



DRAFT 7.0

26 October 2025

Peter Fenton
P.O. Box 93
Lahaska, PA 18931
(717) 875-8404
emailpeterfenton@gmail.com

This play contains mature themes, some coarse language, and several depictions of murder. It is a dark comedy murder mystery/thriller following a morally gray ensemble. Appropriate for ages 14+

© 2024, 2025 by Peter Fenton. All rights reserved.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Cast Size: 8 (4f/4m)

HARRISON "HARRIS" FOWLER (Mid-20s, male-presenting, likely white or multiethnic), a debut novelist presently angry at his editor, unsure whether his work is any good, and sitting on a compromising secret. His book, **BLUE SKIES YONDER**, is set to launch with Blackfeather Press next week and is expected to be a best-seller. Harris has yet to be paid a penny of his hefty advance and his novel is being sent to market with edits he never approved.

JASON YANG (Mid-20s, male-presenting, Chinese), a photogenic app developer and AI expert who is quick with a joke and never misses a chance to pitch his technology. He recently proposed to Harris and their wedding is scheduled for next July. Both a romantic and a survivalist, Jason is eager to marry soon and is determined to use this party as leverage to ingratiate himself into the publishing startup.

MARYBETH FOWLER (50s, female-presenting, any ethnicity), an Ivy League English professor and highly selective literary agent who recently went through a financially damaging divorce. A ruthless negotiator with a cool head and a sharp tongue, Marybeth keeps close tabs on who owes her favors and what exactly she owes. She represents Harrison--and she's also his mother. Her instinct, always, is to protect.

PRESTON FOWLER (50s, male-presenting, almost definitely white), a New York City real estate mogul who is hosting the launch party for **BLUE SKIES YONDER** at his recently-acquired luxury mountain cabin. An aspiring author himself, Preston knows his son's secrets and keeps a close eye on Harrison's budding career and those he rubs elbows with--and he's no stranger to a good old fashioned backroom handshake.

COREY REYNOLDS (Late 20s to mid 40s, male-presenting, any ethnicity), the fabulous Co-Founder of Blackfeather Press building his empire on funds from flighty venture capitalist Heidi McEwan (an Irish billionaire!). Much of the company's future hinges on the success of Harrison's novel, and Corey is bold enough to break through barriers of every kind to see his plans come to fruition with nothing but his wit, charisma, and charm.

REBECCA ADLER (Flexible age, female-presenting, any ethnicity), the quiet Acquisitions Editor at Blackfeather and a former student of Marybeth's. Hardened by the cutthroat industry after coming in with an already sharp attention to detail, Rebecca has learned to strike under-the-table deals and blur ethical lines to maintain her precarious upward mobility with cold precision as she calculates her most lucrative paths.

JILLIAN CHAU (Mid to Late 20s, female-presenting, Chinese-American), the astute Marketing Director for Blackfeather Press. Bilingual in both Mandarin and English and seeming to go by two different names, Jillian has a keen eye for book covers, writes snappy social media posts, and rents a deluxe apartment on the Upper West Side with her boyfriend in med school. How does she manage it all? She would prefer you didn't ask.

AMBER CRAWFORD (Early 20s, female-presenting, any ethnicity), the Junior Editor at Blackfeather and editor of Harrison's novel who loves **THE HUNGER GAMES** and never seems to have trouble speaking exactly what's on her mind. Fresh out of college and small town Oklahoma, Amber has developed a genuine passion for the book which led her to send a draft to print that the author hadn't approved--a risky move with inevitable fallout.

SETTING

Chalet Waterspout, Preston Fowler's luxury cabin in the Adirondack Mountains. A Saturday afternoon in April 2025.

ACT ONE

SCENE 1 - Chalet Waterspout, a Saturday afternoon in April 2025.

PROLOGUE (FLASHBACK) - Virtual Meeting Rooms, four days earlier.

SCENE 2 - Chalet Waterspout, moments following Act One, Scene 1.

ACT TWO

SCENE 1 - Chalet Waterspout, about an hour after Act One.

SCENE 2 - Chalet Waterspout, a few minutes after Act Two, Scene 1.

EPILOGUE - New York City Courthouse, four weeks later.

BLUE SKIES YONDER is a contemporary Agatha Christie-inspired locked room murder mystery in the shadow of late-stage capitalism. At his lavish book launch party (complete with a looming ice sculpture of a bird of prey), promising young author Harrison Fowler spirals under the weight of his mismanaged manuscript and the deadly ambitions of his colleagues and loved ones. In company with big money and bigger ambition, someone threatens to get away with murder, and in the cutthroat world of publishing, the real killer might be whoever tells the best story. This play is a dark comedy about queer survival, creative ownership, and the stories we tell to stay relevant--even if it kills us.

ACT ONE, SCENE 1.

CHALET WATERSPOUT, Preston Fowler's luxury cabin in upstate New York. A Saturday afternoon in April 2025. A grand display of several copies of a novel titled BLUE SKIES YONDER written by Harrison Fowler features at center stage of an open-concept living space and kitchen. A balcony overlooks a pristine blue sky. Offstage is a bathroom and office in one direction and bedrooms in the other.

An ice sculpture in the shape of a bird of prey features on a drink table, surrounded by a bowl of ice and several liquor options. Charcuterie for what appears to be a large "upscale casual" event is spread on the kitchen counter.

A phone rings a few times before a recorded voicemail:

"Hello, you've reached the office of Heidi McEwan. I'm rather sorry, I can't take your call right now. Kindly leave a message and I will get back to you."

MARYBETH (VOICE)

Heidi, it's Mare.

I'd hate to involve my attorney in a matter you and I could solve in a few pen strokes. Call me back.

A phone hangs up. A news report:

"An apparent suicide in a Hudson Yards penthouse leaves some on Wall Street reeling and the NYPD leaving no stone unturned. More on this at 11."

AT RISE: A spotlight appears on brooding author HARRISON "HARRIS" FOWLER (Mid-20s) holding his own novel.

HARRIS

I'm going to kill her.

Lights rise to reveal his tech bro fiancé, JASON YANG (Mid-20s, Chinese).

JASON

Don't say things you don't mean.

HARRIS

Have you even looked at this?

JASON

I love you with my whole heart, but my dude, you have reached your limit of free feedback on this one.

