

Functional

A family drama series about holding onto what matters
in a world that's coming apart.

Screenplay
by
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TITLE: 1997

BEGIN MONTAGE: FLASHBACK TO EMMA'S ADOLESCENCE (1997)

Different forms of silence inhabit each scene

EXT. YOUNG EMMA'S GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE - COASTAL DECK - DAY

A gray day. A deck overlooks Puget Sound. Emma (14, angsty teen) sits in a WOODEN CHAIR next to her stern GRANDMOTHER. No words, no eye contact. A dense, OPPRESSIVE SILENCE. Emma fidgets with a beaded bracelet (*this is the same bracelet we'll see in Adult Emma's opening monologue*)

INT. YOUNG EMMA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Empty house. Emma enters the kitchen and reads a NOTE on the FRIDGE: "Back late."

INT. YOUNG EMMA'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Emma, in a TOWEL, searches for her reflection in a hazy mirror. Opens a drawer: RAZOR BLADES, OINTMENT, BANDAGES. A TENSE INHALE and LONG EXHALE.

INT. YOUNG EMMA'S HOUSE - FOYER/ STAIRS/ LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Empty house. Emma glances at the empty couch in a lifeless living room (*this couch is nearly identical to the Baker's present-day couch*). She walks through a hall decorated with pictures of her parents as they accept awards. One old family photo.

INT. YOUNG EMMA'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Emma sits by her open bedroom window overlooking an empty driveway. Expressionless. Smokes pot.

INT. HOUSE PARTY - NIGHT

Emma drinks from a RED CUP in a crush of TEENAGERS. Bass THUMPS. UNDERWATER SILENCE. Emma looks like she might float out of her body.

INT. HOUSE PARTY - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Emma stares at the ceiling with a blank face as her body moves from the boy's thrusts. Numbness. Counterfeit affection.

INT. YOUNG EMMA'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

Emma sits on the floor in a corner of her bedroom, blood-streaked TISSUE pressed against her arm. Curls her knees into her chest. Sobs.

EXT. YOUNG EMMA'S HOUSE - FRONT YARD - DAY

Two uniformed HOSPITAL WORKERS escort Emma across a front lawn toward a VAN with an open side door. Emma pulls, cries, looks over her shoulder at statue-like MOTHER AND FATHER in the doorway. Van door closes to reveal logo: Northwest Children's Hospital.

INT. NORTHWEST CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL - GROUP THERAPY ROOM - DAY

Emma, eyes glazed, sits in a semi-circle of wilted TEENAGERS that face a beaten-down FACILITATOR as she drones on soundlessly.

INT. NORTHWEST CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL - EMMA'S ROOM - LATE NIGHT

Emma curls into a fetal position in a NARROW BED with white sheets. Clutches a left-behind CHEAP STUFFED BEAR. Stares numbly into the near-darkness.

CLOSE ON: YOUNG EMMA'S EYES.

YOUNG EMMA (V.O.)
I didn't fall apart. I was never
whole to begin with.

END MONTAGE.

SMASH TO BLACK

TITLE: *Functional*

TITLE: 2025

INT. LINCOLN HILLS HIGH - HEALTH CLASSROOM - LATE MORNING

CLOSE ON: ADULT EMMA'S EYES.

WIDEN TO: REVEAL EMMA'S FACE

EMMA
(patiently, intensely)
What. Is. Health?

BEGIN A SLOW, DELIBERATE ZOOM-OUT.

Behind EMMA BAKER (early 40s, kind eyes, natural beauty),
only a blurred WHITEBOARD. SILENCE with AMBIENT, REAL-WORLD
SOUNDS.

EMMA (CONT'D)
Is it physical—A beautiful, age-
defying body built with vitamins,
workouts, and a perfect tan?
(pause)
Is it social—A sense of belonging
built on friends, followers, and
likes?
(pause)
Is it financial—Enough money to
eat well, live comfortably, and
buy whatever you want?
(pause)
Is it spiritual—Faith in something
bigger than us that makes sense of
life?
(pause)
Is it cognitive—Mental sharpness,
achievement, a mind that keeps
climbing?
(pause)
Is it psychological—Inner
stability created through managing
your thoughts, feelings, and
behaviors?

We begin to see more of her surroundings: large windows,
whiteboards, HANGING and POTTED PLANTS in corners. One wall
POSTER reads: "You are not your thoughts." Another POSTER:
"Occupy Yourself."

Emma is perched on the edge of her DESK. Poised. Grounded. Warm—but serious. Behind her: a short stack of FABRIC LINED WOODEN BASKETS.

At the top of the whiteboard: "Junior Health: 3rd Period" and "Mrs. Baker." In the middle of the whiteboard: "REAL HEALTH = KNOWING YOURSELF"

EMMA (CONT'D)

Every one of us is made from the same stuff—but built differently. Wired differently. Raised differently. We see the world in our own way. And because of that, we'll each define health differently—at different times in our lives. But here's what never changes:

(pause)

You are the sum of how you think, how you feel, how you relate, and what you CHOOSE.

(pause)

Your life will be shaped by what happens to you—and what you do with it. And your ability to choose? That depends on the skills you've built. And those skills will decide the shape of your life—and how it feels to live it.

The class of 25 JUNIOR-LEVEL STUDENTS sits in STUNNED SILENCE. They're attentive—even with phones in their hands and on their desks.

EMMA (CONT'D)

This is not going to be a typical health class.

(pause)

We're not here to talk about body parts or rehearse outdated nutrition charts—We're not going to pretend you aren't already googling everything you're curious about.

Scattered laughter. Emma smiles slightly, fiddles for just a second with her beaded bracelet (*the same one from Young Emma's opening montage*).

EMMA (CONT'D)

The world is changing. Fast. Your lives are not like any generation that came before you. So we won't use old methods or recycle old ideas.

(pause)

We're going to go deeper.

(pause)

We're going to ask what's BEHIND health. We're going to talk about what it means to take care of yourself--In a world that rarely cares how you're REALLY doing.

She pauses. Lets it land.

EMMA (CONT'D)

You'll earn your grade in this class. But this class is not about making a grade.

(pause)

It's about making YOURSELF.

BLACK

TITLE: THREE DAYS EARLIER

Subtle visual change, like a color grade shift, to ease the audience into the location and chronology.

INT. SUV - LINCOLN HILLS NEIGHBORHOOD - SATURDAY MORNING

A tree-lined street. Birdsong. Crisp early fall morning. A mid-priced SUV with SOUTH CAROLINA PLATES rolls slowly through the manicured outskirts of Lincoln Hills--a suburban haven of quiet wealth. Perfect hedges. A few open garages offer glimpses of luxury cars and luxury toys.

The BAKER FAMILY drives down the street. Windows up. Inside the SUV, COMFORTABLE SILENCE. A touch of anxiety.

Emma sits in the passenger seat, alert but unreadable. She watches a TEENAGER pass by on a MOTORIZED SCOOTER-AIRPODS in, face blank.

In the back seat: NOAH BAKER (12, cute, skipped-a-grade smarty) scrolls an IPAD, brow furrowed as he conducts research. AMELIA BAKER (16, lowkey defiant, a striking natural beauty) sketches the neighborhood in a SPIRAL ART NOTEBOOK. She occasionally looks out the window. Her sketch shows symmetry. Wealth. Sterility.

MICHAEL BAKER (early 40s, handsome and composed tech exec) drives. Calm, but alert. One hand TAPS his thigh. Lets out a long WHISTLE at the fancy digs.

They pass a sign: "LINCOLN HILLS - A Community of Excellence." An emblem: three perfect trees, no roots.

MICHAEL
Rootless trees. Welcome to the
future.

He looks at Emma, who half-smiles, eyes on a MOTHER who pushes a STROLLER and talks on her BLUETOOTH EARPIECE. The TODDLER in the stroller is mesmerized by an IPAD.

EMMA
Or the end.

Michael shoots her a dry smile.

MICHAEL
(in the rearview)
What're you working on back there,
Amelia?

AMELIA
Just sketching the view.
(pause)
Feels...pretend.

MICHAEL
Like most first impressions.

AMELIA
(distractedly)
Sometimes first impressions show
you exactly what's underneath.

Emma and Michael exchange a glance—amused, a little
impressed.

Noah looks up from his tablet, eyes the sketch, then the
neighborhood. Amelia looks at Noah.

AMELIA (CONT'D)
What do you see, Noah?

NOAH
(considerately)
A living algorithm. Predictable.
Optimized. Controlled.

Emma stares out the window, nearly lost in thought.

EMMA
What do you see, Michael?

MICHAEL
A world built by engineers. Big
brains. Small range.

