he beat you up pretty good.

CAMERON
 I bruise easily. Who were those
 guys?

SHERLOCK
 A typical Tuesday.

Cameron clearly doesn't get it.

SHERLOCK (CONT'D)
 Meat suits with too much
 testosterone and not enough
 emotional regulation. They get
 wasted at the dive bar down the
 road and sometimes end up here.

CAMERON
 Why didn't you fight back? You
 could totally take that guy.

SHERLOCK
 I'm tired. So tired of fighting.
 (sighs)
 You wouldn't understand. And how
 could you? Look at you.

CAMERON
Hey, man. That's not fair.

Sherlock limps away, clearly deflated.

Carol scurries up and tries to peel Andi away from Cameron.
Cameron holds her back and shakes his head no.

CAMERON (CONT'D)
(aloud and signing)
Stop! Stop. Please stop.

Eyes wide, Carol backs up.

CAMERON (CONT'D)
Let's go for an airplane ride, huh?

Andi lightly nods. Cameron pulls Andi onto his back. He walks to the front door, making airplane "vroom" noises. Andi clings to him like a baby sloth on its momma's back.

CAMERON (CONT'D)
Same time tomorrow?

SHERLOCK (O.S.)
I don't care.

Cameron leaves with Andi on his back. The door shuts.

EXT. HIDDEN NOOK MOTEL - NIGHT

Cameron hops out of his parked car and helps Andi out. His busted lip swells and his eye is almost swollen shut.

ANDI
I'm fine. I said I'm fine!

CAMERON
I want to help.

ANDI
Why are you being so nice to me?
What's the catch?

CAMERON
There is no catch. I'm just-you're nice to me, too. It's the same.

ANDI
There's always a catch.

Gaze on the ground, Andi walks to their room: Room 13.

INT. VINTAGE CLOTHING STORE - BREAK ROOM - DAY

Cameron walks in holding new sketches. His bruises look worse, but the swelling is less. The break room is silent; no Sherlock or Andi.

INT. VINTAGE CLOTHING STORE - DAY

Cameron walks to the front counter where Carol works the register. Cameron spells out "Sherlock?" in Sign Language.

She shakes her head no. She grimaces when she sees his bruised face. He spells out "Andi?" She shakes her head no.

He writes on a piece of paper: "Should we keep working?"

She writes: "What's the point?"

Cameron: "Redemption?"

She points to him in a questioning kind of way.

Cameron: "For Sherly."

Carol studies his face. Her brow softens. She nods.

INT. VINTAGE CLOTHING STORE - BREAK ROOM - NIGHT

Cameron and Carol work diligently at their respective stations. They look up at each other every now and again, only once catching one another's glance. They quickly go back to their work. There's a spark that neither will admit.

INT. VINTAGE CLOTHING STORE - DAY

Cameron walks in, face still bruised but clearly better than the day prior. He looks to Carol in a questioning way. She shrugs and shakes her head no. He heads to the break room.

INT. VINTAGE CLOTHING STORE - BREAK ROOM - NIGHT

Cameron hand-drapes and pins beautiful, vibrant dresses. Like, "holy shit how did THAT BEAUTY come out of THAT DUDE?"

A finger taps him on the shoulder and he YELPS.

It's Carol. She laughs and holds her hands up in surrender.

She leads him through a back door that leads to stairs.

INT. VINTAGE CLOTHING STORE - STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Carol knocks on the door that has a stolen street sign on it: "QUEEN'S CROSSING." She and Cameron wait. Nothing.

CAMERON
Hey, Sherlock? You alive?

SHERLOCK (O.S.)
Begrudgingly.

Cameron nods encouragingly to Carol.

CAMERON
I finished some dresses. I need you
to check the fit.

SHERLOCK (O.S.)
I'm not competing.

CAMERON
You what?

The apartment door cracks open presenting a makeup-free Sherlock who looks exhausted and despondent. Carol reaches in and holds Sherlock's hand through the crack.

SHERLOCK
Don't worry, I'll still pay you.
And keep your secret safe.

ANDI (O.S.)
What secret?

Andi walks up the steps.

ANDI (CONT'D)
You look about how I feel.

SHERLOCK
That bad, huh?

CAMERON
Where have you been? You
okay?

ANDI
Licking my wounds. And working.
About 50/50. What secret?

SHERLOCK
That Shy isn't a complete jackass.

CAMERON
Shh. I have a reputation to
keep.

ANDI
You're not competing?

SHERLOCK

I could be most of their fathers,
or worse. My luster is gone. I need
sleep. And chocolate. Good night.

Sherlock goes to close the door. Cameron stops it.

CAMERON

Hard work outdoes talent when
talent doesn't work hard.

ANDI

Oh snap! Oh no you didn't!

SHERLOCK

What's that supposed to mean?

CAMERON

Those other guys don't hold a
candle to you. But they're probably
working hard, not sulking.

The door CLICKS shut. Andi and Carol pat Cameron on the back.

INT. CAMERON'S CAR - NIGHT

Outside of the vintage clothing store, Cameron sits in his car and finally opens Sludge Critic to read the countless notifications he'd been ignoring.

A RED BANNER notice at the top of his account reads:
"WARNING: Your paid premium status is in danger of lapsing.
You need to complete **9** reviews before by end of month. You
have **3** days."

A message pops up from MARC: "Hot water heater's fixed. See
you tomorrow? Bring rent. And pizza." Another text that says,
"Actually, bring 2. Missy's eating everything."

Cameron hits the steering wheel.

CAMERON

One last month.

He presses Play on a sludge metal album to review. He types
aggressively on his phone.

INT. VINTAGE CLOTHING STORE - DAY

Cameron walks in to a young FRONT DESK ATTENDANT (18ish, any
gender) staring at their phone behind the front desk. There's
LOUD MUSIC coming from the break room.

CAMERON

Hey, uh. You seen Sherlock today?

The Front Desk Attendant points to the Employees Only door without looking up from their phone.

INT. VINTAGE CLOTHING STORE - BREAK ROOM - DAY

Cameron walks in to see Sherly Dimples strutting her stuff in the amazing gowns Cameron created for her. There's music playing, Carol and Andi dancing. There are a few other DRAG QUEENS there as support. They whisper to each other.

Cameron has the panicky look all perfectionists know.

QUEEN 1
Looks fishy as fuck.

QUEEN 2
Gagged. I can't even.

CAMERON
(to Andi)
Fishy? Gagged?

ANDI	SHERLY (SHERLOCK)
Trust me; it's a good thing.	You, sir, are a fucking magician.

Cameron coyly smiles.

SAME - LATER

The other Queens fuss over Cameron. Andi and Carol dance.

QUEEN 1
So can we get a card or are you another one of Sherly's secrets?

CAMERON
I don't have cards --

SHERLY (SHERLOCK)
-- yet. I'll put you in touch.

QUEEN 2
Will you really, though?

SHERLY (SHERLOCK)
Oh hush. Of course I will.

QUEEN 1
I'll believe it when I see it!

The Queens laugh. Cameron walks to his work station.

ANDI (CONT'D)

During down time, help around here for extra cash. Can you fix stuff?

CAMERON

Not really. But I already --

ANDI

-- You can clean the rooms! And ask the YouTubes how to fix things.

CAMERON

I have a job and an apartment.

ANDI

But doesn't all this feel right to you? It does to me, down in my pinky toes. You can still be a famous music critic of slug metal.

CAMERON

Sludge. And, not famous.

ANDI (CONT'D)

Then grow a fashion career. Nookie revives dreams. You can be anyone you want there.

CAMERON (CONT'D)

Life would have to be pretty shitty for me to work and live here, no offense. Like, super last resort.

ANDI

You know saying "no offense" doesn't automatically remove the assholery from your words, right? Whatever. See ya tonight, Shy.

Andi hops out of the car and canters away.

CAMERON

I don't know if I'm coming!

EXT. HIDDEN NOOK MOTEL - ROOM 5 - NIGHT

Carol, Sherlock, and Andi sit in Sherlock's truck, an old Ford with manual windows. Cameron stands outside his room, hands in his pockets.

SHERLOCK

You coming or going? Can't have it both ways.

ANDI

Unless you're bisexual!

Andi cracks up at themselves. Sherlock throws a red deep V shirt at Cameron's face.

<p>ANDI (CONT'D) Cause bisexuals have it... Both ways. Get it? No one?</p>	<p>CAMERON I think I'll stay here. To pack. I'm a little tired.</p>
--	---

SHERLOCK
We're all a little tired. Welcome
to the human experience. Get in.

CAMERON
I can drive myself --

SHERLOCK
-- Get in the car.

SHERLOCK & ANDI (CONT'D)
Get in the car! Get in the car!

Carol hops out of the car and playfully shepherds Cameron toward the car. He hem haws a bit and she slaps his butt. Cameron looks shocked. Sherlock, Carol, and Andi laugh.

CAMERON
Stop! Stop!

He moves away from Carol and shakes his head at her. She rolls her eyes at him, then gets in the car.

SHERLOCK
You sure?
(off Cameron's look)
It's your funeral.

Sherlock puts the car in gear and starts driving away.

CAMERON
Gaaah. Wait!