HARRIS

How could she think it's her right to--
How am I supposed to talk to her?

JASON

I know that my opinion doesn't mean much, but.
You're a good writer.

HARRIS

Thanks.

JASON

And even if your book sucked, I choose you.

HARRIS

Was wondering what this ring was for.
I just wish I knew--if this book was actually good, you know?

JASON

Kirkus said, "Harrison Fowler is someone to watch... a literary fiction genius."

HARRIS

I guess.

JASON

Once people are buying it, does it even matter what's inside?

HARRIS

Babe.

JASON

As long as the check comes.

HARRIS

I will appreciate when the check comes.

JASON

Put our future on lock, baby boy.

HARRIS

What are they paying this editor for?

JASON

Editing.

I hate you.

HARRIS

Love you, too.

JASON

*Harris's mother and literary agent,
MARYBETH FOWLER (50s), enters.*

Good afternoon, Ms. Fowler.

JASON

Hello, Jason.

MARYBETH

(To Harris.)
No kiss for your mother?

Yeah--hi.

HARRIS

Let me see the ring.

MARYBETH

She picks up Harris's left hand.

Tasteful. Where'd you get it?

MARYBETH

I got it customized from a jeweler in Chinatown. Yeah, I built an AI model that took his photos and "likes" and designed a ring that would be cute and fit the di-dimension?--

JASON

Real diamonds?

MARYBETH

Real love?

JASON

Marybeth chuckles.

Good flight?

HARRIS

Four-hour layover in Vegas! The hell am I supposed to do with a four-hour layover in Vegas?

MARYBETH

Gamble?

JASON

MARYBETH

Oh, I killed time. Had two martinis--bone dry--, a spring mix salad with goat cheese and truffle oil, and for dessert, a much younger Brazilian gentleman.

HARRIS

So you gambled.

MARYBETH

Enough about me.
My son wrote the great American novel.

HARRIS

Honor of a lifetime.

MARYBETH

Honor of a lifetime to have referred you.
When's Mama's cut coming?

HARRIS

Well, weren't you supposed to send me the--?

MARYBETH

Worry about it later. I'll get it.
You have a very real gift. And fifty percent of my DNA.

HARRIS

Sure.

MARYBETH

Where is your father, anyway?

JASON

He took the Blackleather people on a tour of the property.

MARYBETH

Mm. Of course. Our son writes a book set in the Adirondacks, suddenly oh. Would you look at this? 3 million to spare on a little weekend pad with shiplap and a gorgeous view and--
You see he named this place "Chalet Waterspout"?

HARRIS

Seemed pretty obvious. Waterspout.

MARYBETH

He's still on that?

JASON

What?

HARRIS

I'll tell you later.

MARYBETH

Is Becky here yet?

JASON

Oh, Rebecca? Yeah, seems great.
She's a Columbia grad.

MARYBETH

Yes, I taught her everything she knows.
What about Heidi?

JASON

She's not here yet.

HARRIS

I don't think we'll see her.

JASON

Did she come to US from--London?

MARYBETH

Dublin, actually.

JASON

Did you read the article in 2020? In Forbes about things
finance people did in the quarantine?

HARRIS

When Heidi McEwan "discovered" reading?

JASON

And six months later, boom. She co-founds Blackfeather Press.

MARYBETH

She was also my roommate. Oxford, Class of '89.

JASON

No way! You know how to get in touch with her? I wanna try
pitching something.

MARYBETH

You and me both.

*She picks up the handle of vodka from
the drink table.*

MARYBETH

Where are you keeping the good stuff, Press?

*She finds a cabinet with a keypad. She
plugs in a PIN number and it unlocks.*

MARYBETH

Still know your father.
Same password for everything.

She takes a premium bottle of vodka out of the cabinet and exits.

JASON

Would it be weird if I start calling her "Mom"?

HARRIS

Yes.

JASON

I think I'll call her Mom.

HARRIS

Maybe after the wedding.

JASON

OK. Let's go. Let's get married.

HARRIS

Um--no?

JASON

I already bought the ring. We're ready. I'm ready.

HARRIS

The Loft and Garden famously was not.

JASON

Screw the venue. I just wanna marry you.

HARRIS

Oh yeah?

JASON

Imagine. People magazine: "New York Times bestselling author Harrison Fowler enters the cute interracial marriage to app developer Jason Yang."

HARRIS

They'll probably leave out the "cute interracial" part.

JASON

Still true.
What's up? What's wrong?

HARRIS

What's wrong with keeping the date?

JASON

Nothing wrong, I just--
If you said yes to marrying me, aren't we just... ready?

HARRIS

I don't want any more surprises.

JASON

What if it's a really, really nice one?

HARRIS

It might as well be her name on the cover.

JASON

I don't like seeing you like this.
Wish I could just... wave a wand and make you happy. What can I do?

HARRIS

There is definitely something.

JASON

Anything.

HARRIS

I've got an editor out there,
Not saying I wish her dead, but I might be inclined to dance
on her grave.

JASON

What a coincidence, sir.
Because from the moment I caught sight of those baby blue
eyes, I knew that someday
I just might kill for you.

HARRIS

Don't say things you don't mean.

JASON

How's my literary voice?

HARRIS

I think you need a good editor.

JASON

Aw, damn. We just killed her.

They laugh.

HARRIS

What are you trying to pitch to Heidi McEwan?

JASON

That AI model I made for the ring--I think I could make some money with it. Could match people with books. Or design covers. Still figuring out the angle.

HARRIS

You want to work for Blackfeather?

JASON

Why not? If you dangle AI in front of any startup, suddenly you're the sexiest man in the room.

HARRIS

Are you now?
Making some plans with Heidi McEwan?

JASON

Hey, if that woman gives me a job,
I say she can do anything she wants.

HARRIS

Can she? Hmm. You're getting reckless, mister.
I just might have to keep you in a cage.

JASON

Lock me up.

The young editor, AMBER CRAWFORD (Early 20s), enters.

AMBER

Hey! Thought I wasn't gonna see you! You hiding from me or something?

HARRIS

Yes.

AMBER

This guy. Oh! You must be Jason.

JASON

Amber. Nice to meet you.

AMBER

Did you know Harris has been working on this book since undergrad?