EMMA
(with slight sadness)
I see a neighborhood almost
identical to where I grew up.

They drive in silence, each watching the neighborhood
scroll past.

AMELIA
There's like three people out.
That's weird, right?

EMMA
It's only weird if you think being
outside is normal.

NOAH
Is this the kind of place where
kids get grounded for a B-plus?

MICHAEL
Only if it hurts their college
applications.

They turn onto a cul-de-sac. More formulaic beauty masked
as uniqueness.

Michael slows the SUV in front of a PRISTINE MODERN HOME
with an immaculate lawn and early-fall flower beds. He
waves to TWO MOVERS as they unload a SMALL MOVING TRUCK.
They carry useful and homey POSSESSIONS unworthy of the
home's calculated affluence.

The SUV comes to a stop in the driveway.

MICHAEL
I guess I wasn't clear enough that
we don't need much.

EMMA
It's pretty in its way. But it's
quiet.

NOAH
...too quiet.

Light laughs.

They climb out of the SUV and walk inside, across a WELCOME
MAT that says "Grateful. Grounded. Growing."

INT. BAKER HOUSE - EMMA'S OFFICE - LATE SATURDAY AFTERNOON

A cozy, almost-moved-into space. LOVE SEAT. THROW BLANKET.
Books on trauma, child development, cultural psychology. A
PICTURE of the family in South America. Unlit candles. A
BLUETOOTH SPEAKER plays quiet yoga-trance MUSIC.

Emma unpacks her last BOX. The perfect nest is nearly
complete.

Michael enters and sits on the love seat. Beckons her. She
sits. He puts his arm around her, rests her head on his
shoulder. Tenderness.

MICHAEL

Tell me.

EMMA

Nervous. Excited. Open.

(pause)

Tell me.

MICHAEL

School-boy anxious. Curious.

Ready.

They sit in comfortable silence. Safety. Friendship.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Got the bedroom and bathroom done.

Thank God we don't have enough
stuff to fill this place.

EMMA

Seriously.

They let the stillness linger.

MICHAEL

You think the kids will be OK with
this?

EMMA

If we've taught them one thing,
it's how to deal with a challenge.

**INT. BAKER HOUSE - AMELIA'S BEDROOM - LATE SATURDAY
AFTERNOON**

Amelia's face is screwed up. She looks through a stack of
pictures spread on top of the DESK. Pins a few to her
CORKBOARD.

A bohemian, creative-girl room. Her BED is made. Her closet
is organized. A few EMPTY MOVING BOXES are broken down in a
corner. She pins up a PICTURE of her and her best friend
NICOLE (16, dark, smiley) on a South Carolina beach.

She picks up a FLIP PHONE from the desk and sends a text:
"Talk tmrw morn?" Puts the phone back on the desk,

continues with finishing touches. A few seconds later, a reply from Nicole: "Def! :D xo"

Amelia's spiral art notebook sits on the desk next to a can of DRAWING PENCILS. She opens the notebook to the sketch she made in the SUV: A loose drawing of the suburban area they drove through—neatly spaced houses, trimmed hedges, clean sidewalks. It looks like a simple affluent-neighborhood scene.

She sits and considers the drawing, then adds to it: branching cracks—like those in old porcelain or fractured glass. The cracks originate not from the street, but from the houses themselves. Some cracks run through windows, others through the door frames or foundations. She titles the drawing, "Cracked Veneer."

Sits still. Looks toward her window with a thoughtful expression.

INT. BAKER HOUSE - NOAH'S BEDROOM - LATE SATURDAY AFTERNOON

A bit of chaos: a few BOXES, open and picked through but not unpacked. A few CLOTHES hang in the closet. The BED is made, but belongings are strewn across it.

POSTERS of thinkers surround him. A schematic of a robotic arm. A FRAMED QUOTE from Marcus Aurelius. His DESK is in perfect order: laptop computer with wireless keyboard and mouse, connected to dual monitors, and a small printer.

On a BOOKSHELF, BOOKS are stacked by subject: philosophy, robotics, space, physics, and biographies of smart people. He makes sure everything on his desk is just right. Grabs a BOOK on robotics and sits down on the bed to read.

INT. BAKER HOUSE - DINING ROOM - SATURDAY EVENING

The canned lights are dimmed. In a room built to hold a table of 12 sits a well-worn DINNER TABLE and FOUR CHAIRS. A few UNOPENED BOXES are stacked in a corner.

Michael and Emma unpack a bag of TAKEOUT CONTAINERS on the table next to PLATES, UTENSILS, GLASSES, and a full WATER PITCHER.

A LINED WOODEN BASKET sits on a built-in bookshelf. As Amelia and Noah enter, Michael points to the basket.

MICHAEL

The basket's over there.

Noah drops his iPad into the basket.

AMELIA

Mine's upstairs.

They each serve themselves from the takeout containers, then sit.

EMMA

Everybody have what they need for tonight?

Nods, grunts of assent while they chew.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Great. We'll have a slow day tomorrow.

NOAH

Let's take a walk. Freak out all the neighbors.

AMELIA

Only if we laugh as loud as we can to shatter the silence.

Emma smiles, takes a drink.

MICHAEL

Another family adventure begins!

A few moments of COMFORTABLE SILENCE, just the sounds of the room as they eat.

NOAH

Do you think GRANDMA and GRANDPA will even care that we're here?

Uncomfortable moment.

EMMA

Honestly, I'm not sure what to expect. Like everything else, we'll just have to take it as it comes.

She and Michael share a dark look.

A BIT LATER

Michael sits back, satisfied.

MICHAEL

Well, we've done the hardest parts. Now we just need to make this our new normal.

AMELIA

A new normal for the odd ducks.

Shared laugh. Emma smiles at Amelia. Then, with genuine curiosity

EMMA

Do you feel odd?

AMELIA

Not really. It's the world that's weird. Just means it's hard to...blend.

A thoughtful moment, then Amelia becomes upbeat.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

But, most times, I'm totally fine with that.

Chuckles of understanding and agreement.

They all push back their chairs. Start to clear their dishes.

INT. BAKER HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

A spacious, well-lit kitchen off the dining room, with another doorway into the front hall. Large windows, a large

island, and an inordinate amount of counterspace scattered with a few BOXES labeled "Kitchen."

Amelia and Noah stand side-by-side at the sink. Amelia rinses dishes, Noah loads the dishwasher. Michael and Emma move between the kitchen and dining room: finish collection, deliver dishes, put away leftovers, and wipe the table. A well-oiled machine.

Michael and Emma linger a moment in the kitchen. Amelia and Noah finish.

EMMA
(to Amelia and Noah)
Thanks, guys. I'm going to go work
for a bit.

Emma kisses Amelia and Noah.

EMMA (CONT'D)
I know it's your last night of
freedom but don't stay up too
late, OK?

Emma shares a long hug and tender kiss with Michael. Exits.

INT. BAKER HOUSE - KITCHEN - EARLY MONDAY MORNING

Sunshine streams through the large kitchen windows. On the kitchen island are four packed lunches in REUSABLE LUNCH TOTES.

Emma stands at a WHITEBOARD hung on a wall. A space for notes holds a short grocery list. Emma creates a September calendar. Crosses off the days of the first week.

Michael sits at the KITCHEN TABLE, reads a TECH TRADE MAGAZINE.

Amelia and Noah enter, in mid-conversation.

AMELIA
...that's a cool idea. What would
you do with it?

Noah sets his backpack on the floor by the doorway.

NOAH

Nothing. It's just a mental exercise.

AMELIA

Ahhh...the best kind.

Noah grins.

Michael puts down his magazine.

Each family member prepares their own breakfast: Toast, cereal, juice, fruit, muffins from a store-bought plastic tray. Easy. Healthy, but not too healthy.

They all settle at the kitchen table. A few moments of COMPANIONABLE SILENCE.

MICHAEL

OK, gang: Give me three.

AMELIA

Wavering. Curious. Hopeful.

NOAH

Ready. To. Go.

EMMA

Aligned. Ready. But a little jittery.

MICHAEL

Free. Interested. Challenged.

AMELIA

No one said dreading.

NOAH

Or excited.

MICHAEL

Are those in there, too?

Noah smiles but doesn't answer.

AMELIA
I'm kind of excited...just
dreading being the automatic loser
in the social media game.

Noah points to his head and, with googly eyes, says...

NOAH
At least your brain still works
for other things.

They laugh.

EMMA
(to Amelia)
I know it's hard to be different,
especially at your age. But you're
already putting your energy into
something much more important...
yourself.

Amelia nods, smiles.

MICHAEL
(to Noah)
How are you feeling about the age
difference?