Sherlock slams on the brakes. Cameron jogs to the car, changing his shirt.

EXT. GAY BAR - NIGHT

Sherlock and Carol walk arm-in-arm to the bar. They do a fun secret handshake with the bouncer and walk inside. Cameron sits in Sherlock's truck. Andi KNOCKS on the CAR WINDOW.

Andi's CELL PHONE RINGS. They ignore the call.

Cameron manually rolls down the window.

ANDI
 (to the phone)
 Give it a rest, dude.

CAMERON
 I can't be seen in there.

ANDI (CONT'D)
 Uh. Can't, or won't?

Cameron crosses his arms and slouches like a cranky child.

ANDI (CONT'D)
 You're super gross right now. This
 isn't you.

CAMERON
 You have no fucking idea who I am!

ANDI
 Talking to yourself, my dude.

Andi walks to the bar, tickles the bouncer, and goes inside.

SAME - LATER

Cameron closes the car door and walks to the bar. He tries to peek inside each time the door opens: MUSIC and LAUGHTER and sounds of people enjoying themselves.

YOUNG CAMERON (O.S.)
 I can help.

Adult Cameron looks to see Young Cameron sitting on top of Sherlock's truck. Adult Cameron makes sure no one is looking.

ADULT CAMERON
 No.

YOUNG CAMERON
 Pleeeeease-uuuuuhhhh. It'll make
 it all make sense. I promise.

ADULT CAMERON
 Why are you here? What is all this?

YOUNG CAMERON
 If I help you, maybe I won't have
 to go back. I can stay, with you.

ADULT CAMERON
 Go back where?

YOUNG CAMERON
 The ouch. I was there a long time.

Someone grabs Cameron's arm. He lets out a high-pitched scream and turns to see Andi's brother, Bryan, laughing.

CAMERON
Hey man, what the fuck?

BRYAN
Where's Andrea?

YOUNG CAMERON
Pssstt!

CAMERON
Who?

BRYAN
She chose the name Andi to break
our parents' fragile little hearts.

Young Cameron pulls on Adult Cameron's shirt.

CAMERON
That's a bit harsh.

YOUNG CAMERON
Come here. Come heeere-uhh!

Adult Cameron squats down as nonchalantly as possible.

CAMERON (CONT'D)
(through his teeth)
You're not real. Go. Away.

YOUNG CAMERON
Not until you let me open the door! Don't make me go back!

BRYAN
Right? Probably what killed mom.

CAMERON
Damn, dude. Andi's in there.
(quietly; to Young
Cameron)
Fine. If it shuts you up.

Young Cameron squeals in excitement, twirls, and puts his hand on Adult Cameron's head.

BRYAN
Can you go get her for me?

CAMERON
You're just as close as I am.

BRYAN'S VOICE WARPS as the SCENE SLOWS DOWN. Cameron's eyes roll back and his eyelids flutter. The CACOPHONY of EMPATHY NOISES (voices, laughter, tears, and so on) increases in speed and volume until it STOPS.

BRYAN
(warped; slow motion)
I can't be seen in there.

Bryan dramatically puts up his middle fingers and pantomimes using them as machine guns.

CAMERON
Wait. You have my laptop?

Brian shrugs.

CAMERON (CONT'D)
You're the one? Who broke into my car and stole my stuff? Why? What did I ever do to you?

BRYAN
(smirking)
I would never do such a thing.

CAMERON
People trust you! Disgusting prick.

BRYAN
What did you say?

CAMERON (CONT'D)
Does Andi know you do this?

BRYAN (CONT'D)
If I did take your laptop-not saying I did-I'd need help, wouldn't I? Scope out the idiots.

Bryan shrugs and whistles a tune. Cameron walks to the bar.

BRYAN (CONT'D)
Did you hear me? Hey!
(beat)
Tell Andrea to answer her goddamn phone when I call!

Bryan gets back in his Mustang and drives away, listening to Country Rap music.

INT. GAY BAR - NIGHT

LOUD MUSIC, happy screaming, plenty of talking. Cameron spots Sherlock, who's taller than nearly anyone else in there and dancing with Andi and Carol.

ANDI
Thought you can't be seen in here.

CAMERON
Your brother showed up.

ANDI
My brother from another mother!

CAMERON
Your actual brother.

ANDI
Bryan? Where? In here?!

CAMERON
He wanted my laptop charger.

Sherlock pulls on Carol's shirt. They sneakily dance toward Andi and Cameron, pretending not to pay attention.

CAMERON (CONT'D)
Is it true?

ANDI
What did he say?

He scoffs.

ANDI (CONT'D)
No, I mean. I was just curious --

CAMERON
-- That tells me everything I need to know.

Cameron walks to the exit. Andi starts to run after him.

ANDI
Shy! Wait! Shit. Fuck. Shitfuck!

SHERLOCK
Is this what I think it is?

ANDI
Not now, Sherls.

Sherlock's face clearly says, "Excuse the fuck outta me?"

EXT. GAY BAR - NIGHT

Andi runs out, with Sherlock and Carol close behind. Cameron paces by Sherlock's truck.

ANDI
Can I please explain before this gets blown out of proportion?

CAMERON
Were you gonna tell me?

ANDI

You said you didn't care about the laptop.

CAMERON

Don't try to put this on me.

Sherlock has the door cracked open to hear the conversation. Carol slaps his shoulder. He scoffs and shuts the car door.

ANDI

I wanted to tell you. I should have. I didn't want to upset you.

CAMERON

So you kept pretending to give a shit?

ANDI

Of course I give a shit! I give so many shits about you. All the shits. That's-that came out weird. Shy, I can explain. The motel --

CAMERON

-- Stop calling me that. I can't even look at you.

Cameron walks away to the main road. Sherlock starts the car.

ANDI

Wait. Can I please come with you?

SHERLOCK

You said you stopped.

ANDI

I did. I promise I did. You know Bryan, I can't control him.

SHERLOCK

So you knew nothing about this?

ANDI

...I...

SHERLOCK

Ooo child.

ANDI

I know, I know. I'm the literal worst. Now can I please get in?

SHERLOCK

Ah, this is why you were so eager for me to work with him. Guilt.

ANDI

No. I mean, maybe a little at first. He's also really talented.

SHERLOCK

You're not out of the doghouse. I've watched too much true crime and my blood pressure can't handle you or that boy getting kidnapped.

Andi gets in the back seat.

SHERLOCK (CONT'D)

Knowing you, you'd befriend your kidnapper and be his therapist.

EXT. GAY BAR - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Cameron walks, hunched over, hands in his pockets. A TINY CAR full of loud, laughing women drives by him, SCREECHES to a halt, and backs up. One of them rolls down the window.

WOMAN

No way. Cameron?

Cameron looks up at the car.

CAMERON

(to himself)

Fuck.

The woman is Missy, Marc's pregnant wife.

MISSY (WOMAN)

What are you doing here?

CAMERON

What are you doing at a bar when you're eleven months pregnant?

MISSY

Funny.

WOMAN 2

Is that Cam?

His eyes go wide at WOMAN 2's voice.

MISSY (CONT'D)

What are you wearing?

CAMERON

Nothing. It's a joke. A prank.

Woman 2 sticks a phone out the window to snap a photo of him.

Sherlock pulls up alongside the other car.

SHERLOCK

Come on, Shy. I'll take you home.

WOMAN 2

Wait. Lemme out.

Woman 2 stumbles out and stands in front of Cameron.

WOMAN 2 (CONT'D)

Do you even remember me?

CAMERON

What? Yea. Hey, Shelly. Um.

SHELLY (WOMAN 2)

Wow. He remembers my name! Can't be bothered to return my call after putting his dick in my mouth, but at least he remembers my name!

The women all laugh. Sherlock gets out of his car.

SHERLOCK

Are these folks picking on you?

SHELLY

Us? Picking on him? Ha!
(to the other women)
Did you hear that?

CAMERON

I'm fine, dude. Just, go.

The other women laugh. Shelly backs Cameron up so she can get a picture of him with the gay bar's sign in the background.

SHERLOCK

You okay, baby?

SHELLY

Baby? Oh-oh my god. Now I see why you didn't call me back. You had another guy's dick in your mouth!
(to Sherlock)
Which is fine, by the way. I'm an ally.

SHERLOCK

(dead pan)
Clearly.

Sherlock puts his arm around Cameron to guide him to the car.

SHERLOCK (CONT'D)
 It's just tabloids. Fake news.

SHELLY
 This explains so much.

MISSY
 I'm texting Marc right now!

Cameron shrugs Sherlock's arms off of him.

CAMERON
 No, Missy. Please don't.
 It's-I...

ANDI (O.S.)
 Is everything okay?

SHERLOCK
 (to the women)
 I'll have you know that Cameron designed the most profoundly beautiful gowns for my show. He's a goddess gift to fashion.

CAMERON
 No, I'm not. He's joking.
 (to Sherlock)
 Stop. Please. Don't.

Young Cameron tugs on Adult Cameron's shirt.

YOUNG CAMERON
 Mommy was wrong. Tell them.

SHERLOCK
 Don't what? Tell the truth? You said yourself you don't share your gifts. Now's your chance. Take it.