JASON

Yeah, I was there.

AMBER

Were you in the frat with him? Omigod. Two frat boys discovering themselves--it's like *Heartstopper*--

JASON
He tells me so much about you.

AMBER
All good things, right?

HARRIS
Only true things.

AMBER
(To Jason.)
I think you're gonna have some stiff competition for who's his biggest fan. If someday, Harris Fowler has no fans, then I must be dead.

JASON
I'm a pretty big fan of my fiancé.

AMBER
I've actually never been to a gay wedding before.

HARRIS
The wedding's gonna be pretty small.

AMBER
Oh--of course. My word, I didn't mean to--

HARRIS
It's OK.

JASON
You're very sweet.

AMBER
You're so sweet. Thank you.

HARRIS
For what?

AMBER
I'm a girl fresh outta Tornado Alley. I have no clue what I'm doing. But you trusted me with your book.

HARRIS
Oh, I--mmm... didn't have much of a--

AMBER
And on Tuesday, the whole world gets to meet Allison Noelle.

HARRIS
Some version of her.

AMBER

No shade to Katniss, 'cause I love *Hunger Games*, but in your book, Allison--she finds the strength to figure out she's in a cult, kill the leader, and run home--and isn't afraid to have feelings.

HARRIS

Yeah, that's--basically the book.

AMBER

That's a strong female character.

HARRIS

Well--I. Sure.

AMBER

You brought this book into the world. Nobody can ever take that away from you.

JASON

She's right.

AMBER

And--your dad bought this whole cabin just for the party?! I'd kill to have your parents.

HARRIS

You want 'em?

AMBER

My folks are funny. When I said I was movin to New York, they were all like "Why you wanna leave Owasso? You can be a writer in Owasso. You can write anywhere."

HARRIS

They're not wrong.

AMBER

It's different in New York--it's almost like... I'm shaping the stories that are gonna change lives.

HARRIS

You changed mine.

AMBER

You're too sweet!

Harris raises an eyebrow.

AMBER

Think everyone was right behind me, I just ran ahead 'cause I had to pee.

She exits. Harris's real estate mogul father PRESTON FOWLER (50s) enters with founder COREY REYNOLDS (Late 20s), marketer JILLIAN CHAU (Mid 20s, Chinese), and editor REBECCA ADLER (Early 30s).

PRESTON

And woulja look at that? Here we are, back at the bar.

REBECCA

You have a beautiful property. It's even prettier in person. How much did this end up running you?

PRESTON

Two million, I think. Ballpark.

REBECCA

What'd it say on Zillow, Core?

COREY

Think it was closer to 3 mil.

PRESTON

It might've been closer to three.

REBECCA

Corey would not stop poring over those pictures--

COREY

Hey, I said, "I need you to find the ultimate DILF house." And did Preston Fowler deliver.

REBECCA

Corey.

PRESTON

Well, this DILF says it's happy hour time! Little day drinking ain't gonna kill ya. VIP, what are we drinking?

JASON

We'll take a red if you're opening one.

PRESTON

I asked my son.

HARRIS

We'll have a red if you're opening one.

Preston takes out a wine bottle.

PRESTON

Bordeaux?

HARRIS
Vintage?

PRESTON
This one's a 2017. "Maison-Janelle"

HARRIS
OK.

Preston takes out another.

PRESTON
Cabernet? Napa Valley, '94.

HARRIS
Sure.

PRESTON
This one's a nice bottle.

HARRIS
It's a special day. Isn't it, Dad?

PRESTON
Anything for the man of the hour.

He uncorks the bottle.

COREY
Thank you for opening your home, this has just been a great week. Lord knows I needed a self-care retreat after the month I've had.

PRESTON
It's the least I could do.

COREY
It's not my home yet, but I do know my way around. The sheets in the guest room are to die for.

PRESTON
The ones in the master are even nicer. Can I interest you in the Cabernet, Rebecca?

REBECCA
Oh, why not? Business is good at the Preston Fowler Group?

PRESTON
Well, we survived '08 just fine. '25 is shaping up to be nothing but blue skies ahead.

COREY
I see what you did there and I am literally obsessed.

REBECCA

I don't know if editing books can make anyone successful like this. But I could get used to it.

PRESTON

Anyone can get there. You just shake the right hands, strike the right deals--

COREY

Take every delicious risk your heart desires.

PRESTON

What can I do for ya, Corey?
Glass of the '94 Cab? Or shall we open something else?

COREY

I'm gonna sound so gay right now--
I kinda wanna make a Cosmo.

PRESTON

Ah, you're in luck. Cranberry's in the fridge, and vodka is--
oh, use the Grey Goose.

He sees the open cabinet.

PRESTON

Someone been in my cabinet?

JASON

No, that was--uh.

HARRIS

Mom.

MARYBETH (OFF STAGE)

Coming.

She enters with a half-empty bottle of Grey Goose and hands it to Preston.

MARYBETH

My--~~DEAR~~--Preston.

PRESTON

You look wonderful. I see you've made yourself at home.

He puts the vodka back in the cabinet and locks it.

MARYBETH

All for you.

PRESTON

I thought you weren't coming.

MARYBETH

You bought me a ticket.

PRESTON

You never wrote back.

MARYBETH

Harrison Fowler is my client.

Oh, lighten up. I wouldn't miss this for the world.

She plants a kiss on his cheek. She notices her former student.

MARYBETH

Becky.

REBECCA

Rebecca, actually.

MARYBETH

How special.

Preston hands wine out to everyone.

PRESTON

So? When's the rest of the gang getting here?

COREY

The party's all here!

PRESTON

You're kidding.

COREY

We got the fun wine mom, the silver fox DILF, and I mean, you know I'm a walking P-Town rave--

PRESTON

Corey, where is everyone?

JILLIAN

We're expecting more people?

COREY

Were we?

PRESTON

You said forty to fifty important publishing industry decision-makers were gathering today.

COREY

Yes! All the important people are here.

PRESTON

I bought a non-refundable block of fifty rooms at the Best Western. My sculpture guy did a bird of prey on very short notice.

COREY

Oh, it's gorgeous!

PRESTON

Is anybody else coming?

COREY

We're 200 miles north of Manhattan, honey.

PRESTON

OK. C'est la vie.