NOAH
Nothing new. I'll probably get
some flak.
(shrugs)
I can handle it.

Amelia apes the family motto...

AMELIA
Handling it is what Bakers do.

Chuckles. Smiles of acknowledgement.

EMMA
(to Amelia)
You good with the route to school?

AMELIA

Yeah, I mapped it on the laptop.
It's simple. Take us about 15
minutes to get there.

NOAH

Someone'll probably call the cops
about kids on the loose.

MICHAEL

(chuckles)

Don't laugh. It might happen.

Heads shake. Consternation-type laughs.

A BIT LATER

The family works together to rinse their dishes, load the
dishwasher, and clean up the table.

Michael picks up his MESSENGER BAG. Puts his lunch into it.

MICHAEL

I'm headed out.

He hugs Amelia.

AMELIA

Bye, dad

MICHAEL

(to all)

I have a work event late this
afternoon, so I'll be back right
before dinner.

He hugs Noah.

MICHAEL

See ya, kid.

NOAH

See ya, dad.

Michael kisses Emma. Lingers. A long, loving look. No words
necessary.

As he exits, Michael calls out:

MICHAEL
Have a great first day, Bakers!

Noah grabs his lunch, puts it into his backpack. Gives Emma a hug on his way out of the kitchen.

EMMA
(to Noah, mid-hug)
I hope your day goes just like you want it to.

NOAH
Fingers crossed!

He pulls away and looks over to see if Amelia is ready.

AMELIA
(to Noah)
I just need to grab my book bag.
Meet you by the front door in a few.

Noah nods and exits. Emma and Amelia take a moment.

AMELIA
You ready to dive back into a pool of teenage angst? And take crap from people who don't want you to get real?

Emma tucks a strand of hair behind Amelia's ear. Smiles.

EMMA
Like you guys, I can handle anything they throw at me. Have to expect some splinters when you go against the grain.

Emma passes Amelia her lunch tote.

EMMA (CONT'D)
I'll be done by 12:30. See you back here later this afternoon.

Emma and Amelia share a warm embrace.

AMELIA

Good luck.

EMMA

You, too.

(pause)

Remember, you like who you are.
You're being YOU on purpose. Don't
let them drag you into a game
nobody wins.

Amelia considers. Nods. Exits.

Emma stands for a moment. Looks around her kitchen. Her
life. Smiles to herself.

INT. INSCAPE - RECEPTION AREA - MORNING

Michael steps out of an elevator, into the bright, warm
Inscape reception area.

A male RECEPTIONIST (an efficient mid-20s tech-nerd) looks
up.

MICHAEL

Hi. Michael Baker. Starting today.

RECEPTIONIST

Welcome to the team, Michael. I'll
tell JAKE you're here.

(picks up phone, dials)

Hey Jake, Michael Baker is here.

(pause)

OK. Thanks.

(hangs up phone)

He'll be right up.

MICHAEL

Thanks.

Michael turns to take in the office: Glass. Metal.
Concrete. Wood. Open floorplan: reception area, work areas
with standing desks, common area with communal tables and
kitchen. Offices around the edge.

JAKE ABRAHMS (mid-40s, olive complexion, dark hair) enters.
Nods to the Receptionist. Shakes hands with Michael and
pulls him into a bro-hug.

JAKE

Finally back out West. Glad to have you on board, Mike.

MICHAEL

Looking forward to collaborating again, buddy.

They release the hug and...

INT. INSCAPE - OFFICE TOUR - CONTINUOUS

Jake starts a tour around the office. It smells like coffee and ambition. Low chatter, workers engrossed in monitors atop standing desks. A project team works in a conference room.

INSCAPE EMPLOYEES look up and acknowledge Jake and Michael as they pass.

In the background, DANA CARLISLE (an early-30s techy sexpot) clocks the new hottie.

The tour lands at Michael's office, just off the common work area.

INT. INSCAPE - MICHAEL'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Jake lingers outside the office doorway, points to Michael's office.

JAKE

This is you. Any questions, dial 39 to get my office. Any emergencies, get me on my cell.

MICHAEL

Got it.

JAKE

I'll give you an hour to get your presentation out before we get lost in brainstorming - I'll be back at 10.

MICHAEL

Great, see you later.

Jake walks away. Michael enters and sets his messenger bag on the desk. Settles into his OFFICE CHAIR. Spins in the chair like it's a mildly amusing ride. Looks around. Checks the DESK drawers.

Takes his LAPTOP from his bag, opens it, and gets to work.

INT. LINCOLN HILLS HIGH - HALLWAY - MORNING

Amelia walks slowly down the hall. Alone. No headphones. No phone. Just her and the current.

Around her, the hallway flows—students weave through one another like water around rocks.

Not quite chaotic, but not connected either.

Every third kid has earbuds in. Some mouth lyrics. Others scroll, eyes half-lidded. A few make eye contact, then look away just as quickly. Micro-calculations. Image control.

Amelia drifts between teen clusters.

Posture worn like body armor. Smiles worn like brand placement. Voices tuned to performance frequencies.

She watches as:

A girl adjusts her jacket to show a logo.

A boy laughs too loud, scans to see who heard.

Two kids lean against lockers—flirting, maybe—but both glance down at their phones mid-conversation.

Amelia passes a group of girls. MADISON CLARKE (16, gorgeous, influencer-wannabe) is among them—flawless, with a perfectly timed laugh.

Beside Madison:

JENNA VANCE (16, spiky, cruel eyes), surveys the hall with a sharp look.

TASHA KUMAR (16, soft, visibly relieved to be friends with the "cool" kids), tries to look like she's not trying.

Amelia notes it all. Doesn't slow. Doesn't look away.

She's not invisible. Just outside the game.

At the end of the hallway, Amelia ducks into a stairwell—alone again.

She exhales. Then pulls a pen from her sleeve and makes a note on her forearm.

"HALL = COMPETITIVE FLOW"
"FACES = IDENTITY FILTERS"

She disappears up the stairs.

INT. LINCOLN HILLS HIGH - MAIN OFFICE - MORNING

FIRST BELL rings.

Emma and PRINCIPAL GRAVES (an early 60s, African American "super boss") exit the principal's office, mid-conversation. They walk into the MAIN OFFICE area.

PRINCIPAL GRAVES
...It'll be a coup of sorts—but
I'm confident you're the one to
lead it. Just tread carefully and
be ready for pushback.

Just ahead, CRAIG KESSLER (early 50s, white, balding, V-neck sweater) enters from the hallway. He pauses mid-step, catches the word "coup." His expression tightens.

PRINCIPAL GRAVES (CONT'D)
Mr. Kessler, this is our new
health teacher, Emma Baker. Emma,
this is Craig Kessler, our
guidance counselor.

EMMA
Great to meet you.

KESSLER
(polite, but guarded)
Likewise. Let me know if you need
anything.

He turns and heads into his office-doesn't wait for her reply. Principal Graves clocks it.

EMMA
(calls after, pleasant)
Thanks-I will.

INT. LINCOLN HILLS HIGH - HEALTH CLASSROOM - FIRST PERIOD

The hallway is quiet. Emma stands just outside the classroom door, BOX under one arm, POTTED PLANT in the other.

She looks in-scans the room. Wall of windows, wall of shelves, two bare painted concrete walls. Cold lighting. Desks in rigid rows.

She takes a slow breath, then steps in. Sets the plant and box on the desk. Rolls up her sleeves.

LATER

Posters and potted plants are hung, class materials cover her desk.

She wipes the whiteboard. Writes: "Junior Health: 3rd Period" and "Mrs. Baker" at the top in calm, careful script.

Then, in large letters in the middle of the whiteboard:
"REAL HEALTH = KNOWING YOURSELF"

She caps the marker and turns. Takes in the rigid lines of desks. Walks down rows with a thoughtful look, nudges a few desks slightly to break the symmetry.

Stands at the back of the room. Appraises her kingdom.

The space isn't complete yet-but it's starting to feel more lived-in.

She exhales. Walks to her desk, grabs her car keys. Heads out, leaves the door ajar behind her.

INT. LINCOLN HILLS HIGH - HONORS ENGLISH CLASSROOM - FIRST PERIOD

Class is underway.

Quote of the day on the WHITEBOARD: "Even in the underworld, Odysseus seeks understanding." - Unknown

The room is clean, sleek, and mildly impersonal, with early-year energy. Ms. Pierce (early 30s, glasses, bookish) stands near the board, animated and warm, tries to bring the *Odyssey* to life.

MS. PIERCE

As you complete the reading,
recognize that the gods—Athena,
Poseidon, Hermes—are not just
characters. They're really
metaphors. They represent
Odysseus's inner world—his fears,
his choices, his growth. Think of
them like psychological symbols,
not literal beings.