SHELLY
 What is happening right now?

MISSY
 Oh my god. This is a karma moment. I'm so glad you convinced me to go out.

CAMERON
 It's not what it looks like.

Young Cameron screams at the women. They can't see him.

YOUNG CAMERON
 Yes it is! You have to tell them!

ADULT CAMERON
 Stop. Stop stop stop. Go away.

Sherlock cocks his head to the side at Cameron and backs up from him. Andi and Carol walk up next to Sherlock.

SHERLOCK
 And what exactly does it look like?

CAMERON
I just mean, they won't understand.

ANDI
Hey. What's going on? Are these your friends, Shy?

SHELLY
Friends?!

MISSY
Shy?!

The women laugh. Sherlock grabs Andi's shirt so they don't get any closer to Cameron. Carol sneaks by Sherlock. Young Cameron tugs at Adult Cameron's shirt.

CAROL
(signing)
Are you okay?

YOUNG CAMERON
Don't make me go back.
Please.

Cameron spins to fling Young Cameron off of him, almost accidentally hitting Carol with his arms. Sherlock wraps his arm around Carol. Young Cameron weeps.

SHERLOCK
Enlighten us. It's not what it looks like. What does it look like?

SHELLY
Cameron doesn't do friends. You know what he does for a living?

CAMERON
(to Sherlock, Andi, Carol)
You should go.
(to Shelly)
Shelly, let it go. I'm serious.

Sherlock crosses his arms and very clearly isn't budging. Shelly pulls up her phone and taps on it.

ANDI
He's a renowned music critic. And a fashion designer. And our friend.

CAMERON
Andi, don't.
(to himself)
Fuck.

ANDI
What? It's true.

MISSY
Ha! He's an internet troll.

SHELLY
He literally gets paid to bash people online.

CAMERON
I am not an internet troll.

The women laugh. Shelly keeps tapping on her phone. He looks at Shelly. She looks right at him, fire in her eyes.

The laughter and the scene suddenly slow down and go silent.

INT. SHELLY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (EMPATHY FLASHBACK)

Shelly texts Cameron on her phone for the eleventh time and he hasn't responded. She cries on her bed.

Suddenly, present-day Cameron stands in Shelly's flashback memory, watching her sob. She looks right at him.

PAST SHELLY
(heaving sobs)
Why?

EXT. GAY BAR - PARKING LOT - NIGHT (BACK TO PRESENT)

The laughter and scene speed back up. Cameron's eyes go big. He shakes his head as if trying to snap out of a dream.

CAMERON
What?

MISSY
I said, no internet troll actually thinks they're an internet troll.

SHELLY
That's like a narcissist thinking,
"I wonder if I'm a narcissist."

MISSY CAMERON
Exactly. It doesn't happen. Why are you doing this?

Missy won't make eye contact with Cameron, except for a brief moment when she catches his glance.

The scene slows down and goes silent.

INT. MARC & MISSY'S GUEST ROOM - NIGHT (EMPATHY FLASHBACK)

Present-Day Cameron watches as Past Cameron drunkenly stumbles into Missy and Marc's guest bedroom. He accidentally falls and cracks a dresser mirror. He barfs on the carpet.

Missy comes in with a glass of water. In his embarrassment, he pushes her. She falls back to the wall and hits her head.

**INT. MARC & MISSY'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER (EMPATHY
FLASHBACK CONT'D)**

Missy lies in bed with Marc, but she doesn't tell him what happened. She cries silently and holds herself. Present-Day Cameron stands in the room, looking confused and panicked.

Missy looks at Present-Day Cameron.

MISSY

Why?

EXT. GAY BAR - PARKING LOT - NIGHT (BACK TO PRESENT)

The scene speeds back up. Cameron's face is white. He holds his stomach and looks like he's about to fall over or puke.

SHELLY

Here's some of what he's said.
Classy. Misogynist *and* a homophobe.
And this is just the start of it.

Shelly hands the phone to Andi.

Cameron hears his MOM LAUGH. Then the LITTLE BOYS LAUGH. Fire in his eyes, he looks to Young Cameron, who scurries away.

ANDI

SludgeFucker69? Is that you?

MISSY

That's him alright.

CAMERON

(out of breath)
It's not like that anymore.

Missy looks over Andi's shoulder and points at the screen.

ANDI

Anymore? These are from today.

CAMERON

(to Shelly)
You just looked for comments with
shit you're sensitive about. I
don't only attack certain groups of
people. It's not like that.

ANDI

So you, what? Attack everyone?

He looks up at Andi, who has tears in their eyes. The scene slows down again.

CAMERON

Ahhhh! Stop! Fucking stop! Stop!!!

Cameron hits himself in the head and face repeatedly.

Andi and Carol and Sherlock rush to help him. Cameron rips off the red shirt and throws it at Sherlock.

CAMERON (CONT'D)

(to the women)

You cunts don't know what the fuck you're talking about. Go suck another dick, you slut.

SHERLOCK

Let's take it down a notch.

(to the women)

Maybe you better get going.

Cameron shakes his hands in an OCD movement and struggles to breathe. Andi keeps walking toward Cameron.

CAMERON

(to Young Cameron)

It's you. You did this to me!

ANDI

Hey, you spiraling? Deep breaths.

THE SCENE SPLITS as Adult Cameron tosses Young Cameron back into the repeating trauma scene with the young boys.

CAMERON

Get away from me, you freak!

YOUNG CAMERON

No no no, please!

Young Cameron's screams cut off when Adult Cameron opens his eyes back in the parking lot scene. Young Cameron is gone.

He sighs in relief, but soon sees that, in his freakout moment, he'd pushed Andi into the very pregnant Missy.

CAMERON (CONT'D)

Oh no. Did I?! I didn't mean to!

Cameron walks toward Missy and Andi with his hands out, apologetically. Missy, Andi, and Shelly back away from him. Everyone looks afraid of him, except Sherlock.

Sherlock encourages the women back toward their car.

CAMERON (CONT'D)

Missy! Shit. Don't tell Marc, okay?

ANDI
 Seriously?!

SHELLY
 Fuck you, Cam!

CAMERON
 I just, I need that apartment.

Sherlock intercepts Shelly before she runs at Cameron. Carol walks toward Cameron, but Andi grabs her arm.

<p>SHERLOCK -- I'll take care of this. Go have some fun tonight. Tell them Sherly Dimples sent you.</p>	<p>ANDI (signing to Carol) Let him go. He's not worth it.</p>
--	--

The women get in the car and drive to the bar parking lot.

SHERLOCK (CONT'D)
 All of you get in the car.

No one budges.

SHERLOCK (CONT'D)
Now!!!

Carol and Andi scurry to Sherlock's truck. Cameron follows.

INT. SHERLOCK'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Sherlock drives; Carol in the front seat, Cameron on one side of the backseat, Andi as far as possible on the other side.

CAMERON
 You have to believe I'd never say
 that to you. Or push you. It was
 just wrong place, wrong time.

Andi scoffs and snuffles, looking out the window. Cameron reaches forward to touch Carol's shoulder. She flips him off.

EXT. HIDDEN NOOK MOTEL - NIGHT

Andi and Cameron hop out of Sherlock's truck.

CAMERON
 (to Sherlock)
 I'll, uh, I'll see you tomorrow? I
 have a great idea for a new dress.

Sherlock LOCKS the CAR DOORS and drives away.

CAMERON (CONT'D)
 I'll give you a discount!

ANDI

Wow. You really are a troll.

Andi shakes their head at Cameron and walks to the lobby.

INT. HIDDEN NOOK MOTEL - ROOM 5 - DAY

When Andi goes to clean Cameron's old room, the laptop charger sits in the middle of the bed on top of a folded piece of sketch paper.

Andi opens the paper: Cameron sketched a beautiful drawing of Andi in a pilot outfit, with a jet behind them.

Andi crumples the drawing and throws it in the trash can.

EXT. MARC'S HOUSE - FRONT - DAY

Cameron's car pulls into the driveway. Missy opens the curtain, yanks it shut. Marc opens the curtain and stares.

Cameron sees that all his stuff sits in a giant pile under a tarp. He rolls down the window and screams at the house:

CAMERON

Where am I supposed to go?!

INT. STAY 4 LONG MOTEL - LOBBY - DAY

Cameron checks in at a very run-down extended stay motel where dreams go to die. The CSR is an obese sweaty man with a mustache and blank stare; very different vibe from Andi.

SWEATY CSR

Sorry, kid. Two weeks in advance.

CAMERON

I only need a few nights. I don't plan to stay for long.

Sweaty CSR points to the name of the motel: Stay 4 Long.

Cameron opens the envelope he got from Sherly.

CAMERON (CONT'D)

Listen, do you have a computer center I could use? Just to charge my phone and look up other places.

Sweaty CSR holds his hand out. Cameron stares at it.

CAMERON (CONT'D)

Seriously?

Sweaty CSR presents his hand again. Cameron hands him a \$20 bill. Sweaty CSR motions to the computer center.

INT. STAY 4 LONG MOTEL - COMPUTER CENTER - DAY

Cameron sits in a sad excuse for a "computer center" and logs on. He leaps back at the sound of DIAL-UP CONNECTION.