MARYBETH

What's a couple thousand to Preston Fowler?

PRESTON

Mare.

COREY

Where can I get some ice?

PRESTON

You're looking at it.

*He indicates the sculpture and hands
Corey an ice pick.*

COREY

Oh--no. I couldn't

PRESTON

Do the honors.

COREY

Just feel so bad cutting into such a pretty thing.

MARYBETH

It's gonna melt anyway.

PRESTON

The artist put hours into this.
It's the least you could do.

COREY

I see there's ice I could grab in the dish here.

PRESTON

I insist. Do the honors.

Corey stabs into the sculpture.

HARRIS

Jillian! Hey!

JILLIAN

You're shorter in person.

HARRIS

What's that supposed to mean?

JILLIAN

It's good to see you.

HARRIS

Jason, this is Jillian Chau.

JASON

Ryan's girlfriend! Ryan Lin.

JILLIAN

Yeah.

JASON

We do the--volleyball. Twice a week.

JILLIAN

Nice to put a face to the name.

They share a tentative look.

HARRIS

Jillian does all the marketing for Blackfeather.

Jillian takes a copy from the display.

JILLIAN

They say don't judge a book by its cover, but everyone knows that's a lie. Your eye's going right to this one.

HARRIS

It is a nice cover.

JILLIAN

I was honestly struggling on a direction for this one, but the focus group really locked in on the "vintage girl boss" vibes.

HARRIS

Yeah, I was outvoted.

JILLIAN

All my girls in book club loved it. You should be proud.

Corey crosses to Harris, Jason, and Jillian.

COREY

Jill is an aesthetic genius. I just look at all our reels and book covers--and I just wanna eat 'em all!

JILLIAN

Listen, I'm a marketing queen.

COREY

And I'm just a queen!
Look out for this one; she's always like five steps ahead of me. Girl, slow down.

JILLIAN

Killing it.

Corey pulls Harris aside.

COREY

Damn, Harrison. I heard you had a boyfriend, but nobody told me he was Chinese Jonathan Bailey. I'd let that man do so many things to me--

HARRIS

Fiancé.
Jason is my fiancé.

COREY

Oh, congrats! How'd I miss that?

HARRIS

I don't know you.

COREY

That's so funny. I feel like I know you so well; your personality leapt off the pages--

HARRIS

He proposed. Couple weeks ago.

COREY

Well, your dad talked so much about you and--

HARRIS

My dad hates him.

COREY

Oh--I'm. Guess that would do it. Homophobe or racist?

HARRIS

Neither. Both. I don't know.

Jillian turns to Jason.

JILLIAN

我难道不认识你吗?

(Wǒ nándào bù rènshí nǐ ma / "Don't I know you?")

A chill runs down Jason's spine.

JASON

Excuse me?

JILLIAN

Don't I know you?

JASON

I play the volleyball with your boyfriend.

JILLIAN

Sure. But I know you.

JASON

(With a smirk.)

That's kind of racist.

JILLIAN

Fair enough.

JASON

I just have one of those faces?

JILLIAN

Hmm. 你会说中文吗?

(Nǐ huì shuō zhōngwén ma / "Can you speak Chinese?")

JASON

What--um--what did you say?

JILLIAN

Why would you lie to me, Yang Zekai?

*Jason hurries a sip of his wine.
Marybeth turns to Rebecca.*

MARYBETH

So. "Rebecca."

REBECCA

Rebecca.

MARYBETH
Press, I'm sure you remember Becky Adler.

PRESTON
Oh--have we met?

REBECCA
Years ago; it was a department event.

PRESTON
Small world.

REBECCA
Could not be smaller.

MARYBETH
She's a tough one. You know what I always said.

REBECCA
"Only the biggest assholes survive in this biz."

MARYBETH
Only the biggest assholes survive in this biz.

REBECCA
My MFA made me a cold-blooded killer.

MARYBETH
These books are gonna ruin your life.

PRESTON
Freshen your glass, Mare?

MARYBETH
Oh--probably had enough already.

*She hands her glass to Preston, who
refills it and hands it back to her.*

MARYBETH
On my flight, I was looking back over Harrison's contract.
You remember that 30 days clause?

REBECCA
Sure do.

MARYBETH
Think we're well past that by now, aren't we?

REBECCA
That's above my pay grade. Talk to Heidi about that.

MARYBETH
I've tried Heidi. She's not calling me back.

REBECCA
Guess I can't help you, then.

MARYBETH
You like your job, Becky?

REBECCA
Quite a bit.

MARYBETH
Good.
Never forget how you got here.

REBECCA
How could I?

She crosses away.

PRESTON
And her title is...?

MARYBETH
Acquisitions Editor.

PRESTON
Hmm.

Marybeth recognizes this "hmm". They were married for a while.

MARYBETH
Oh--no. No.

PRESTON
What'd I say?

MARYBETH
Blackfeather is not a place where you can just get the editor's email and dump any old manuscript--

PRESTON
What about a great one?

MARYBETH
You write something new?

PRESTON
Heidi liked it.

MARYBETH
No she didn't. Why don't you self-publish?
Told you to do that with *Up the Waterspout*--

PRESTON

Well, I--

MARYBETH

You have the money. The process has never been easier.

PRESTON

Self-publishing, it's tacky. No?
You're not really an author if--

MARYBETH

If your book's that good, then what are you afraid of?

*Amber enters. Rebecca intercepts her
for a private conversation.*

REBECCA

Amber.

AMBER

Hey! Did you see the bathroom?! I started to wash my hands
with the bright green stuff next to the sink, and I was like,
"Why do my hands smell so minty?"

REBECCA

You found the mouthwash, didn't you?

AMBER

That's mouthwash. Huh.

REBECCA

We need to talk about this book.

AMBER

It is so good. I get this, like, feral empowerment high--

REBECCA

I need you to listen to me. I know how hard you worked, but
I'm taking credit for the book.

AMBER

What?

REBECCA

Swear on your life.
You did not edit *Blue Skies Yonder*.

AMBER

Can I ask why?

REBECCA

This isn't personal. It's about keeping promises that were
made before you were hired.

Oh. OK.

Do you understand?

Is this related to the thing I found on your desk with--?

No.
No, this is different.