A few students nod. Some scribble it down.

NOAH

(dry, without raising
hand)

That's not how Homer's audience
would've understood them. The gods
were real to them. Saying they're
just metaphors is a modern
interpretation.

MS. PIERCE

(intrigued, keeps it
light)

Fair clarification. Though I think
we're allowed to apply modern
lenses too.

NOAH

Sure. But it should be clear that
it's an interpretive layer—not
authorial intent.

CRICKETS. Some students glance at each other. Eye-rolls.
Someone stifles a laugh.

BOY (O.S.)
(hushed)
Bro's writing a dissertation.

Ms. Pierce smiles with tight grace and, fades to the background to call on a STUDENT with a raised hand, while...

The student directly behind Noah, JAMES HERNANDEZ (13 going on 40, sarcastic, nothing to prove), taps him gently on the shoulder. Noah turns to look at James, who smirks playfully.

JAMES
Sometimes being right just makes
you annoying.

Noah turns back around frowning slightly—he looks down.
Silenced.

INT. LINCOLN HILLS HIGH - U.S. HISTORY CLASSROOM - SECOND PERIOD

Midway through US History.

MR. JACKSON (an early 50s, African American history buff) talks about Post-Civil War Reconstruction.

MR. JACKSON
After the Civil War, we passed the
13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments—
abolishing slavery, granting
citizenship, and promising voting
rights.
On paper, that's progress.
But rights don't mean much if the
people enforcing them still
believe in the old system.
(pause)
So the question isn't just "Did
Reconstruction work?"
It's—

The door opens slowly. As if whoever is behind it can sneak in without being noticed.

LILY HOFFMAN (16, anxious, with perfect hair and clothes)—enters, head down. Glances up at Mr. Jackson.

LILY

Lily Hoffman. Sorry I'm late.

Mr. Jackson nods even though Lily has already looked away.

He, and the students, watch as she heads toward the back of the room. Eyes red, swollen. Moves like she wants to disappear. Tries not to make eye contact on her way to her seat.

AVA WATSON (16, observant, quietly powerful) to the right of Amelia, watches Lily. As Ava turns back around, she clocks Amelia...

Amelia's glance lingers—she doesn't just look. She sees.

The room is quiet. A shared held-breath after Lily's entrance.

MR. JACKSON (CONT'D)

(kindly)

Welcome, Lily. Tough morning, huh?

Lily looks up at him quizzically, gives a small smile. Mr. Jackson nods again. Quiet acknowledgment. No judgment.

As Lily looks away, she meets Amelia's eyes for a moment, then her eyes dart toward her desk. Expressionless.

Amelia turns forward.

Mr. Jackson continues, as if there was no interruption.

MR. JACKSON (CONT'D)

So when we ask "Did Reconstruction work?" maybe the better question is—

We get a glimpse of Lily's face. She takes a deep, steadying breath.

LATER

MR. JACKSON
...alright, homework: read
chapters 1 and 2...

Amelia, diagonally behind Madison, watches her use her
IPHONE as a mirror.

Ava clocks Amelia again.

Lily sits silently in the back of the room, looks out the
window.

MR. JACKSON
...and complete the study
questions at the back of each
chapter.

As Mr. Jackson finishes, Amelia jots down a few notes in a
large TABBED NOTEBOOK and closes it to reveal her name in
big, bold letters on the cover and a stunning SKETCH of a
deep-rooted, wide-armed tree.

Ava looks over, notices the drawing. Looks away.

The BELL rings. Students shuffle. Ava decides to break the
ice with Amelia. Points to the notebook.

AVA
That's a cool drawing. You do
that?

AMELIA
Yeah.
(beat, self-consciously)
It's rough.

AVA
Cool talent to have.
(pause)
Do you have health class next?

AMELIA
No. My mom teaches it. I'm doing
independent study instead.

Madison overhears the conversation, smirks a judgment and glides out of the room.

Lily lingers in her seat. Listens to Ava and Amelia without drawing attention.

AVA

What's your mom like?

AMELIA

(smiles knowingly)

She's cool. Nothing to worry about
if you don't mind thinking.

Ava laughs.

AVA

Well, see ya.

(over her shoulder)

Oh, by the way...I'm Ava.

Ava starts to walk away. Amelia takes a second to try to hide her excitement about the outreach. Says too late for Ava to hear:

AMELIA

Yeah, OK.

With the classroom nearly empty, Lily stands and shuffles her textbook into her bag.

Amelia glances back at Lily with a kind expression.

Their eyes meet again.

Amelia smiles warmly.

Lily's smile is fleeting. Almost a wince at being seen.

She slips out quietly—like she was never there. Amelia watches her go.

INSCAPE - MICHAEL'S OFFICE - MORNING

Michael is absorbed in work on his laptop. Puts the finishing touches on a PowerPoint presentation.

Dana, in the shared work area, looks up at him through his glass office wall. Sees her chance. Dials up the swagger and walks past his office in a clearly orchestrated manner. Throws a glance at Michael on her way by.

Michael notices this out of the corner of his eye. Purposely doesn't look up. The vibe tells him all he needs to know. He sighs. Closes his eyes. A slight shake of his head.

INT. LINCOLN HILLS HIGH - FRESHMAN HALLWAY - BETWEEN SECOND AND THIRD PERIOD

Low-grade hallway CHATTER. Students cluster in groups or move between classes. Lockers SLAM.

MARK WILLIAMS (13, freshman Abercrombie bully) leans casually against a locker flanked by his henchmen: TYLER GREGG (13, dopey follower) and CAM WU (13, shrewd observer). They're all swagger and rich-kid menace.

They spot Noah a few yards from where they stand.

Noah reads from an ALGEBRA II TEXTBOOK as he walks down the hall—clearly in his own world. His backpack is high on his shoulders, posture upright, his rhythm slightly off from the social flow of the hall.

TYLER

Is he--doing homework?

MARK

Probably... looks like he skipped
a few grades.

Noah is within earshot but gives no indication of hearing.

CAM

Maybe he's a robot.

They laugh. Noah walks past them. As he passes, Mark raises his voice.

MARK

Hey junior - leave any IQ points
for the rest of us?

NOAH
(eyes still on his book)
Why? You clearly have no use for
them.

A pause. Even kids nearby stop in their tracks. What did he just say?!

Cam and Tyler look at each other and start to laugh—until they see Mark give them the evil eye.

Cam tilts his head, watches Noah walk away—almost impressed by the deadpan reply.

CAM
That's either confidence...or a
bug in his social chip.

FLASH TO: NOAH'S FACE

His mask slips for a moment. Eyes close. Minor shake of the head. He exhales—long and quiet. Not fear. Not shame. Just the weight of being an outsider.

He looks back at his book. Reclaims his posture. Gets back to being himself.

Across the hall, James leans against a locker, one earbud in one ear, the other dangles. He clocked the whole thing.

Doesn't say a word. Just lifts one eyebrow, watches Noah go with a look that's half curious, half amused, maybe 5% concerned.

He adjusts his hoodie and walks off in the opposite direction.

INT. LINCOLN HILLS HIGH - HEALTH CLASSROOM - LATE MORNING

We catch back up in time as Emma finishes her opening monologue.

EMMA
This class isn't about making a
grade. It's about making YOURSELF.

The room is quiet. Attentive.

Principal Graves watches from the hallway. Emma sees her, they share a glance. A small nod. Graves walks on.

Lily sits in the back corner by the window. Present, for once. Ava sits near the front—alert, engaged, cool.

Madison occupies her desk like a throne. Feigns disinterest—but watches. A glimmer of something under her perfectly crafted exterior.

EMMA (CONT'D)

We'll cover attention, critical thinking, coping skills, relationships.

(pause)

And yeah—some awkward stuff, too.

Light laughter.

She grabs the stack of baskets from her desk and hands one to the head of each row.

EMMA (CONT'D)

First thing first.

(pause)

We're calling these attention baskets. Phones—and all other small devices—go in. Powered off. If you have a laptop, leave it in your bag.

Shock. Grumbles.

STUDENT (O.S.)

For real?

EMMA

(kindly)

Yep. For real. No texts, games, videos, or scrolling in this room. Just brains. Learning.

(pause)

Drop 'em in. Pass it back. Last person in each row, place it on THAT shelf.

Ava slips her phone in without hesitation. Madison looks scandalized. Baskets move down rows.

EMMA (CONT'D)
You'll take them back at the end
of class.

A few students shift in their seats, look around. Nervous.

EMMA (CONT'D)
(without heat)
Or-keep yours and write a three-
page essay on dopamine addiction
and personal agency. No AI -
sources cited.
(pause)
Bonus: you'll read it to the
class.