He looks up cheap apartments for rent. The cheapest he finds requires a \$500 down payment. He counts his cash: \$555 left.

He opens his Sludge Critic account. Lots of unread stuff. He gets a notification from Dastardly Skirts (steampunk unicorn band). The singer asks: "Did you even listen to our album?"

Cameron types "No" then lets the cursor blink, blink, blink.

He deletes the text, types "Sorry", lets the cursor blink. He deletes it and opens his profile. He gently hovers over the "deactivate account" button. He clicks it. A pop-up reads:

"Are you sure you want to permanently deactivate account named SludgeFucker69? Note that this will disable your premium account and paid status."

CAMERON

How the fuck you gonna make money?

OLDER WOMAN

You could always sell your used panties online.

CAMERON

Fucking what?!

A tiny older woman stands up from the computer across from Cameron. She wears a pink floral nightgown. This is DORIS (70s+, looks like life chewed her up and spit her out because she's that much of a hard ass). She hobbles to the door.

CAMERON (CONT'D)

No, wait. I'm sorry. I didn't know anyone was there. Don't be scared.

DORIS (OLDER WOMAN)

I ain't afraid of ya. I just don't like the look on your face. Looks like you think the world owes ya when it sure as shit don't.

CAMERON

I fucked up. I really fucked up.
Wait! Um. Do you have an extra bed
in your room? I'll pay. One night.

DORIS

Flattered, but I gave up that life
long ago. That and stripping.

Cameron's eyes go big. Doris opens the door and leaves.

INT. CAMERON'S CAR - NIGHT

Cameron sits in his car, packed with all his stuff from
Marc's. Everything is black and gray and tattered.

He takes out his phone and hovers over Carol's name, then
Andi's name, then Sherlock's name.

CAMERON

Fuck!

Cameron puts down his seat and covers himself with a hoodie.

He stares at the ceiling of his car, at a perfectly round
stain. An overlay of a Sludge comment pops up on the ceiling
from Cameron's memory. "Did you even listen to our album?"

He rolls to his side to avoid it. He closes his eyes.

SAME - LATER

Cameron tosses and turns, now covered with multiple clothes.

CAMERON

Hey, little dude? Lil' Cam, you
there? Cammy? Buddy?

No response. He grunts and covers his face with his hands.

INT. APARTMENT LEASING OFFICE - DAY

Cameron sits across from a leasing agent who's typing-very
slowly-on her keyboard. This is FLORENCE WENDELBROOK, 50s,
surrounded by framed pictures of cats. Lots of cats. Cameron,
bags under his eyes, shifts in his seat as he shares a glance
with big, gaudy eyeballs of a taxidermic cat. The cat has a
name plaque which reads, "HANNIBAL WENDELBROOK, R.I.P."

FLORENCE (LEASING AGENT)

Almost done here.

Cameron smiles and nods.

Florence finishes a very heated Facebook post about someone leaving dog poop in her yard. She CLICKS her MOUSE, then nods like she's just done the world a favor.

FLORENCE (CONT'D)
Allllright, great. So, I looked through your application. And, everything looks perfect.

CAMERON
Really?

FLORENCE
No, dear! Without a referral from your previous landlord who you say here is "out of the country," there's nothing we can do.

CAMERON
I... Can you please help me?

FLORENCE
There's also the issue of you not being employed, isn't there? Mmhmm.

CAMERON
I am. I don't have a W2 but I make money. I promise I'm good for it.

FLORENCE
Good for it, hm?
(to the taxidermy cat)
Did you hear that, Hanny? He says he's good for it.
(to Cameron)
Well, in that case...

Cameron smiles with hope. She laughs to Hannibal the taxidermic cat as if Hannibal is laughing along with her.

CAMERON
I have the down payment in cash.

Cameron fumbles through his pockets and takes out the envelope from Sherlock with a wad of cash. He tries to hand it to her. She puts her hands in her lap and leans forward.

FLORENCE
We're just not that kind of place.
You understand. Now, scoot.

She goes back to typing. Another Facebook post.

INT. BANK - LOBBY - DAY

Cameron sits with restless legs in the lobby.

MARC (O.S.)
You're kidding, right?

Cameron looks up to see Marc in full work attire.

CAMERON
Listen, I. I'm really sorry about what happened. And I -- I mean, I really am. Sorry, I mean.

Marc crosses his arms.

CAMERON (CONT'D)
And I was hoping I, maybe --

MARC
-- I don't have time for this shit anymore, man. It's like, grow the fuck up already. You come to my job? My place of employment, and make a big scene? I'm about to be a dad. A father! Or did you forget?

CAMERON
Just for a bit longer. You know the site only pays me once a month.

Marc motions to a SECURITY GUARD, who escorts Cameron out.

CAMERON (CONT'D)
What? Dude, come on. This is stupid. You're like my brother. And I'm yours! We're brothers, right?

Marc's eyes squint and he shakes his head. The scene slows.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY (EMPATHY FLASHBACK)

Present-Day Cameron suddenly stands at Marc's brother's funeral. It's raining, but Present-Day Cameron isn't wet.

CAMERON
This again? God damnit.

He sees Marc sobbing while Missy holds him. Past Cameron sits next to them, on his phone. Not even paying attention.

CAMERON (CONT'D)
 (under his breath)
 Come on, man. Put the phone away.

INT. BANK - LOBBY DAY (BACK TO PRESENT)

Cameron clutches his chest as the scene speeds back up.

CAMERON
 No. I know I'm not. Because your
 brother died-passed away. Sorry.

MARC
 You know that word loses its
 meaning when you constantly say it
 but don't change your behavior?
 This is over. Get him out of here.

Marc walks away. The Security Guard tosses Cameron out.

INT. CAMERON'S CAR - NIGHT

Another night sleeping in his car. He stares at the ceiling,
 at that perfectly round water stain. He sees the comment from
 Dastardly Skirts: "Did you even listen to our album?"

MARC'S VOICE
 You constantly say it but don't
 change your behavior.

He squints his eyes, then flings himself into the back of his
 car with a grunt. He searches through remaining bags and
 boxes in his car until he finds what he's looking for:
 Dastardly Skirts' demo CD.

He turns on the car. SPANISH MUSIC blares. He feeds a CD into
 the CD slot of his car.

CAMERON
 Come on...

The car's CD PLAYER GRUMBLES and SPITS OUT the CD. SPANISH
 MUSIC. Cameron plops his head on the steering wheel.

He checks the time: 8:52PM, then checks the hours for a local
 radio store: closes at 9PM. He puts the car in gear.

SAME - LATER

While driving, Cameron keeps pushing the CD into the car's CD slot, and the car chews on it for a bit then spits it out. They do this dance over and over.

CAMERON
(whispering)
Come on... Come on...

The car eats the CD and won't spit it back out.

CAMERON (CONT'D)
Come on!

He hits the steering wheel, then punches the CD player. The car's TIRES SQUEAL as Cameron yanks the steering wheel to keep the car on the road. The makeshift PLASTIC WINDOW rips off and FLAPS in the wind. Cameron reaches to fix it.

BLUE LIGHTS. Cameron looks in his rear-view mirror.

CAMERON (CONT'D)
Are you fucking kidding me.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Cameron pulls to the side of the road, cop car behind. POLICE OFFICER (woman, 30s) walks to his car with a flashlight.

INT. CAMERON'S CAR - NIGHT

Cameron rolls down his window.

POLICE OFFICER
My name is Officer Lancer. The reason I'm pulling you over is that you failed to maintain lane.

CAMERON
Yes, sir -- ma'am. Sorry.

OFFICER LANCER (POLICE OFFICER)
Can I see your license and insurance?

Cameron hands his information to Officer Lancer.

OFFICER LANCER (CONT'D)
You were swerving over the double yellow line, and you have plastic hanging off your window.
(MORE)

OFFICER LANCER (CONT'D)
That's a distraction and potential hazard. Have you been drinking tonight?

CAMERON
No! I was trying to play a CD.

OFFICER LANCER
A CD, huh?

CAMERON
Yea, but this old hunk of junk won't play it.

OFFICER LANCER
Sit tight, okay? I'll be right back with you in a minute.

SAME - LATER

Cameron swipes through stuff on his phone, which is at 5% battery. His Sludge Critic app has 99+ new notifications. He keeps getting more notifications of comments and messages.

He clicks to open and sees an anonymous user posted a photo of Cameron, topless, outside of the gay bar. They tagged Cameron's SludgeFucker69 account.

Fans and trolls alike are going bananas over the photo. Comments such as:

- "Who's the fag now?"

- "I knew it!"

- "Bet he luuuuvs moshing lmao"

- "Hypocrisy at its finest."

- "Maybe you'll stop being such a dick now? lol"

- "Isn't this the same guy who bashed Dastardly Skirts for their tutus? What a poser. Dastardly shreds. Swampy AF."

And other comments that are supportive:

- "No judgment here. Metal community accepts all kinds. \m/"

- "Good for you, man. Let it all hang out."

- "Never knew SludgeFucker was so hot. LMK next time you're in NOLA. Small but mighty LGBTQIA+ metal community here."