So... I mean--I can lie. But--doesn't it say inside that I--?

She opens a book to the copyright page.

"Edited by Rebecca Adler".

We're a team. It takes a village to put a book on the shelf.

Yeah. No, I like that.

Rebecca crosses away. Preston crosses to Jillian. Amber joins them.

So you are a woman of many talents.

I wear many hats.

Don't we all, Miss Olivia?

Her name's Jillian.

Jason sees Jillian thrown by the mention of "Olivia". He crosses to Rebecca.

Slip of the tongue.

But yes, I am quite good at what I do, Mr. Fowler.
That is your name, right?

PRESTON

Do you wish anything to drink, Miss Amber?

AMBER

I'll have a red, if you have one? I'm not picky.

PRESTON

You'll love a Mourvèdre. I have one, somewhere early 2000s. It'll hit like a Shiraz with notes of vanilla bean and leather.

AMBER

Sounds great.

Preston searches for the wine.

AMBER

Hey, I'm--I'm a big fan of *Ink and Vellum*.

PRESTON

Oh--thank you. I've never met a fan in person, actually.

AMBER

Yeah, I got hooked when you interviewed Corey! I went back and listened to all the other episodes.

PRESTON

The podcast is my labor of love. Glad you like it.

AMBER

I loved your episode with Heidi. When's the one with Harris coming out?

PRESTON

My son will not be doing an episode.

AMBER

Oh. I thought he said he was--

PRESTON

He wasted an hour of my time. Call me old-fashioned, but I believe actions have consequences.

He finds the bottle and opens it.

PRESTON

Oh--it's 2001.

AMBER

That wine's older than I am!

Preston pours Amber a glass.

AMBER

Wait, have you ever written a book?

PRESTON

It's coming out soon.

AMBER

Who's publishing it?

PRESTON

Haven't decided.

AMBER

Well, we all have to start somewhere!
And if you write anything like your son--wow!

Amber takes the wine and crosses away.

PRESTON

Well. There is no substitute for enthusiasm.

JILLIAN

What?

PRESTON

My apologies, this is--the most wonderful surprise seeing you again. Did you receive my gift?

JILLIAN

I did. It was very kind of you. It's right here in my bag.

PRESTON

You need to look out for yourself. If you're going to keep that venture going.

JILLIAN

Thank you, Press.

PRESTON

So this is the job?

JILLIAN

It is.

PRESTON

Interesting.

JILLIAN

Mm-hmm.

PRESTON

I'm not shocked. It's you and Heidi pulling all the strings around here, right?

JILLIAN

And Beck, yeah.

PRESTON

You do have a great head on your shoulders.

JILLIAN

Gotta be. I'm a saleswoman.

PRESTON

And a very good one at that.

JILLIAN

So, you got a book?

PRESTON

I do.

JILLIAN

Genre? Demographic?

PRESTON

Adult crime thriller.

JILLIAN

I see why you've thrown the party.

PRESTON

I was promised there would be 40-50 important decision-makers in the room today.

JILLIAN

You don't need 40-50 if you can secure that one "Yes."

PRESTON

That is quite true.

JILLIAN

Marketer's advice?
Harris could do a lot for you.

PRESTON

Hmm.

JILLIAN

I'll put a bug in Corey's ear. Work on your son.

Preston nods.

JASON

(to Rebecca; mid-conversation.)

Hey, weird question. Does she ever go by Olivia?

He indicates Jillian.

REBECCA
No, but--I don't know her that well.

JASON
Yeah, I thought so.

REBECCA
Hmm.

JASON
Anyway, that's wild! Blackfeather books really get into the New York Times?

REBECCA
Yes! We've put out 23 titles. Nearly all of them had a week in the Times.

JASON
Harris will be there at least a month.

REBECCA
That's the hope, right?

JASON
What are some of the other books?

REBECCA
Last month, we published this child prodigy, Obadiah Jones. I put that one on Amber; I'm more of a lit fic gal.

Jason looks this up.

JASON
Oh, wow! *The Coefficient Empire* by Obadiah Jones had two weeks on the Young Adults Bestseller list. Wow, he's sixteen. Five stars on Amazon. Solid Kirkus review, too.

REBECCA
Kind of amazing.

JASON
Weird I didn't hear about it--

REBECCA
Corey said he's talking to Netflix about movie rights.

JASON
Must be all the Heidi McEwan money.

REBECCA
We truly don't deserve her.

Jason hands Harris his glass of wine.

JASON

You wanna finish for me?

HARRIS

Thank you, sir.

He pours the remainder of Jason's glass into his own.

JASON

Corey Reynolds. My man. Jason Yang.

COREY

Pleasure's all mine. I hear the man of the hour has you locked down. When's the date?

JASON

Fourth of July!
All American day for the all American couple. It's a Saturday.

REBECCA

Thought it fell on a Friday this year.

JASON

2026.

REBECCA

A nice, long engagement.

JASON

Way too long, if you ask me.

He turns to Harris--"kidding, not kidding".

HARRIS

But the Loft and Garden on Fifth was next available that day.

REBECCA

The one in Midtown? I've been to a wedding there--that must've cost a fortune.

HARRIS

They asked for twenty-five percent upfront. So once my advance comes in--

COREY

What are you waiting for?! This man--*this man*--looks like this and says he wants to marry you!

JASON

I've been saying the same thing!

HARRIS

But if it's the launch and the wedding back-to-back... I mean, what's even left after that?

JASON

Our love?

REBECCA

Write a sequel? This book is gonna basically print us money.

HARRIS

Well, you read it. The ending's kinda-- it's pretty definitive.

REBECCA

Sure.

COREY

You're a smart kid. You've got a few more stories in you. We're all kinda banking on that.

HARRIS

So am I.
Jason, actually, develops apps. He's been working on something--pretty cool.

JASON

Sure. One of my classmates and I--

HARRIS

From Yale.

All trickle in to listen to Jason's impromptu presentation.

JASON

Yes. From Yale. We built this app, Birdsong AI--that syncs up with your phone to listen to your friends and family; so that you can type or copy and paste whatever text in and pick a voice you wanna hear it in.

AMBER

Like the jabberjays! From *Hunger Games*.

JASON

Exactly. It's like when you don't feel like reading all the text or if you wanna just hear something in someone's voice.