Groans. Chuckles.

A SECOND ROW STUDENT stands, powers off his phone, and hustles to catch the basket. Smirks at himself.

A hand goes up in the back.

BACK-ROW MALE STUDENT
What if I need it for,
like...emotional support?

Light laughter. But nervous expressions say he wasn't the only one wondering.

EMMA
(without sarcasm)
If that's true-this class will be
tough. But maybe also...a relief.

Ava smiles. Madison's expression tightens.

Lily gets the basket. Hesitates. Then drops her phone in. puts the basket on the shelf behind her.

The shelf begins to fill.

EMMA (CONT'D)

In this class, we'll talk about
building a life that fits you.

(pause)

That supports you in becoming—and
being—the person you actually want
to be.

Behind teenage masks, something flickers: longing.
Curiosity. Readiness to learn how to live in the real
world.

KYLE (16, blond, carefree) off to one side, types under the
desk.

Emma notices. Says nothing.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Our first topic is attention.

(pause)

Your attention is your most
valuable asset. But every
distraction, notification, feed,
ad... snatches some of it from
you.

She walks across the room. As she speaks, she sees Mr.
Kessler slowly walk by. In surveillance mode.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Attention can be hijacked and
detained. It can wander naturally
— or it can be directed on
purpose.

(pause)

Right now you hear my voice, maybe
think about your phone, wonder
what's for lunch...Now—

(faint smile)

Direct your attention to the soles
of your feet.

Smirks, posture shifts. They're back with her.

Emma doesn't notice, but Kessler frowns slightly. Not
hostile. Just...uncomfortable.

He moves on with a thoughtful look.

EMMA (CONT'D)

That's focus. Your brain is constantly scanning and reacting—but YOU are far more than the activity of your brain. There's a part of you "outside" that activity. A part that can watch. Choose. Direct.

Ava nods—almost to herself. Lily pays close attention.

EMMA (CONT'D)

So—why does this matter?

(pauses for effect)

Because what you focus on shapes how you feel. And what you HABITUALLY focus on shapes who you become.

She places a box of COMPOSITION NOTEBOOKS on the desk. Starts to hand them out.

EMMA (CONT'D)

You'll use these for assignments and reflections. They're for your eyes only. At the end of each module, you'll write a short essay to tell me what you've learned about yourself.

Ava's already opened her notebook. Madison holds hers away from her body like it's a threat. Lily clutches hers like it's a lifeline.

EMMA (CONT'D)

First assignment: List the ten activities you spend the most time on each day. Then, estimate how much attention each one gets.

Students begin writing.

Emma sees Kyle type under his desk. She doesn't call him out. Yet.

INT. LINCOLN HILLS HIGH - INDEPENDENT STUDY CLASSROOM - 3RD PERIOD

An undefined, brightly lit space more like a home-ec room than a traditional classroom. Windows look out onto trees. A flyer on a corkboard reads, "Turn Your Curiosity into Credit."

Amelia enters. Cautious. Scans the room. Two other students:

- A SENIOR BOY: types furiously on a laptop
- A JUNIOR GIRL: flips through a printed novel marked up with three colors of highlighter

Mr. Jackson sits on the desk at the front of the room. Watches Amelia enter.

MR. JACKSON
(kind smile)
Baker. Welcome.

He gestures toward a table near the window. Amelia walks over and sits. Takes out her notebook-with the drawing Ava commented on-but doesn't open it.

Mr. Jackson clears his throat, gets the students' attention.

MR. JACKSON (CONT'D)
This period is technically called
"Independent Learning Lab."
(pause)
We'll call it a choose-your-own-
adventure. You'll propose
something to work on. Doesn't have
to be academic-just real.

Amelia's gaze settles on the drawing on the cover of her notebook. Mr. Jackson clocks it.

MR. JACKSON (CONT'D)
You'll work in stages. We'll check
in as needed. Can be solo or
involve others. The only real rule

is that the project should matter
to you.

Amelia raises her hand, hesitant. Mr. Jackson nods at her.

AMELIA
What if you're not sure what
matters yet?

MR. JACKSON
Then you're in the right place.

Amelia stares at him. That isn't enough.

MR. JACKSON
Last year, one student built a
compost network. Another filmed
her grandmother for six months.

AMELIA
What did she turn in?

MR. JACKSON
(with levity)
A slightly blurry video.
(beat, sincerely)
You could still feel the love.

He grabs a short stack of proposal examples and hands one
to each student. The Senior flips through it.

MR. JACKSON (CONT'D)
Take a look through these sample
proposals and consider what you
might want to do. We'll start
shaping your ideas this week. By
Friday, you'll have a draft
proposal.

Amelia nods. Absorbs. Glances at the samples, then out the
window.

MR. JACKSON (CONT'D)
One more thing: no empty time. If
you're here, be here - focusing on
your project.
(gentle look at Amelia)

Even if you're just looking at the trees.

Amelia smiles faintly. Puts away her school notebook and pulls out her sketchbook. Begins to draw—lines without definition, as an idea forms.

INT. LINCOLN HILLS HIGH - HEALTH CLASSROOM - LATE MORNING

Class is nearly over. Thoughtful energy in the room. A few students scribble final notes.

EMMA

Nice work on that first assignment.

She opens a desk drawer, pulls out a stack of handouts.

Through the open door, we see Mr. Kessler standing just outside Emma's view, still in surveillance mode.

EMMA (CONT'D)

So—you've listed your top ten attention spenders. Estimated how much time they take. Reflected on how attention shapes your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

(pause)

You've even identified a few things you want to change.

She passes the handouts down. Students move them along. Read them.

Emma clocks Lily, who looks unusually distressed after the assignment. Emma's eyes catch hers. A flicker—something unspoken. Then Lily looks away.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Your homework: a daily journal entry for the next five days. Document what you notice about your attention - how it feels to make the changes you identified. Are you frequently hyper-focused, or flitting from one thing to...

(MORE)

another? What happens to your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors when you actively change what you're giving your attention to?

Silence. Students listen closely.

EMMA (CONT'D)
Remember, this isn't about perfection - or self-judgment. Just awareness. Notice what your mind is doing and pause to redirect it - again and again.
(pause, taps her temple)
Just a little mental weight lifting.

Mr. Kessler, with a half-smile, walks away.

Emma eyes Kyle. Smiles.

EMMA (CONT'D)
Oh-and one last thing.
(pause)
Let's all thank Kyle. He'll be the first to educate us on dopamine addiction and personal agency.

Laughter ripples through the room. A few glances at Kyle.

KYLE
(sheepish grin)
Busted.
EMMA
(kindly, no heat)
See me after class, please.

EMMA (CONT'D)
Alright-class dismissed. Grab your phones from the back on your way out.

Students rise. Journals go into backpacks. Conversations begin. Chairs scrape.

The baskets empty fast. A low buzz of relief as students take their dopamine hits back. The BELL RINGS.

INT. LINCOLN HILLS HIGH - CAFETERIA - JUNIOR LUNCH PERIOD

The cafeteria hums with controlled chaos. Noise without warmth. Bright lights. Big windows. Sterile modern tables and chairs. Vending machines.

Students cluster by algorithmic tribalism: athletes, influencers, AP kids, emo kids, the ultra-groomed.

Most of the students scroll PHONES and talk about what's on their screens.

Amelia moves through the crowd, book bag over her shoulder. She surveys the room, reads the code.

Spots a few open seats—but they come with glances. Calculations. Silent dismissals.

She finds an empty table in a corner, half in shadow. Sits. Takes out her lunch tote and her sketchbook. Begins to draw—fast. Thoughtful and fluid: A loose outline of a cafeteria. Her own small figure in the corner.

Across the room - Ava leans back in her chair, mid-convo with a few EMO KIDS. She sees Amelia. Stares for a moment.

Amelia looks up. Their eyes meet—barely. A flicker of recognition.

Ava smiles quickly and looks away. But not unkindly.

A few tables over, Madison, mid-story, laughs with exaggerated breathlessness.

MADISON

—so I told him, "I'm not going to date someone whose MOM still picks out his clothes."

Jenna and Tasha laugh. A little too loud.

JENNA

Right? Why are boys such... BOYS?

Madison's eyes catch Amelia—specifically, Amelia's flip phone, open and placed on the table like a prop from a 90's movie.

MADISON

(loud, theatrical)

Ohmygod. Flip. Phone. There's a girl who brings a Myspace vibe to a TikTok world.

JENNA

Ugh.

TASHA

People probably thought they were cool...like 30 years ago.

They make sure Amelia can hear them but get no reaction from her.