CAMERON

No. No no no.

He tries to find a way to delete or report the photo. The familiar PTSD sounds of CHILDHOOD FRIENDS LAUGHING and his MOM LAUGHING start to bubble up. The scene slows down.

A flowing overlap of people's voices build in volume, speed, and intensity.

SHERLOCK

Some are just too far gone.

MARC

This is over.

ANDI

You really are a troll.

SHELLY

Misogynist *and* a homophobe.

Cameron has a full-blown, bat-shit flailing meltdown in his car. He punches his dashboard, his steering wheel, his rearview mirror, all while screaming bloody murder.

OFFICER LANCER

Sir? Sir! Calm down.

CAMERON

Fuck you! Fuck you! Leave me alone.
Let me die. I want to fucking die!

Cameron screams.

CUT TO BLACK.

OFFICER LANCER'S VOICE

188 radio I need a wrecker and
ambulance. I have a 1013 times 1.

FADE IN ON:

INT. AMBULANCE - LATER

Cameron lies on the stretcher with blank eyes.

EMT 2 (O.S.)

Dispatch. Show me en route to
Kerning Hospital. Beginning mileage
11,345.

EMT 1 wraps Cameron's hand while EMT 2 drives.

DISPATCH (O.S.)

(over radio)
10-4 en route to Kerning.

EMT 1

(to Cameron)
Want to talk?

Cameron tries to talk, but the panic attack starts again.

EMT 1 (CONT'D)
It's all about the exhale.

Red models a long exhalation. Cameron follows suit. He calms.

EMT 1 (CONT'D)
The sympathetic nervous system gets activated during inhales. Fight or flight. Lots of tiny inhales like you were doing? Makes it worse.

Cameron continues slow, deep breathing.

EMT 1 (CONT'D)
Good. Better, right? The exhale activates the para-sympathetic nervous system. Rest and digest. It helps calm panic attacks. And helps process the big feels.

CAMERON
Shit. That really works.

EMT 1
It's almost like I'm getting my PhD in psychology and am a trained EMT! You ready to talk? We got a solid 10 minutes before Kerning.

INT. AMBULANCE - LATER

Cameron sits, facing EMT 1, who smiles at Cameron. Cameron doesn't hold eye contact for very long.

EMT 1
Dang. What a ride. Andi sounds hot. Can I get their number?
(beat)
Do you have a question for me?

CAMERON
I don't know. Am I really this awful person? What should I do?

EMT 1
Try again.

CAMERON
I --

EMT 1
-- Try again.

CAMERON

Uh... What's your name?

EMT 1

There ya go. Not as dumb as he looks, folks! See, a conversation is a two-way street. I'm Red.

She points to her hair which is, in fact, red.

CAMERON

Should you talk like that to someone who wants to die?

RED

You don't wanna die. You wanna live. I can see it all over you. You just got the volume turned up on life. Sometimes we gotta clear out the pipes; that's all an anxiety attack is. Triggers are a gift, my dude.

CAMERON

I don't know what that means.

RED

A trigger? Hm. Think of it this way. We all deal with painful shit; suffering is an inevitable part of the human experience. Sometimes, big painful stuff happens that we can't process in the moment. Like, I was molested by a gynecologist when I was eleven, but didn't remember it until I was in my thirties. So we kind of store the pain in our psyche to deal with later, when we're hopefully more capable. You following?

CAMERON

I think so. I recently started to remember some stuff, too.

RED

Congrats! A trigger is like a trail head, the starting point of a trail. Something happens in life-a "trigger"-that BOOM makes that trail head visible. If you sit with and follow the feelings, you'll find what most needs your attention. Hard work, but worth it.

The ambulance pulls into the hospital.

CAMERON

Do I really need to go in there?

RED

They'll ask you some questions to see if you're a threat to yourself or others. If you do it right, you'll be out of there tonight. If you do it wrong, you'll be in there for 72 hours minimum. I don't recommend it; the food is crap and it's the most expensive, least relaxing vacation you'll ever have.

CAMERON

Hey, uh. I'm sorry for what happened when you were eleven. You didn't deserve that.

Red smiles.

RED

You're alright, Cameron.

EXT. IMPOUNDMENT LOT - DAY

A car (Uber or taxi or similar) stops and Cameron hops out.

INT. IMPOUNDMENT LOT - DAY

He shows proof of his car title on his phone to the coked-out IMPOUND EMPLOYEE (20s, any gender), who scratches their nose and snuffles. He pulls a wad of cash from his envelope that Sherlock gave him and hands it to the Impound Employee. Cameron looks in the envelope; the cash is getting thin.

INT. CAMERON'S CAR - DAY

Cameron plops the plastic bag of his belongings onto the passenger seat of the car. He starts the car.

The CD PLAYER GRUMBLES, then starts playing the CD. Cameron gasps and takes his hands off the wheel, clearly not wanting to touch anything to irritate the CD player.

He listens to the MUSIC. A KNOCK on the CAR WINDOW.

IMPOUND EMPLOYEE

You wanna come back in? I got other things you could use that cash for.

Impound Employee rubs their nose and sucks their teeth.

CAMERON

Uh, no. Thanks. I was just leaving.

SAME - LATER

Cameron bobs his head while listening to Dastardly Skirts' MUSIC. It's good. It's *really* good.

EXT. RADIO STORE - DAY

Cameron leaves the radio store with a shopping bag, holding the door open for an old couple walking in.

INT. CAMERON'S CAR - DAY

He removes a CD player and headphones from the bag. He gingerly pets the car and presses the Eject button. The car's CD PLAYER GARBLES, then spits out the CD.

CAMERON

Yes! Thank you!

Cameron puts the CD into the portable CD player. Nothing happens. He opens the back of the portable CD player. It doesn't come with batteries. He rolls his eyes.

SAME - LATER

He plops back into the car, this time with batteries. He sits and listens to Dastardly Skirts' demo CD from the very beginning. And the music is *really* good.

He props himself up to look in his rearview mirror, where his leather case beckons him from the backseat (belted in).

Starting quietly then getting louder, the LAUGHTER of the kids overlaps with his MOM'S LAUGHTER.

He turns up the volume on the CD player.

INT. STAY 4 LONG MOTEL - COMPUTER CENTER - DAY

Sweaty CSR stands the background putting \$20 in his pocket.

Cameron goes back and responds to the original Sludge Critic comment: "I listened. Great music. I'll change your rating."

Cameron sits and thinks for a moment, then types: "Also, did you guys make those tutus?"

He clicks POST, then quickly closes out of the site and logs out of the computer before he can change his mind.

His phone vibrates over and over again. He looks down to see multiple notifications in response to his updated review, but only one comment stands out above the rest: "Metal heads can wear dresses, too." by user @R_U_Cirrus?

CAMERON
(to himself)
Metal heads can wear dresses, too.

DORIS (O.S.)
What's a metal head?

Cameron jumps at the sound of Doris's voice. Turns out, she's standing right behind him, squinting to read the screen.

CAMERON
Someone who likes metal music.

DORIS
Why couldn't they wear dresses?

CAMERON
I dunno. Dresses are for...

DORIS
Comfort? Really airs it out.

Cameron's face scrunches at the thought of old lady parts.

DORIS (CONT'D)
Are all metal heads men?

CAMERON
No. Anyone's allowed. Why?

DORIS
Oh child. You're all twisted up in there, aren't you? Are you a pilot?

CAMERON
No. I'm a... Music crit -- Well, I don't know. I like fashio -- I'm...

DORIS

Don't give yourself a heart attack.
I'm asking on account of your
screen user name-is that what they
call it?-saying Cirrus.

CAMERON

What?

Doris moves to the other side of the desk and sits down at
the computer across from Cameron.

DORIS

Cirrus is a type of airplane.

Cameron clicks on the @R_U_Cirrus account and looks at their
account activity. The profile is a drawing of an airplane
with legs and a cowboy hat.

Cameron smiles as he realizes who the user really is: Andi.

EXT. HIDDEN NOOK MOTEL - DAY

Cameron parks his car and takes a big breath in and out.

INT. HIDDEN NOOK MOTEL - FRONT DESK CHECK-IN - DAY

Cameron slowly enters. Andi sits behind the desk, head down.

ANDI

Be right with you.

CAMERON

Take your time.

Andi pauses at Cameron's voice.

ANDI

I wondered if you'd come back.

CAMERON

I almost called you, many times.

ANDI

Yea well, put your good intentions
in one hand and shit in another and
see which hand fills up first.

CAMERON?

What?

They stand silently. Finally, Andi looks up at Cameron.

ANDI

Are you here to apologize?

CAMERON

Let's go on an adventure.

ANDI

Are you joking?

CAMERON

There's this band called Dastardly Skirts that I sort of, well. I didn't give them a chance at first.

ANDI

By "didn't give them a chance" you mean, judged them harshly and publicly shamed them? That chance?

CAMERON

Something like that. I was drunk and said it in passing. But --

ANDI

-- It wasn't in passing. It was their dream. You shat directly on the hairy chest of their dreams.

CAMERON

Right. You're right.

Andi rolls their eyes and nods their head to give Cameron visual permission to continue with his bullshit.