REBECCA

How'd you get the idea?

JASON

(Indicating Harris.)

I love this boy, but he writes too many words.

COREY

Can it talk dirty?

Jason types in a message on his phone and presses "play."

HARRIS (AI GENERATED VOICE)

Of course it can.

COREY

(To Harris.)

Marry that man or I will.

JASON

We don't have it in the app store yet, but just for fun--

He opens his phone and pushes a button. A "file sent" noise is heard on everyone else's phones.

JASON

There--I just sent you all the prototype!

(To Corey.)

So I am curious about Blackfeather. I specialize in AI and B2C communications. Have you th--?

COREY

You're gonna have to slow way down. It's hard to focus on the techy talk when I am literally swimming in your eyes.

REBECCA

Knock it off.

(To Jason.)

Is he bothering you?

JASON

Nah, it's chill.

Rebecca crosses to Jillian and Amber.

COREY

OK. Finish your thought.

JASON

I looked at the Blackfeather website and it gave me some ideas.

I wanna hear 'em.

COREY

Jason brushes Harris's shoulder. He and Corey exit to the balcony. Harris crosses to pick a copy of his book up and fixates on a page. Preston crosses to him.

It's the big day, huh.

PRESTON

Something like that.

HARRIS

"Harrison Fowler"--that name's gonna take you places.

PRESTON

HARRIS

(Abrupt.)
Is my book any good?

You're published. I threw this whole party for you.

PRESTON

Yeah. Thanks.

HARRIS

You've always had such an imagination.
But I find it quite interesting that you used the name Allison in a crime thriller novel.

PRESTON

It's a pretty common name.

HARRIS

You remember *Up the Waterspout*?

PRESTON

Your manuscript?

HARRIS

My book.

PRESTON

It's been years.

HARRIS

It's about Detective Windsor Barrow.
I named his wife Allison.

PRESTON

OK?

HARRIS

PRESTON

It gets better. Barrow investigates a cult and rescues young girl. Shoots the leader dead. I can't help but be flattered, you know. Imitation is, after all, the highest form of flattery.

HARRIS

Dad--

PRESTON

It's even more interesting seeing these concepts repackaged by my own son. Celebrated by your mother. And a publisher. I do wonder sometimes... how much of this is really yours?

HARRIS

I don't owe you anything.

PRESTON

What'd you get for the advance?

HARRIS

200k.

Preston whistles.

PRESTON

No starving artist here, huh.

HARRIS

Someday, maybe.

PRESTON

And how much did your mother get out of that?

HARRIS

She's my agent.

PRESTON

Hmm.

HARRIS

What?

PRESTON

I'm catching some inconsistencies in your story, Harrison.

HARRIS

No, Dad--

PRESTON

I'd hate to see you caught unprepared for the consequences of your actions.

HARRIS

I wrote my own book.

He starts to walk away.

PRESTON

You know, people lie to you when you have money to burn.

Harris stops in his tracks.

PRESTON

Especially when they say they love you.

HARRIS

Mom's not lying to me. Jason's never lied to me.

PRESTON

You ever told Jason who's been paying your half of the rent?

HARRIS

Does it matter?

PRESTON

Well, if you pulled a six-figure advance like that, you certainly have no need for someone to further bankroll that "bohemian" lifestyle--do you?

HARRIS

No--I--Dad...

PRESTON

I thought so.

HARRIS

Thank you. Is that all?

PRESTON

No, I've got one more way you can show appreciation. I know you're good with words.

He leads Harris to the office. They exit.

AMBER

Did you see the mouthwash dispenser in the bathroom?

JILLIAN

Pretty standard practice in country clubs.

AMBER

As soon as my check hits, I'm gonna have to look into getting one of those--

JILLIAN

You still haven't been paid?

REBECCA

Corey said he was mailing it.

AMBER

Yeah, it might've come in. Lemme text my roommate Michelle.

She writes a text.

AMBER

We're down in Staten Island. Michelle, Julia, and Emma and me. Two sorta half-bedrooms, and a couch. I kinda won the Craigslist lottery.

JILLIAN

Sounds lovely.

AMBER

I'm on the couch.

JILLIAN

Could have guessed.

AMBER

Where do you live? Didn't I see you the other night out in Hell's Kitchen?

JILLIAN

Yeah, that was funny. New York City, and we just ran into each other.

AMBER

It was weird! You were talking to that older guy, and you said your name was--?

JILLIAN

My boyfriend and I are in a two-bedroom on 87th. Gorgeous view of Central Park.

REBECCA

You're kidding. What's your boyfriend do?

JILLIAN

Ryan's in med school, actually. NYU.

REBECCA

Two-bedroom on the Upper West Side.

JILLIAN

Mmm-hmm.

AMBER

You'll have to have us over sometime!

REBECCA

How much do you make?

JILLIAN

Plenty.

REBECCA

Hmm. I moved to Brooklyn a few months ago.

Marybeth stands at the ice sculpture.

MARYBETH

Where the hell is the ice pick?

She muscles off a loose "appendage" and drops it into her glass.

REBECCA

Did you not see the ice in the dish?

MARYBETH

Where'd all the men go?

REBECCA

Corey went off with, uh,

JILLIAN

Jason.

AMBER

Oh, you're Harris's Mom. I'm Amber. Huge fan of your son.

MARYBETH

I'm Harrison's agent. His mother, too. Marybeth Fowler.

AMBER

You're a professor at Columbia. Right?

MARYBETH

I was. I'm at UCSB now. Mentored Becky back in the day.

AMBER

Oh my gosh! And she's my supervisor--so, I guess--
That means you're like my grand... mentor?

MARYBETH

Amber, sweetie. No.

JILLIAN

Beck doesn't miss a thing. She must've been a great student.

MARYBETH

Her thesis was unforgettable.

REBECCA

Well--you taught for so long, I don't--

MARYBETH

No, no. You and I have a special bond. Got you this job, didn't I?

REBECCA

I did the interview myself.

MARYBETH

Heidi McEwan's an old friend.

REBECCA

Marybeth.

MARYBETH

What's gotten into you? I think you need to do a shot.

REBECCA

Dr. Fowler.

AMBER

I'll do a shot.

JILLIAN

Yeah, let's do shots!