JENNA

(looks disgusted)

It's giving me analog trauma.

Madison glances at her phone on the table next to her.

MADISON

Gawd, imagine if we had to live without them?

(beat, judgmental tone)

Her mom is clearly anti-tech. Bet she doesn't even get a say.

TASHA

As if any of us do.

JENNA

(face in her phone)

Speak for yourself, Tash. This thing is my best friend.

(looks up)

After you guys, obviously.

(returns to her phone)

A flicker crosses Madison's face. Brief. Real. A crack in the shell.

She stares at Amelia, curious.

Amelia glances up. Their eyes meet. Madison looks away, then back again.

Amelia keeps her gaze on Madison.

AMELIA
(under her breath)
Must be exhausting keeping up that
act.

Then, Amelia flashes a radiant smile at Madison.
Exaggerated. Showbiz sparkle. Waves like she's on a game
show.

Then drops her eyes. Goes back to sketching.

Tasha and Jenna exchange confused looks.

JENNA
What the hell was that?

MADISON
I have no idea.

Ava watches from a distance. Smiles at Amelia's minor
revolt.

Madison hesitates—momentarily off-balance. Then goes back
to her story.

CLOSE ON: AMELIA'S PAGE: She's sketched the cafeteria, full
of people with phones for faces. In the corner: her. A girl
with no face—only eyes. Captioned: "Looking for something
real."

INT. BAKER HOUSE - KITCHEN - EARLY AFTERNOON

Emma puts away groceries. Updates the whiteboard grocery
list.

INT. BAKER HOUSE - EMMA'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Emma sits on the love seat, reads *The Anxious Generation*,
adds notes to a legal notepad. Looks out the window.
Thinks.

Glances at a picture of Amelia (8) and Noah (4), in rain
boots, mid-laugh.

FLASH TO: Emma's memory of day the picture was taken - when they were still little kids. RAINDROPS and SPLASHING WATER in gutters. Kids all smiles and innocence.

EMMA (V.O.)
 (to the memory)
 Will you spend your lives
 recovering like so many of us?
 Burning your time and energy on
 unnecessary problems?
 (pause)
 Can any of us really thrive in a
 world built to undo us?

Back to the present. Emma sighs. Closes her eyes, puts her hand on her heart. Takes a deep breath.

EXT. LINCOLN HILLS HIGH - FRONT STEPS - AFTERNOON

Students mill about, scroll, share, and wait for rides. Madison flirts with the Senior from Amelia's Independent Study, poses as if to recreate an image she saw in a movie.

Mark, Tyler and Cam huddle. They occasionally eye Noah, who sits on a low wall at the bottom of the steps, nose in a book. Calm exterior. But his eyes flick up every so often.

Amelia, book bag slung, exits the school and nears the steps. Ava trots by, takes the steps briskly, heads for a rideshare.

AVA
 (over her shoulder)
 See ya, Amelia.

AMELIA
 (startled, but pleased)
 Y-yeah. See ya.

A flash of hope in her eyes. A small, unexpected win.

Amelia passes a pair of NERDY STUDENTS at the top of the steps. One points over at Noah.

NERDY STUDENT 1

(awed whisper)

That's the kid that burned Mark
and his cronies.

NERDY STUDENT 2

That was so sweet. Dude didn't
even blink.

They both nod, look impressed.

Noah appears buried in his book—but he overhears it. He
doesn't seem to react. But his eyes flicker.

Amelia looks at him. Smiles at his...Noah-ness.

She walks over and sits beside him. He looks up.

AMELIA

OK. Tell me what you learned.

Noah points casually toward Mark, Tyler, and Cam.

NOAH

That big dude flanked by henchmen?
Top gorilla in 8th. Still gunning
for it. Gonna be fun to watch him
fail in HD.

AMELIA

That must be what those kids—
(points to the nerds)
—were talking about. Seems you
made an impression.

NOAH

Well...they never got Dad's bully
lesson.

(pause)

What'd you learn?

AMELIA

(points toward Madison)

Top Mean Girl. Shiny on the
outside. Gangrene and desperation
on the inside.

Noah stands, puts his book into his backpack.

NOAH
Sometimes I'm glad we're the weird
ones.

Amelia stands too. A silent rhythm between them.

In the background, the handsome senior clocks Amelia. She
doesn't notice. Madison does.

AMELIA
Weird's not so bad when you
consider the alternative.

They start to walk home. Side by side. Natural.

INT. INSCAPE TECH - MICHAEL'S OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

Hazy sunlight filters through the sleek, glassy office.

The room shows the debris of a day-long brainstorm session:
markers, coffee cups, open laptops, remnants of lunch. A
Post-It that reads "noise buffer." Color-coded diagrams
sprawl across whiteboards, digital mockups are printed and
pinned. A map of how data moves, how users interact. Three
instances of one world are circled: FILTER.

Jake lounges on the couch—casual, confident, founder-
energy.

Michael caps a marker, steps back from the board—where a
simple user path is diagrammed:

SELECT: Topics / Sources / Tone / → FILTER ENGAGED →
CONTENT NARROWED.

Followed by: SILOS??

JAKE
I like where it's headed. Just
keep in mind we'll eventually have
to deal with PR.

MICHAEL

(a little sharp)

PR will just have to figure it out. We're not trying to fit in here, Jake.

(beat, regroup)

Sorry. But, we have to stay honest about the fog. The world is on overload. Noise reduction is the USP. Even if we take some heat.

JAKE

I hear ya, Mike.

(pause)

Let's take it back up tomorrow.

(stands, stretches)

I forgot how intense it is to work with you. This is going to be fun. And (grins) a little painful.

MICHAEL

It'll feel better now that we can expect our paychecks to clear.

JAKE

(laughs)

Ain't that the truth? Even if our desperation sparked some good ideas.

Jake picks up his coffee cup and heads toward the door.

JAKE (CONT'D)

I'll see you at the mixer. Get your game face on—

(turns back, smirks)

word's out about you selling to the big boys. The young ones will be starstruck.

Michael rolls his eyes.

Jake exits. Michael stays a moment longer, looks at the whiteboard. The word "FILTER" stares back at him.

Through his glass office wall, we see into the shared work area. Dana takes a long look at Michael.

INT. BAKER HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATE AFTERNOON

Emma works with the beginnings of dinner: Salmon, broccoli, carrots, rice. Jars of store-bought sauces.

Amelia and Noah walk in.

EMMA

Hey guys.

Emma gives them each a hug and goes back to her prep.

EMMA (CONT'D)

I went to the store. Fresh snacks are in the fridge. Dinner's in a couple of hours - as soon as dad gets home.

Noah drops his backpack in the corner and grabs a few snacks out of the fridge. Puts them down on the kitchen table.

Amelia puts her book bag down next to Noah's and stands next to Emma, grabs a carrot from the vegetables Emma is prepping.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Do you guys want to talk about your first day now, or wait til Dad gets home?

AMELIA

I'll wait. Nothing big to cover.

NOAH

Still processing, so, later.

Noah takes a deck of cards from a BOX OF GAMES on a nearby shelf. Sits expectantly. Amelia lingers next to Emma.

AMELIA

(to Emma)

Did you have a client call after your class?

EMMA

Not today. The rest of the week,
though.

AMELIA

How did class go?

EMMA

As expected. The door has been
opened. We'll see who walks
through.

(beat, sly grin)

I'll start getting parent emails
tomorrow.

They both laugh.

Noah glances at Amelia and Emma. Shuffles while he waits.
Listens.

AMELIA

I'd probably freak out too if I'd
never met someone like you. Find a
way to be excused and skip all the
life lessons.

EMMA

I'm sure some of them would love
that. Today, I gave an attention
journaling assignment—what they
pay attention to, how often, and
how it feels...

Noah looks up. Something registers on his neutral face.

EMMA (CONT'D)

We'll see if they CAN even pay
attention to their attention. Poor
kids - the world's been training
them to scroll and obsess for a
long time.

AMELIA

Well, if anyone can bring them
back to earth, you can.

Emma smiles. Returns to dinner prep.

Amelia slides into a seat across from Noah. They snack and play cards. Easy rhythm. Supportive, familiar.

Emma glances over, clocks the flow between them. Smiles to herself.

INT. INSCAPE - COMMON SPACE - LATE AFTERNOON

The common area is more wood, concrete, brushed steel, and Edison bulbs. A communal version of Michael's office.

The company mixer is underway. Fancy wine. Kombucha on tap, served in champagne flutes. Finger food. Low AMBIENT MUSIC. The room HUMS with ambition disguised as ease.

Michael mindlessly grabs a half-full champagne flute from a full tray, just to have something to do with his hands. He joins a small group of COWORKERS. They go through introductions.