CAMERON (CONT'D)

I listened.

ANDI

To?

CAMERON

To you. And to them. I listened to you to listen to them.

Andi gives a big, sarcastic thumbs up.

CAMERON (CONT'D)

They're good. Really good. And. They're playing tonight.

Cameron unfolds a flyer and puts it on the desk. Andi pretends not to look at it, but clearly eyeballs it.

CAMERON (CONT'D)
Will you come with me?

ANDI
Are "freaks" allowed?

CAMERON
Only freaks are permitted.

Andi slightly smirks, then catches themselves and stops.

ANDI
Yea, I can't.

CAMERON
Can't, or won't?

ANDI
Don't do that. Don't try to feed me
my own medicine. I literally can't
go tonight. Bryan-well-let's just
say I'm the only one working here
now. I mean aside from two part-
time college kids-I think they're
boning by the way-and there's no
way I can get someone to cover on
such short notice.
(beat)
But even if I could...

CAMERON
Right. I get it.

ANDI
Maybe you should go alone. It's
what you prefer anyway, right?

Cameron nods like he deserved it and leaves.

CAMERON
Bye, Andi.

Behind the desk is the drawing Cameron made for Andi, with
Andi dressed as a pilot standing in front of a jet. It's the
same drawing that Andi had crumpled and thrown away, except
it was retrieved from the trash can and flattened out.

Andi deflates and slumps in their chair.

INT. VINTAGE CLOTHING STORE - DAY

Cameron walks in.

SHERLOCK (O.S.)
Welcome in!

CAMERON
(altering his voice)
Thanks.

Cameron searches through colorful shirts. He sees Sherlock and Carol and keeps a good distance from both of them.

SAME - LATER

Cameron lays a few items on the counter in front of Sherlock.

SHERLOCK
Find everything you needed?

CAMERON
Not quite.

SHERLOCK?
Oh?

Sherlock looks up and locks eyes with Cameron.

SHERLOCK
Oh.

CAMERON
Hey, Sherly.

Hands on his hips, Sherlock lets out a huge exhale. They stand looking at each other for a while.

CAMERON (CONT'D)
Listen, I --

SHERLOCK
-- Oh shut up and come here.

He holds his arms out to Cameron. Cameron eyes him suspiciously, then walks around the counter and hugs him.

CAMERON
I'm sorry, and thank you.

SHERLOCK
I know, baby. Water under the bridge. God knows the untowardly stuff I've done online to make ends meet. I'm in the doghouse with Andi, too. Not a fun place to be.

CAMERON

Hey, did you win? The competition?

SHERLOCK

Not even close.

CAMERON

Shit. You okay?

SHERLOCK

Better than okay! I'm retired! Once people heard of my retirement, I had wannabe queens lining up out the door! Time to hang up the heels and pass on my knowledge. You ever tried these?

Sherlock flings his leg on the counter with impressive dexterity. He's wearing bright red, sparkly Crocs.

SHERLOCK (CONT'D)

Life-changing, I tell you. And you can adorn them with little gems!

Sherlock shows off a little Croc charm that's a high heel.

SHERLOCK (CONT'D)

Ah.

CAMERON?

What?

Sherlock nods toward Carol. Cameron sheepishly waves at her.

Carol pantomimes spinning a handle on her hand and watches as her middle finger slowly extends. She gasps in fake shock at the middle finger, turns on her heels, and walks away.

SHERLOCK

Leave it. She'll take a bit more time. I'm like a happy little goldfish-emphasis on gold-always in the now. She's more like...

CAMERON

An elephant?

SHERLOCK

Are those the ones that never forget? I can never remember.

CAMERON

I thought she knew. About it all.

SHERLOCK

Love's funny like that.

Cameron chokes on his spit.

CAMERON

Love?

SHERLOCK

I tell her she reads too many romance novels where men have 20-packs of abs and drive McLarens. Real men are shit shows who're trying like hell to balance emotions and what society barks at us with receding hair lines and sore knees. I can't pretend to understand the complexity of that woman's brain. She hated you, you won her over, then you, well...

CAMERON

I really am sorry. If only I could talk to her and tell her that.

SHERLOCK

You think redemption happens on your timeline? You're the only one holding your camera, the only one seeing your point of view. Carol's got her own POV, doesn't she? The protagonist of her own life. And right now? You're the villain. That'll be \$18.

CAMERON

Did I get a discount?

SHERLOCK

I made sure to add asshole tax.

CAMERON

Sounds painful.

SHERLOCK

A joke? Dear me! Is it a full moon?

CAMERON

Yea I think the Peter Pan moon is aligned with the Third Toe star.

SHERLOCK

(cackling)

What on Earth has gotten into you?

CAMERON

My whole life imploded and I realized the common denominator.

SHERLOCK

Rebirth is painful, baby. Worth it.

Cameron hands Sherlock a \$20 bill. Sherlock hands him back \$2 and Cameron puts it in the "SHOW ME YOUR TIPS" jar. He keeps looking over his shoulder at where he knows Carol is.

CAMERON

How long should I give her?

SHERLOCK

Dear Lorde--the musician not the zombie--get the hell out of here before I kick your ass with these sparkly cloud shoes. Give it time. Let it ride. Hold on loosely.

INT. CONCERT - NIGHT

LOUD live METAL MUSIC. Thick clouds of smoke. Laughter. People making out. Cameron walks through the crowd wearing a bright, flamboyant shirt he got from Sherlock's store. He has product in his hair and eyeliner on.

Based on his facial expressions, Cameron seems to oscillate between blinding confidence and near-debilitating insecurity.

SAME - LATER

Cameron bobs his head listening to Dastardly Skirts. He looks around and sees other people wearing tutus. Like, big badass dudes with spikes and leather... And tutus.

Cameron smiles and dances with a bit more physical freedom as his previously boxed-in and limited ideas of "manly" and "metal" shatter and disintegrate.

He unbuttons a couple buttons on his shirt, letting some of his chest show. He dances, throwing himself into a mosh pit.

He's in his own world. A deep voice yells from behind him.

DEEP VOICE

Hey, pussy!

Cameron turns around to see Andi. He grabs Andi and lifts them and spins them around. They talk over the loud music.

ANDI
 Careful! Someone might think
 we're... gas efficient.

CAMERON
 I don't give a fuck!

They smile and rock out to the gritty SLUDGE METAL MUSIC.

ANDI
 This music really gets a lot of
 rage out. I think I just stopped
 being mad at my father.

EXT. CONCERT - NIGHT

Andi and Cameron sit on the curb, both very sweaty.

CAMERON
 I went to apologize to her. And I
 updated the comment for these guys.
 But I can't find a place to live.

ANDI
 Moral dessert.

CAMERON
 What?

ANDI
 You're looking for moral dessert.
 You're not doing the kind thing
 because it's the kind thing. You're
 doing the kind thing and then
 saying, "Great big momma in the
 sky? I was a good little boy. Can I
 haz some vanilla ice cream with
 crushed up bits of Oreos in it?"

CAMERON
 Oddly specific.

ANDI
 I haven't had ice cream in years-
 lactose intolerant-but I can dream.
 Listen, what if it's like,
 emotional debt? Like, you were a
 jerk wad for your whole life --

CAMERON
 -- Thanks. --

ANDI

-- Happy to oblige. And you've changed your ways, what, in the last week? I've had bowel movements that lasted longer than that.

CAMERON
Lactose intolerance?

ANDI (CONT'D)
Lactose intolerance.

ANDI (CONT'D)

All I'm saying is, maybe take a breath. Show a bit of resolve.

Dastardly Skirts walks out of the venue. Andi nods to Cameron, who dusts himself off and walks up to the band.

CAMERON

Excuse me?

SINGER

Yea?

Cameron and the Singer and band walk off and talk.

SAME - MOMENTS LATER

Cameron and the Singer shake hands. He walks back to Andi.

CAMERON

Where's Javier?

ANDI

I Uber-ed. How'd it go?

Cameron shrugs and walks to his car. Andi canters after him.

INT. CAMERON'S CAR - NIGHT

They drive in silence, with a bit of RUFFLING of the PLASTIC over the passenger window. No Spanish music plays.

ANDI

Donde esta la musica española?

CAMERON

It stopped playing.

ANDI

How? You pressed the off button?

CAMERON

Something like that.

ANDI

Stop being so cryptic! You're not as cool as you think you are.

CAMERON

I punched it and then went to the hospital. The next day, it worked.

ANDI

You are so cool! You gonna spill the beans or do I need to get out the tickle sticks?

Andi wiggles their fingers. (Fingers = tickle sticks.)

CAMERON

You'd be great at interrogation. Uh. They didn't really care.

ANDI

What? Seriously?

CAMERON

I blew it up in my head as this huge deal. It wasn't. Or it was but they got over it.

ANDI

Humans are resilient, adaptable, disgusting, beautiful flesh sacks.

CAMERON

I think maybe I'm a nobody.

ANDI

Oh, the freedom! Welcome to the club, Shy. Blank canvas.