She finds a bottle of tequila and four shot glasses. She prepares the shots.

JILLIAN

All right. Salt, lime, and then... shot!
Uno, dos, tres!

All four women partake.

AMBER

Woohoo!!!

Marybeth inspects the tequila bottle.

MARYBETH

Oh, Preston. Who are you trying to impress?

JILLIAN

How long has it been? If you don't mind my asking--

MARYBETH

Three years.
Honestly, I wish there was something juicy to say... but we just grew apart. The proceedings were quick. Prenup shut down most of the conversation. I took my dignity west to Santa Barbara, never to see his face again.

REBECCA

But you're here.

MARYBETH

Yeah, life's funny like that.

A pause.

MARYBETH

Girlfriend of mine saw him out with a much younger woman the other night. An escort.

JILLIAN

How would she know?

MARYBETH

We can always spot them.

JILLIAN

Well. It's big of you to be here today.

MARYBETH

Wouldn't miss this for the world.

AMBER

I think your son is incredible--

MARYBETH

(Ignoring Amber.)

D'you know Preston tried writing a book back in the day? Don't worry. He'll tell you. *Up the Waterspout*.

AMBER

Great writing must run in the family!

MARYBETH

Preston--

Always dreamed of writing the great American novel.

AMBER

And...?

MARYBETH

Sometimes I wonder if I'd let myself be a little happier. I don't know if we'd be here today.

AMBER

You want to get back together with him?

MARYBETH

Word of advice.

Don't stick your nose in places it doesn't belong.

Jillian shoots a look at Amber. Rebecca fixes a cold gaze. Amber notices all three women staring.

AMBER

What?

JILLIAN

It's good advice.

Corey and Jason enter. Jason hands Corey his business card.

JASON

...it's the best thing you can do for the startup.

COREY

Sexy business card! Yeah, send me the pitch.

JASON

Will you show it to Heidi?

COREY

Yeah, I'll run it by her, soon as I get ahold of her.

JASON

She's not coming today?

COREY

No, she's in Singapore. Yeah, she gets super hands off and likes to jet off at--the worst times.

MARYBETH

Sounds like things haven't changed.

JASON

Oh yeah!

What's she like?

MARYBETH

My roommate Heidi was a mess but everyone loved her. Some may find it hard to believe someone so flighty is one of the richest women in the world. But I always knew. When she latched onto an idea, I saw her go to the ends of the earth to make it happen. And whenever you talk, she makes you feel important. She's a great listener.

COREY

She does ask a lot of questions.

AMBER

I really want to meet her. I mean, now that payroll--

COREY

It's a lot of pressure when I think--*the* Heidi McEwan is my business partner. But we're just another middle-age divorcee and her gay best friend.

JILLIAN

You told me she was quitting.

JASON

She left Blackfeather?

COREY

That's not what I said, Jill. She's on a sudden trip--and she wanted to take a small step back--but now I hear she's always been flighty, so that might be why her husband left her, too.

MARYBETH

Hope he signed a prenup.

REBECCA

(To Corey.)

You want a drink? I'll make you something.

COREY

Can you make a Cosmo?

REBECCA

Sure. Hey, the ice is getting kinda stuck together. Anyone see the ice pick?

COREY

Oh--I'm an idiot. Walked off with it.

He passes the pick to Rebecca. Marybeth exits to the bathroom. Jillian turns to Jason in a side conversation.

JILLIAN

我可以帮助你，杨泽恺。

(Wǒ kěyǐ bāngzhù nǐ, yángzékǎi. / "I can help you, Yang Zekai")

JASON

闭嘴！

(Bì zuǐ! / "Shut up!")

JILLIAN

So it's true, then? Ryan told me everything.

JASON

What did he say?

JILLIAN

Everything.

JASON

Tell me if it's true... Olivia.

AMBER

That's what you said your name was! Out in Hell's Kitchen.
"Olivia". You looked so powerful--

JILLIAN

(To Jason.)

You have so much more to lose than me.

JASON

Are you sure about that?

JILLIAN

你找死吗?

(Nǐ zhǎosǐ ma? / "Are you looking for trouble?")

Jillian carefully opens her clutch.

Jason flinches. Jillian takes out her phone.

JILLIAN

(To Amber.)

We should grab a picture. The wildflowers are gorgeous.

AMBER

Hell yeah!

She exits to the balcony. Jillian follows. Rebecca hands Corey his drink. Jason pulls out his laptop.

COREY

Oh for God's sake, I didn't mean send it now--

JASON

I'm just making sure you get it before I forget. I also attached my resume and--have you thought about hiring a full-time AI Consultant?

COREY
Uh--?

JASON
AI is really best used when you need to retrieve the quantifiable information quickly. You could consolidate several positions--

COREY
Yeah, I'll bring it up with Heidi when she gets back.

JASON
How long is she in Singapore?

COREY
Maybe five, six weeks? With one of her other investments.

JASON
Oh, Felicity? Or Grano? I didn't think they came to Asia yet--

COREY
It wasn't Grano. Um--

JASON
Vauxhall?

COREY
Might've been Vauxhall, yeah.

Jason nods with a knowing smile.

COREY
She said something about them expanding.

JASON
Well, I'm up at weird hours with clients in Korea and China. I can meet for 30 minutes. Give her a call.

COREY
OK.

He initiates a call. Straight to voicemail:

"Hello, you've reached the office of Heidi McEwan. I'm rather sorry, I can't take your call right now. Kindly leave a message and I will get back to you."

A dial tone.

COREY
Heidi! Hey. I've been thinking a lot about AI. I'm at the launch party with, uh, Harrison Fowler's boyfriend.

He's an AI expert and he's just... Brilliant. Let's get a Zoom together next week. Call me back.

JASON

Thank you.

REBECCA

How's the Cosmo?

COREY

Wish it'd been on the rocks. Not your fault.

He carves some ice out of the dish and drops it into his glass.

COREY

It's a good thing you're cute, Jason. Heidi's gonna love you.

*He tops his glass with more vodka.
Harris and Preston enter.*

PRESTON

Think it's about time we have our champagne toast. There's bottles in the fridge for--40 to 50 important decision-makers? Do I have that right?

COREY

(Gritted teeth.)

You sure do.

PRESTON

Give me a hand?