We see the rest of the staff in the background. Happily social: they mingle, continue project conversations, fully in their element.

Michael's group chats about projects they're working on. He nods, listens to someone's big idea when—

His attention shifts.

He can feel it before he sees it. Across the room, Dana surveys him greedily. She dials it up and starts toward him—wine glass in hand, sway in her hips, cleavage front and center.

The group around him starts to thin. They know Dana. They know this play.

She closes in.

DANA

Was starting to wonder if the
ethics guy was gonna ghost the
social.

Michael fiddles with his glass, looks down. Takes the smallest step back.

MICHAEL

Technically, I'm product ops.
Ethics is just...implied.

DANA

And rarely practiced.
(leans in, whispers)
Which is why you're fascinating.

She shifts a bit closer to him.

DANA (CONT'D)

I liked your framework slide
today. Clear spine. No virtue
signaling.
(beat, suggestive)
Can't wait to have you overlooking
my project.

Michael doesn't flinch. But he doesn't smile either.

MICHAEL

(stiffly)

Appreciate that. Gonna be a tight
few months. Getting up to speed.
Launching something new.

She lingers.

DANA

Well...I'll try not to take TOO
much of your time.

A pause. Something sharp in her eyes.

Michael smiles. The kind of smile that that holds a
boundary. He doesn't move. Doesn't engage.

She lets the silence stretch. Then leans in closer—intimate
now, too close.

DANA

When you have 15 minutes...
coffee.
(taps his glass)
Not kombucha.

She saunters off before he can respond.

Michael watches her go. His jaw shifts, just slightly.

Across the room, Jake watches. Not judgmental. But aware. Clocks the moment, says nothing. With a slight tilt of the head at Michael he asks, "You good?"

Michael nods once. Almost imperceptibly. They don't need to talk about it. Yet.

He absently sips his from his champagne flute. Winces.

MICHAEL
(to himself)
Yep. That's vinegar.

INT. BAKER HOUSE - NOAH'S BEDROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

A physical science textbook and the *Odyssey* are on Noah's bed. He sits at his desk, types on his keyboard.

On one of the monitors: lines of code for a robotics project.

He pauses. Attention shifts. Opens a blank notepad window. Types:

"Investigation: Communication Processes."

"Signal Strength vs. Packet Delivery"

Continues to type...

NOAH (V.O.)
In networks, information doesn't
just need to be accurate—it has to
be delivered in a format the
receiver can handle.
(pause, types)
High-frequency signals without
formatting get dropped. Clean
data, wrong port? Useless.
(beat, self-evaluative)
Maybe I wasn't just using the
wrong format. Maybe it was the
wrong protocol, too.

He sits back. Rereads it. Closes it.

Sits still for a moment.

Opens a new notepad window. Types:

"Investigation: Attention"

He starts a list:

- Learning = 50% = Fun
- Being myself (weird) = 25% = Fine
- Calculating social errors = 10% = Confusing
- Avoiding humiliation = 10% = Exhausting
- Not becoming THEM (Mark, Tyler, walking dead) = 5% = Crucial

He stares at it. Blinks. Closes the notepad window and goes back to his robotics project.

INT. BAKER HOUSE - AMELIA'S BEDROOM - EVENING

The glow of the bedside LAMP softens the corners of Amelia's room. SOFT MUSIC plays—lo-fi, girl-power lyrics.

Amelia sits cross-legged on her bed. Book bag on the bed, sketchbook open. Her pen moves slowly. Details.

She adds to the drawing she started in Independent Study: a tidy row of lockers, perfectly spaced, gleaming under fluorescent lights. But inside each locker—visible through subtle cross-sections—is something different:

One holds a clenched fist.

Another, a face in silent scream.

A third: static.

At the end of the row is her own locker, slightly ajar, vines creep out—unruly, alive.

She stares at it. Then titles it: "What We Hold"

She exhales. Deep. Quiet. Intentional.

Reaches into her book bag and pulls out her tabbed notebook and the Independent Study sample proposals.

Turns to a fresh page in the right section of her notebook.

Writes at the top in small, steady print:

"Independent Study Project"

Underlines it once.

Then slowly adds:

- Documentary?

Pauses. Looks for a particular page in the proposal packet.
Reads it. Goes back to writing:

- Visual journal?
- Sketches with voiceover?
- Real? Symbolic? Both?

A pause.

She taps the pen on the notebook. Stares at the page for a moment. Listens for a thought.

Just then, a soft knock on her door. Emma's voice outside.

EMMA (O.S.)
Five-minute warning.

AMELIA
OK.

She pauses. Twirls the pen around. Starts a new line:

"What matters?"

- Surviving
- Observing
- Exploring

Pause.

- Becoming.

She stares at the word.

Crosses it out.

Rewrites it. Smaller.

"Becoming."

She leans back on her pillow. Eyes on the ceiling. Her phone buzzes. She doesn't reach for it. Keeps thinking.

INT. BAKER HOUSE - DINNER TABLE - EVENING

The overhead canned lights are dimmed-soft and yellow.

The table is set with plates of roasted broccoli and carrots, rice, grilled salmon. Water, juice, herbal tea. The device basket sits on the shelf.

Emma and Michael are seated.

Amelia enters, points casually at the basket.

AMELIA
It's upstairs.

Emma watches as Noah, on the couch in the adjacent living room, closes the cover on his iPad, gets up and puts it in the basket. Sits down.

Amelia sits. The family serves and eats in quiet rhythm.

Sounds of forks, glasses, the occasional sigh. Familiar.

MICHAEL
OK, let's go around. First, rate your day on the usual 1-10. Then give us weird or memorable moments. I'll start.

He leans back, mock-serious.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
My day was an 8. Had a great time getting started on the project with Jake. Then I got checked out at a kombucha bar while drinking vinegar out of a champagne flute.

He glances at Emma. Smirks and shakes his head. Her eyes soften with sympathy.

AMELIA

Sounds like Silicon Valley speed dating.

MICHAEL

(smiles)

Doesn't it? At least, there, everyone shows up for the same reason.

(beat, seriously)

This woman is going to make things super awkward.

EMMA

(playfully)

It's not your fault. You can't help but be...Dashing. Smart. Magnetic. I guess she'll just have to learn to live with disappointment.

They all laugh, but Emma casts Michael a supportive look.

AMELIA

Mine was a 7. Met a girl named Ava who seems cool. And I got Mean Girl'ed for the flip phone, so that was fun.

EMMA

So a good one and a bummer, then.

(looks Amelia in the eye)

I'd apologize for not getting you guys smartphones, but I don't want you to melt your brains yet.

Light laughter.

AMELIA

I also need to figure out what to do for my independent study project.

MICHAEL

Any early ideas?

AMELIA

A few. I'll work it out this week.

EMMA

Let us know if you want to talk it through.

Amelia registers her mother's sincerity. Smiles and nods. Takes a drink.

Comfortable pause.

NOAH

Mine was a 6.2.

MICHAEL

(smirks)

Specific. What cost you the other 3.8?

NOAH

Got called annoying, and a "robot."

AMELIA

That sucks. But it's better than being liked for being fake.

Noah looks at her. Blinks. That lands.

MICHAEL

Did you say something, or just... exist too hard?

NOAH

I corrected Ms. Pierce. About the *Odyssey*.

(pause)

I thought it was relevant. But maybe it wasn't the right... signal for the room.

Michael looks impressed at Noah's conclusion.

MICHAEL

(gently)

Sounds like you've thought it through. How do you feel about it now?

NOAH

OK, I guess. It felt weird at the time. Like... I knew I was right, but it didn't land how I wanted. Then a kid behind me called me annoying. Just for being right.

EMMA

Sometimes handing someone a fact they didn't ask for can feel like a slap.

Noah bristles a little. Her attempt to expand his thinking falls flat. Michael translates Emma's statement into "Noah-speak."

MICHAEL

(leans forward slightly)

Every time we open our mouths, we have to decide if the point of communicating is to be right. Or to be helpful.

(pause, then quickly)

Of course, sometimes, it happens too fast to choose. Then we gotta eat our words. Or apologize.

Noah starts to say something. Doesn't.

AMELIA

(big-sister tone)

Don't worry, Noah. You're just in social beta. You'll eventually work out the kinks.

Noah doesn't respond. Processes. But something has softened.

EMMA

8 for me. I'm sure this year is going to be a challenge, but I

can't wait to see what they learn.
Principal Graves is ready for
pushback, so I won't be alone in
it this time.

MICHAEL
That'll make a nice change.

EMMA (CONT'D)
Definitely.
(pause)
Oh-and a student was using his
phone in class, so I got to assign
the dopamine essay on the first
day!