CAMERON

They said my comment sucked because of the following I have-or had-but that it actually brought them more publicity so it worked out fine. Their drummer quit after it but they got some hot chick drummer who's apparently a badass. Which I already kind of knew, because --

ANDI

-- You'll still quit, right? The music critic-ing?

CAMERON

I've been having these episodes.

ANDI

Episodes?

CAMERON

Where it's like I'm suddenly yanked into other people's world and feeling their bad feelings. I knew their drummer quit before they told me he did. I saw it. Or, felt it.

ANDI

That's called empathy. And intuition. No feelings are bad, by the way. At least according to my therapist, Amy. She's a saint.

CAMERON

Well it fucking sucks.

ANDI

Not always.

CAMERON (CONT'D)

There's all these ideas I had for how I wanted my life to look. When those failed, I sort of fell into this world. I was stuck. And then.

ANDI (CONT'D)

Then?

CAMERON

I met you.

Andi playfully hits Cameron, then grabs their own chest.

ANDI

Eewwww grrooosss. The love hurts. So, you were constipated in your spirit and I helped clear out the pipes. I'm a spiritual laxative.

CAMERON

You're weird.

Andi puts their hands in prayer position and bows.

ANDI

Namaste. When we get back home, I have something to give you.

CAMERON

Please, no more pond water juice.

INT. HIDDEN NOOK MOTEL - FRONT DESK CHECK-IN - DAY

Cameron stands in the lobby while Andi messes through stuff behind the counter. Random items get thrown and Cameron ducks to miss them. A pen. Some crumpled paper. A rubber duck.

Cameron goes to sit down but right before he does, Andi sets a gift bag on the counter. It says, "Times are hard. Times are tough. Here's your fucking birthday stuff."

CAMERON

Birthday?

ANDI

Yea, when is your birthday?

CAMERON

January 23rd.

ANDI

Well then happy late birthday. Or, early birthday. Whatever, it's the only bag I had that'd fit.

CAMERON

I don't have anything for you.

ANDI

It's not a contest. But if it was, I'd win. Open it. But also can I get the bag back when you're done? It's a great bag.

Cameron opens the bag. Inside is a new-ish laptop. He gasps.

CAMERON

Is this...

ANDI

No. I mean, yes. It's a laptop. No, it's not yours. I'm sorry. And it's used, not new. Best I could do.

CAMERON

You didn't have to.

ANDI

There's one other thing.

Cameron ruffles in the bag and pulls out a THUMBS UP sticker.

ANDI (CONT'D)

I thought that matched you better.
I'll fix the window too.

(MORE)

ANDI (CONT'D)

I just need some time to sell my
body on the street corner. I
thought Javier would get me enough,
but.

CAMERON

Wait. You sold Javier? Why?!

ANDI

(choked up)

Too soon. Too soon.

Cameron grabs Andi and pulls them into a hug.

ANDI (CONT'D)

You're really getting into this
hugging thing, aren't you? Releases
oxytocin, you know.

CAMERON

You could sell your used underwear.

ANDI

Cameron! How presumptuous of you to
assume I wear underwear.

CAMERON

Gross.

EXT. HIDDEN NOOK MOTEL - NIGHT

Andi watches as Cameron sits in his car and is about to back
out. They quickly TAP on the WINDOW. Cameron rolls it down.

ANDI

Quit the internet troll gig.

CAMERON

Need to find a place to live first.

ANDI

You could work here! And live here!

CAMERON

Have you seen how I am with people?

ANDI

You've met my brother.

Cameron nods.

ANDI (CONT'D)

Then you know anything will be an improvement.

CAMERON

A janitor at a crappy motel. Great.

ANDI

Don't you dare talk about my Nookie that way. The energy we put out into the world is what we attract back to us, I think. And you haven't been particularly kind.

CAMERON

I've been a dick.

ANDI

Your words! Not mine! But yea, a dick. A total dick. A big ol' flaccid wiener. Like a wacky wailing inflatable arm flailing tube man floppy cock.

Cameron does a, "Get on with it" hand motion.

ANDI (CONT'D)

You're attracting flaccid dickness back to you. See what I mean?

Cameron looks at Andi. Andi takes a moment to slow down.

ANDI (CONT'D)

Right. A lot of words when a few would do. Um, dot dot dot. Okay, listen. My mom has Alzheimer's.

CAMERON

She's alive?

ANDI

What? Yea.

CAMERON

Your brother said she was dead.

ANDI

Dead to him, maybe. She doesn't recognize us really. He never goes to see her. She talks about him all the time. So annoying. Anyway. Her getting sick has shown me how quick it goes. It can change like that.

Andi tries to snap, but can't. They try again. No dice. They look to Cameron expectantly. He snaps.

ANDI (CONT'D)

Like that. I think we spend way too much damn time shoulding all over ourselves. "How should I act? What should I do?" Like we're fulfilling some etheric to-do list handed to us by the powers that be and we'll be scored by a judging panel when our flesh prison rots away.

CAMERON

Do you want to get back in the car?

ANDI

No, I really gotta poop. Shy, listen. You're not a shitty person. I think you think you are. And maybe you've done some shitty things. We all have. I realized through all this that we're all five nasty comments away from being an internet troll. You know? Buddha knows I've had my social justice warrior posts where I thought I was doing the world a favor, but really I was flaccid dicking it, too. Thinking I knew better from my limited corner of the universe. I can see light in you, behind your eyes. I know you're in there. If you work here, as unglamorous as that may sound, you can hit Pause for a bit. Figure out what's next.

CAMERON

Okay.

ANDI

Okay, you'll do it?!

CAMERON

Okay, I'll stay. But only for a bit. And only because my spine can't handle sleeping in the car anymore. But I'm not working here.

ANDI

Shy, you've been sleeping in your car? Why didn't you call me? We could've worked something out.

Cameron shrugs.

INT. HIDDEN NOOK MOTEL - ROOM 5 - NIGHT

The room is set up how it was before, leather case safely tucked under the desk. Cameron carefully places the thumbs up sticker on the laptop. He hops back to Sludge Critic where @R_U_Cirrus commented, "Metal heads can wear dresses, too."

He looks at his the case under the desk.

Starting quietly, getting louder, the LAUGHTER of the kids overlaps with his MOM'S LAUGHTER and the EMPATHY memories. He starts taking rapid inhalations, increasing the panic.

RED'S VOICE

You just got the volume turned up
on life. It's all about the exhale.

He does slow deep breaths. The volume moves down, down, down.

RED'S VOICE (CONT'D)

If you sit with and follow the
feelings, you'll find what most
needs your attention.

He walks to the desk and tenderly pulls out the leather case. As he holds it in his lap, the SOUNDS from his PAST PAIN and EMPATHY experiences get louder and louder.

CAMERON

I'm coming for you, little dude.

He SNAPS OPEN the CASE. The sounds get louder. He shudders and continues breathing, clutching the case.

INT. HIDDEN NOOK MOTEL - ROOM 5 - DAY

Various fast food and delivery containers litter the room. Cameron jams out to a DEMO CD. He has his sketchpad out with drawings of badass dresses that can be worn by any gender.

Cameron TYPES and CLICKS away on the laptop. On the screen is a brand new website he's created called Sludge Fashion. Underneath the title is: "Metal heads can wear dresses, too."

He has pictures of his dress designs posted, as well as an option for custom designs.

CAMERON

What do you think?

Suddenly, Young Cameron jumps on the bed behind him and gasps in delight at the site. Adult Cameron clicks PUBLISH SITE.

He opens Sludge Music, clicks a mean comment, copies the topless gay bar photo, and puts it as his profile picture.

He changes his bio from "Music critic. Fuck you." to "Metal heads can wear dresses, too." and links to his new site.

He clicks Save and exits out of the site and computer.

INT. CAMERON'S CAR - DAY

Cameron pulls into a gas station, parking at a pump. He empties his pockets. \$12.34 left.

Cameron checks his phone for sales on his new website. There are none. He checks views. There've been 3 views.

He opens Sludge Critic and sees a notification at the top: "WARNING: Your paid premium status has lapsed."

He turns on the radio and finds the Spanish channel for old time's sake, his car at 1/4 tank. He pats the dashboard.

INT. HIDDEN NOOK MOTEL - FRONT DESK CHECK-IN - DAY

Cameron walks into the front desk lobby. There's GIGGLING from behind the front desk. Cameron clears his throat.

Two CUSTOMER SERVICE REPS (any gender, any ethnicity - as long as there's a clear "vibe") pop up and fix their hair.

CSR 1
Hiiiiii. How can we help?
(to CSR 2)
Stop!

CSR 2 holds their hands up in playful surrender.

CAMERON
I'm looking for Andi.

CSR 2 grabs a walkie talkie, then CSR 1 tries to snag it from them. They playfully wrestle over the walkie talkie.

CSR 1
Knock it off!
(to Cameron)
Sorry, sir. You'll have to excuse this one. Too much caffeine.

Impassioned, CSR 2 stands up and opens their arms.

CSR 2
Coffee is the nectar OF THE GODS!!!

CSR 1 uses this opportunity to page Andi.

CSR 1
(into walkie talkie)
Candy Lizard to Eagle One, come in.

ANDI
(through walkie talkie)
Eagle One. Go ahead, Candy Lizard.