COREY

What are party planning pals for?

Preston and Corey cross to the fridge and unload champagne.

Harris pulls Jason into a side conversation.

HARRIS

"Did you know my dad wrote a book?"

JASON

No?

HARRIS

It's a--

He looks down to continue reading a caption off his phone, reading something he was forced to say.

HARRIS

--"gripping crime thriller. Funny enough, *Up the Waterspout* was a formative piece of inspiration for my own *Blue Skies Yonder*--which speaks volumes about the man who raised me. I'm so proud to call Preston Fowler my father. Usually nepotism goes the other way, but I know his novel would make a fantastic addition to an elite catalogue like *Blackfeather*. If you like *Blue Skies Yonder*, you're going to love *Up the Waterspout*."

JASON

Harris?

HARRIS

Check my Instagram.

Jason looks at his phone to see the exact text Harris read.

JASON

"Did you know my dad wrote--?"
You wrote that?

HARRIS

Only the bit about nepotism.

A pause.

HARRIS

So you talked to Corey.

JASON

Yeah. I think he is interested, but he won't give me--

HARRIS

He keep it in his pants?

JASON

I--what?

HARRIS

Don't lie to me. I see how you've been looking at each other--

JASON

What are you talking about?

HARRIS

Sorry. I, I'm-- My dad's getting into my head.

JASON

Screw your dad. Screw Corey.
Let's just elope.

HARRIS

The Loft and Garden was nonrefundable.

JASON

Let's elope.

HARRIS

Let's get out of this party alive.

Marybeth enters from the bathroom. She approaches Harris and Jason.

MARYBETH

What's your father put you up to?

HARRIS

Nothing.

MARYBETH

Then what's this nonsense I see on Instagram?

HARRIS

Oh--that's... Don't worry about that.

MARYBETH

I know that manuscript didn't "inspire" you.

HARRIS

What's it matter now?

MARYBETH

When are you sending my cut?

A pause.

HARRIS

Don't they pay the agent first?

A champagne bottle is popped open.

MARYBETH

Typically. Depends on the publisher.

JASON

What'd the contract say?

MARYBETH

I've had a bit to drink.
But I fought tooth and nail for a 30 days clause--

HARRIS

I remember. We're down to three days now and--?
Where's the money, Mom?

MARYBETH

Watch your tone.

Jillian and Amber enter.

AMBER

Rebecca.

*Rebecca crosses to them. Jillian
whispers a gravely serious question.*

REBECCA

Thursday.

JILLIAN

Are you absolutely certain you did?

REBECCA

Yes. Didn't you?

AMBER

That doesn't tell us anything, though. Obviously Rebecca
would, since--

REBECCA

Amber.

JILLIAN

Why?

AMBER

Oh--does she not know about the--?

Rebecca shakes her head.

AMBER

Yeah. No, nevermind.

JILLIAN

What don't I know?

REBECCA

It's none of your business.

AMBER

Really, I'm not judging you. Either of you.
We're all just trying to make it. Aren't we?

REBECCA

You remember what Marybeth said?

AMBER

About sticking my nose--?

REBECCA

Best advice she's ever given.

*Corey crosses to center stage. All
gather around the Blackfeather CEO.*

COREY

Good afternoon, officially. Thank you to daddy Fowler for opening your ultimate DILF house. Had a blast pulling this together with you.

PRESTON

The pleasure was all mine.

COREY

Jill, you filming this?

Jillian takes out her phone.

JILLIAN

We're live.

COREY

Edgar Allen Poe once said, "The raven spoke only that one word. As if his soul in that one word he did outpour. Nothing further then he uttered--not a feather then he fluttered. The bird said, 'Nevermore'." Blackfeather Press was a pandemic dream hatched between me and Heidi McEwan. She's a European billionaire. I'm just a boy who loves books. With her money, my people, we'd find the brightest debut authors who'll shape bestseller lists and someday get quoted by startup founders in pretentious speeches--

All politely chuckle.

COREY

By our company's existence, we boldly ask, "Is there a brilliant voice that will not be heard?"

And to quote the raven: "Nevermore."

But anyway. No need to sell you on Blackfeather, you're already here. We're gathered, of course, to celebrate the launch of *Blue Skies Yonder* by Harrison Fowler.

All applaud.

COREY

Harrison. This was just meant to be.

I see so much of myself in you.

When I look at where I was five, ten years ago, I was that gay kid who just wanted my voice to be heard.

He raises his glass.

COREY

To Harrison Fowler. To all the people your book will touch,
to all the hard work that's shaped it, and to all the blue
skies ahead.

*All clink glasses and take a sip of
champagne.*

MARYBETH

That was beautiful.

COREY

And can I say? You wrote a damn good book!
And found a damn good man!

JASON

Yeah, I think I'll keep him.

*All laugh politely. Jillian stops
recording.*

JILLIAN

And... cut!

Amber steps forward.

AMBER

Would you mind if I say a few words?

COREY

Please, go ahead!

DING!

AMBER

I'm so sorry. My roommate Michelle's texting me back--

(Reading message aloud.)

"Isn't this your boss?"

A pause.

AMBER

Holy crap.

REBECCA

Amber?

AMBER

Heidi's dead.

What?

COREY

Jason takes out his phone.

That's impossible.

MARYBETH

Heidi McEwan is dead.

JASON

No. She's in Singapore--

COREY

"Venture capitalist Heidi McEwan found dead in Hudson Yards penthouse, apparent suicide". The articles are on Fox and CNN. The contractor found a body full of pills, head inside the oven, um...
You can read it.

JASON

No--no.

COREY

It's on MSNBC, as well. Estimated time of death Thursday around noon.

PRESTON

This--no. Let me try her.

MARYBETH

She places a call. Straight to voicemail: "Hello, you've reached the office of Heidi McEwan--"

She lowers her phone.

My god.

MARYBETH

The lights fade down. The pristine blue sky is still eerily bright and perfect.

PROLOGUE - (FLASHBACK).

VARIOUS LOCATIONS AND VIRTUAL MEETING ROOMS on a Tuesday afternoon in April 2025, four days before Act One began. The stage is dark--all that can be seen is the backdrop of a perfect bright blue sky looming over the background.

Four days earlier.

AMBER (VOICE)