Head shakes. Snickers. Michael raises his glass.

MICHAEL
To day one. No breakdowns, no
lawsuits, no digital scandals.
Yet.

They clink glasses, then go back to their meals. The table
is quiet-but the space is full.

INT. BAKER HOUSE - EMMA'S OFFICE - AFTER DINNER

Low, AMBIENT MUSIC. A CANDLE burns. *The Anxious Generation*
sits face-down. Holds her place.

Emma sits at her desk, reads an email on her laptop. We see
it from over her shoulder:

Subject: Concern re: Health Class Curriculum

From: Rebecca Hoffman

"Hello, Mrs. Baker,
I wanted to reach out about some of the messaging in your
class today. While I'm sure your intentions are good, some
of the content seems contrary to community values and more
emotionally charged than appropriate for a general health
curriculum.

We'd prefer our daughter be encouraged to focus on facts, not feelings.

Let's connect soon.

—Rebecca Hoffman"

Emma exhales. Not surprised at pushback. Not angry. But... it's only the first day.

She opens a reply window. Fingers hover over the keyboard. She types:

"Hi Rebecca,
Thanks for your note. I'm always happy to clarify my approach. I—"

She stops. Blinks. Backspaces the entire message. Stares at the blinking cursor. Then slowly closes the laptop.

A long pause.

She leans back in her chair. One hand rubs the center of her chest—absent-minded, like calming a phantom bruise.

She breathes—slow, steady.

Then: the faintest smile of resolve.

INT. BAKER HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Soft lamplight. Subdued activity.

Emma stands next to a LAUNDRY BASKET set on the end of the couch, folds laundry — Noah's jeans, Amelia's sweater, Michael's soft tee. Her hands are gentle, rhythmic.

Noah sits cross-legged on the floor. Quickly solves a Rubik's Cube. He glances at his iPad on the floor next to him, then—without a word—walks over to the device basket and drops it in. He resumes his seat and messes up the Rubik's Cube to solve again.

Across the room, Amelia is curled into an armchair. Reads *The Midnight Library*, flips a page, absently tucks her foot beneath her.

Michael enters with two mismatched MUGS of tea. Hands one to Emma. She takes it with a quiet smile, blows on it, sips, sets it down on the coffee table.

Michael sits in a reading chair next to the couch, drinks, and watches Emma for a moment. He picks up *Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less*. Flips to a bookmarked page and begins to read.

Emma places the folded laundry into the empty basket and sits on the center of the couch beside it.

She watches Noah, Amelia, and Michael—all absorbed in quiet doing.

The room is still. Present.

She takes a long, full breath. This isn't perfection. It's protection.

Her eyes glance down to her body on the COUCH.

The fabric.

The light.

But now, there is color. Warmth. Presence.

Her breath catches. Just slightly.

INT. YOUNG EMMA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY (1997)

Young Emma sits alone in the living room, in the middle of the couch, engrossed in *The Bell Jar*.

Behind her: a MAID (mid-50s, in uniform) opens the front door. We hear a low, indistinguishable murmur of voices. The maid turns around, glances at Emma's back, nods toward her and walks away. The two hospital workers (*from the opening montage*) step inside, look toward the living room.

Patient. Clinical. They leave the door open behind them and walk toward the couch Emma is sitting on.

Emma turns to look and stiffens. Drops her book. Glances a question.

YOUNG EMMA

Who are you? What's happening?

Her parents appear to the side of the frame, nod to the hospital workers, and watch dispassionately as they approach Emma.

All the adults are quiet. Emma starts to tremble.

YOUNG EMMA

(to parents)

What's HAPPENING?

Her mother flinches but stays still. Her father avoids eye contact.

A hospital worker is on each side of her.

HOSPITAL WORKER #1

Emma, we're just going to walk
outside together, okay?

YOUNG EMMA

No-NO. What's-I-I didn't do
anything-

Looks to her parents. Scoots forward onto the edge of the couch, like she's prepared to run.

Her mother glances away. Her father sighs-detached.

HOSPITAL WORKER #2 gently touches Emma's arm. She jumps up.

YOUNG EMMA (CONT'D)

DON'T TOUCH ME!

She scrambles over the back of the couch and tries to run to the stairs-up to her room.

But they don't let her get far.

The empty couch stays in the foreground as she fights and cries in the foyer. Each staff member takes an upper arm, guides her as gently as possible toward the open front door.

She continues to try to pull out of their grip. Looks back at her parents. Statues.

YOUNG EMMA

No! Tell me what's happening! Mom!
Dad!

Emma resists as she's led out the door—she fights, confused, betrayed.

Her parents follow. Stop at the threshold. Stand stiffly.

The empty couch stands in sterile silence in the foreground of the doorway, stairs, and foyer. We see Emma's parents' backs as they stand in the doorway.

We hear sounds of struggle, tears, and Emma's pleas.

YOUNG EMMA

No! What did I - What did I do
wrong? Mom! No, please! What did I
do?

INT. BAKER HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - PRESENT

Emma blinks. Breath shallow. Her fingers curl slightly into the fabric of the cushion.

Back in the warm present.

Michael leans forward in his chair, book on his lap, looks at her. He watched her "leave" but sees that she's back now.

She exhales. Long. Quiet. Looks at Michael. Grounds. Communicates.

Michael stands up, marks his page, puts his book on the table. Walks over to Emma and gently takes her hand.

MICHAEL

Let's go to bed, Em.

She nods. He helps her up tenderly. Leaves the laundry basket.

They each kiss Noah and Amelia goodnight.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Be sure to turn off the lights and
make sure the door's locked when
you go up, OK?

NOAH

Yep.

AMELIA

You got it.

Michael starts to lead Emma out of the room, past the couch. As they go, Emma looks back. One hand trails lightly along the back of the couch.

INT. BAKER HOUSE - EMMA AND MICHAEL'S BATHROOM / BEDROOM - NIGHT

Michael and Emma are silent. They finish brushing their teeth together. A comfortable bedtime routine.

She turns on her bedside lamp. He turns off the light in the ensuite bathroom. They stand in the bedroom near the foot of the bed. His hands reach out for hers.

MICHAEL

Were you time-traveling earlier?

Emma nods. He holds her hands.

EMMA

Yeah. When they dragged me out of
the house.

MICHAEL

Want to talk about it?

EMMA

Same memory.

(pause)

It's dumb, really. I was thinking
how much I loved our life, then I
was right back there.

(pause)

That couch looks too familiar when
it's in a big house like this.

(MORE)

Even with all the work I've done,
parts of the past just won't go
away.

Michael envelops her in an embrace. Silent moment of
understanding.

MICHAEL

That's what I'm here for. To
remind you that things have
changed.

(pause)

Y'know, we can always burn the
couch. Get four La-Z-Boys.

Small shared laugh.

EMMA

I was thinking today...

(pause)

What if all this effort doesn't
change anything for them? Is
everyone doomed to spend their
lives repairing themselves...or
ignoring the damage?

Michael becomes more sincere.

MICHAEL

Maybe. But I think we're doing
fine, Em.

(beat, lighter)

They're already ahead of the curve
-they definitely won't have to
deal with the shit we did.

(beat, with levity)

They'll have other stuff to tell
their therapists.

Emma groans and laughs at the thought.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

You're safe.

(kisses her head)

We're safe.

(kisses her head again)

We're good.

They stand in silence. Hold each other. Breathe together.

Emma shifts mental gears. They maintain the embrace while she speaks.

EMMA

A parent named Rebecca Hoffman
emailed.

MICHAEL

That was fast. Let me guess: the
word "concerned" made an
appearance?

EMMA

Yep.

He draws back. Looks her in the eyes. Registers what's
there. Kisses her on the forehead, holds the kiss for a
moment. Resumes the embrace-it's transformed from gentle
support to reassurance.

EMMA (CONT'D)

She said it conflicted with
community values. I guess they
prefer acting like their kids are
fine.

MICHAEL

Aw...You're just neck deep in
feelings right now, hon.
You know they see it. They just
don't know what to do, so they act
like there isn't a problem.

(pause)

Besides, you're the one who is
always saying we're all doing the
best we can with what we have...
even when it's not very good.

Pause. Emma nods.

EMMA

You're right.

(pause)

It's going to be a fight. For all
of us.

MICHAEL

Then we'll fight well.

Emma smiles. Not big. But full.

They release their embrace. Michael pulls back the covers and slides in.

Emma climbs in beside him. Puts her head on his chest. They lie still for a moment.

She grins and leans away to turn off her lamp.

YOUNG EMMA (whispered V.O.)

You're safe.

(pause)

We're safe.

(pause)

We're good.