CSR 1
(into walkie talkie)
There's a Mike Alpha November here.

ANDI
(through walkie talkie)
Is it a Charlie Oscar Papa?

CSR 2 mouths the phonetic letters to spell C-O-P.

CSR 2
COP! It means cop.

CSR 1
I know it does. Sshhh!

CSR 2 (CONT'D)
Are you a cop?

CSR 1 (CONT'D)
He's obviously not a cop.
(into walkie talkie)
Negative. He's tall and shy and has
nice hair. Kind of bad posture.

Cameron stands up straighter.

CAMERON
I'm right here...

ANDI
(through walkie)
Don't let him leave! Eagle
One over and out.

SAME - LATER

Cameron sits in a seat in the lobby. Andi flings open the door and bangs on their chest like a gorilla. The CSRs start howling. Andi does an orchestral motion and there's silence. The CSRs go back to whatever they do when no one is looking.

ANDI

Come here, you. Is the "super last resort" upon us? Are you finally ready to fulfill your true calling as a janitor at a crappy motel?

Cameron nods and stands. Andi squeezes his midsection and manages to pick him up with a surprisingly strong hug.

INT. HIDDEN NOOK MOTEL - ANY ROOM - DAY

Andi rolls a SQUEAKY CART into a motel room to clean it. Andi wears sea-foam dish gloves as they clean.

ANDI

Don't just stand there. Help.

Cameron grabs cleaning supplies.

ANDI (CONT'D)

First lesson is that we don't half-ass anything here. I can't control the bones of this lass, but we can control how clean she is.

Cameron nods and starts cleaning.

ANDI (CONT'D)

Wait!

Andi tosses a pair of pink dish gloves to Cameron. He looks at Andi like, "Really?" Andi smiles like, "Yea, bro. Yea."

Cameron puts on the gloves and starts cleaning.

ANDI (CONT'D)

Gotta protect those tickle sticks and artist hands.

CAMERON

Not sure I'll be making any dresses any time soon.

ANDI

Why not?

CAMERON

I made a website for my dresses.

ANDI

Shy! That's so cool!

CAMERON
Apparently not. Zero orders.

ANDI
When did you make it? The site?

CAMERON
Almost a week ago. Spent the rest
of my money on it.

Andi lets out a thunderous laugh and snort.

CAMERON (CONT'D)
What?
(beat)
What?!

ANDI
Give the universe a chance to catch
up. You missed a spot.

Andi points to the corner the mirror. Cameron wipes.

CAMERON
You were right, by the way.

ANDI
Of course I was. About what?

CAMERON
They're totally banging.

ANDI
Oh my god, right? Be a little less
obvious, people. I can smell the
pheromones from here.

INT. HIDDEN NOOK MOTEL - ROOM 5 - NIGHT

Time has passed, which is shown by the clearly lived-in room. The pink gum is off of the peephole. Cameron has a YouTube video open, learning how to fix an air conditioner.

Next to him is a library book on American Sign Language, handwritten letters made out to Sherly, Carol, Shelly, Mom, and "For the lil alien".

Cameron works on a sketch of a weird-looking helmet. Young Cameron jumps on the other bed in the motel room.

YOUNG CAMERON
And it should have WINGS!

ADULT CAMERON

Wings, huh? Like dragon wings?

Young Cameron shakes his head no, grabs the pen, and draws something on the helmet, just out of the camera's focus.

ADULT CAMERON (CONT'D)

You're pretty cool, you know that?

YOUNG CAMERON

Yea duh!

Young Cameron goes back to jumping on the bed. He reaches out to Adult Cameron, inviting him to jump. He hem haws a bit, then hops on the other bed and jumps and flails and laughs.

EXT. MARC'S HOUSE - FRONT - DAY

Marc opens the door and the envelope falls to the ground.

The envelope says, "For the little alien" on the front.

Missy opens the door with a swaddled baby strapped to her. Marc opens the envelope and shows Missy: it's filled with cash and a handwritten letter. They read the letter.

INT. HIDDEN NOOK MOTEL - FRONT DESK CHECK-IN - DAY

Andi sketches a shoe monster with big googly eyes. Cameron reloads his website on his laptop. Zero sales.

CAMERON

Maybe I should reactivate my Sludge Music account.

ANDI

And bring back SludgeFucker69? No. He belongs dead. Keep him dead. Don't Jesus the SludgeFucker.

Cameron slouches and pouts. Andi rubs Cameron's shoulders.

CAMERON

I figured if I followed my dream...

ANDI

You've got some trust to rebuild.

CAMERON

I wrote the letters! I made shit right with you! What else can I do?

ANDI

I'm talking about with you. Your heart is probably a bit leery of you since you blatantly hid from and ignored it for so long.

CAMERON

I wish I could go back. To not giving a shit.

ANDI

Do you really? I don't. You're way better now. You have more flavors.

CAMERON

Flavors?

ANDI

Yea, you used to only be a giant asshole. But now sometimes you're a tiny asshole. Like a tiny little puckered asterisk mark. Let go of the outcome. Do what you can, and then let it go.

Cameron nods.

ANDI (CONT'D)

Now go clean room 6. I hear they were quite noisy so, good luck.

CAMERON

Gross. This is exhausting.

ANDI

Cleaning up messes? Sure is. Totally worth it, though.

Cameron squints at Andi. The meaning isn't lost on him.

INT. HIDDEN NOOK MOTEL - FRONT DESK CHECK-IN - DAY

The season has changed. All signs in and outside of Hidden Nook are now spelled correctly thanks to Cameron and designed flawlessly thanks to Andi. Dressed for winter, Andi sketches a jar of peanut butter with a rocket pack on.

Cameron sketches dresses.

ANDI

Any sales?

CAMERON

I dunno. I stopped checking.

ANDI

Who are you, and what have you done with my Shy Guy? What if someone ordered! Where's your laptop?

Cameron shrugs.

ANDI (CONT'D)

Someone may have ordered a custom strap-on for a sex party! Er-sorry. I've been reading too much smut. Have you heard from Carol? Or Marc?

Cameron shakes his head no. Andi shoves Cameron's phone in front of his face. It unlocks.

ANDI (CONT'D)

Will I find anything weird on here?

CAMERON

Probably.

Andi opens the web browser. There are tabs open already. It's open to an ASL site. Another tab is about ACoA (Adult Children of Alcoholics). Another is Sludge Fashion. Andi refreshes to see if there are any purchases. There aren't.

ANDI

It'll happen. I can feel it.

Andi squeezes Cameron and kisses him on the cheek.

CAMERON

Personal space!

Andi holds their hands up in surrender. The door DINGS as someone enters. Cameron looks up to see Carol. She looks beautiful. Cameron almost falls out of his chair.

ANDI

(signing)

What's up, slut?

Carol holds up an envelope that says "Carol" on it.

CAROL

(signing)

I'm here for the awkward cutie.

CAMERON
(slowly signing)
You think I'm cute?

She smiles, then does a "so-so" motion with her hand.

CAMERON (CONT'D)
(signing)
You lie!

CAROL
(signing; to Andi)
Can I borrow him?

Andi goes to slap Cameron's ass and he blocks their hand.

ANDI
Personal space, I know. I know.

Through the window, we see Cameron and Carol sit on the curb. Andi watches them, smiling. The two sit quietly for a bit, then Carol grabs Cameron's arm and wraps it around her.

In the motel, Andi jumps at an AWOOGA sound. Andi looks to find the source of the noise, but can't find the laptop.

ANDI (CONT'D)
Laptop, laptop, laptop. Aha!

Andi looks at Cameron's cell: Cameron got his first sale on Sludge Fashion. It's a custom order. "Can you make tutus?"

ANDI (CONT'D)
Shy! SHY!

Andi looks up through the window, where Carol nuzzles her head in to the hidden nook of Cameron's neck. He leans his head on hers. Sherlock's truck pulls up in front of them.

Andi smiles and pats the walls of the motel.

ANDI (CONT'D)
You're a sneaky ol' gal, aren't ya?

The AIR CONDITIONING KICKS ON as confirmation.

FADE TO BLACK.

Suddenly, a toy-like HONK of a HORN.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIDDEN NOOK MOTEL - DAY

Cameron walks a tiny scooter off Sherlock's truck bed's ramp. Andi stumbles out of the motel and hugs the scooter, crying.

ANDI

Javier! But how did you?

Cameron nods to Sherlock. Sherlock claps loudly in the air.

SHERLOCK

Apprentices!!!

TWO YOUNG APPRENTICES (men, 20s, queens-in-the-making) hop out of the truck on cue, holding a box. One wears a poofy dress with a tutu-style skirt, and the other wears pink sweats and his hair in curlers. Andi hops on the scooter.

CAMERON

You look so gas efficient.

Cameron does a bro handshake with the Apprentices and hands Andi what's inside the box: A customized helmet with tiny aviation wings on each side. It's an airplane.

Young Cameron squeezes Adult Cameron. Adult Cameron musses his hair and squeezes him back.

Andi locks eyes with Cameron. Andi smiles, hand on their chest. Cameron puts his hand to his chest, smiling.

CUT TO BLACK.

THE END.