

## FORWARDING INSTRUCTIONS

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## CHARACTERS

MORGAN	Older than Riley, someone who has been homeless for a while.
RILEY	Someone recently evicted after coming out to his/her parents.

Note: In the writing, Morgan is given masculine pronouns and Riley feminine ones. This was just for writing convenience. The names were explicitly chosen to support either character being any gender (or even non-gendered). Also, the director is welcome to set the ages and ethnicities of the characters as desired, and to change the names to match accordingly.

## SETTING

The beach.

SCENE

*(Morgan is sitting on the beach, a half-eaten sandwich wrapped in paper on his lap. Riley enters with a metal detector. It beeps, and she digs in the sand. She finds something, but it isn't valuable and she discards it and keeps on searching. This happens a few more times, and finally she gets so frustrated that she throws the detector away from her in Morgan's general direction, at which point she finally notices him.)*

RILEY

Sorry.

MORGAN

No luck, huh?

*(Riley pauses to consider Morgan. She's clearly cautious. Finally, she replies.)*

RILEY

Understatement of the century.

MORGAN

Hungry?

RILEY

I'm okay.

MORGAN

Doesn't mean you're not hungry.

*(He holds out the sandwich.)*

Here. I've had enough. It's turkey, so...

RILEY

So?

MORGAN

You know, just in case you're...

RILEY

I'm what?

MORGAN

Just in case you're part bird. I wouldn't want to be responsible for any unintentional cannibalism.

RILEY

Ah. Very thoughtful.

MORGAN

I try. Take a load off.

*(Riley takes the sandwich cautiously, sits carefully, then tears into the food like she hasn't eaten in days.)*

Whoa... Slow down. You don't want to get sick. Turkey's dead, it's not going anywhere.

*(This elicits a smile.)*

Morgan.

RILEY

Hey. Riley.

*(Morgan holds out a thermos, and Riley accepts it. She takes a drink.)*

Thanks.

MORGAN

Wouldn't want you to think I was a bad host.

RILEY

Your reputation is safe. I like what you've done with the place.

MORGAN

Thanks. Getting an ocean installed in a living room is expensive as hell, but I think it was worth it.

RILEY

The sand's a nice touch. Gives the place a certain grainy ambience.

MORGAN

Doesn't it, though?

RILEY

So how long have you been calling this place home?

*(Morgan gives a soft chuckle.)*

What?

MORGAN

It's not as easy a question to answer as you'd think. But what are you doing here? You don't...

RILEY

What? I don't what?

MORGAN

You look new to homelessness.

RILEY

Yeah. My parents kicked me out six days ago.

MORGAN

Well, then let me be the first to welcome to the community. Normally we have a ceremony for people when they join, but the cake's on back order.

RILEY

The sandwich works fine, thanks.

MORGAN

Piece of advice though? Maybe don't be so free with telling people stuff like that.

RILEY

Like what?

MORGAN

That you were just kicked out only a week ago.

RILEY

You asked.

MORGAN

Doesn't mean you should answer.

RILEY

I...

*(Morgan smiles, and she realizes that he's trying to look out for her.)*

Thanks.

*(Morgan nods. They sit in silence for a bit.)*

MORGAN

There's a set of instructions, you know.

RILEY

Funny.

MORGAN

No. Really. Not written down, but... it's something we try to pass along to the new members.

RILEY

Let me guess. Step one, find shelter. Step two, find food. Rinse and repeat.

MORGAN

No. Not instructions for being homeless. For the other thing.

RILEY

What other thing?

MORGAN

Getting kicked out.

RILEY

Same thing.

MORGAN

No. It really isn't.

RILEY

Feels like the same thing.

MORGAN

Well, it's all still pretty fresh. Probably pretty hard to tell one thing from another right now.

RILEY

You talk like you know what happened. You don't.

MORGAN

I can make some educated guesses, but it doesn't really matter.

*(Riley looks dubious, and he continues.)*

Your parents reached a tipping point. They told you to get out.

RILEY

You want to know what happened?

MORGAN

I'm glad to listen if you want to talk about it.

RILEY

I came out to them. That night, there was a suitcase waiting for me at the door.

MORGAN

Tipping point.

RILEY

What does that even mean?

MORGAN

It means your parents went from living in some charade where they could pretend that everything was okay... or at least tolerable... and then something happened and suddenly they couldn't pretend anymore. The truth came out.

RILEY

The truth about my sexuality.

MORGAN

The truth that the you that you are... is not the you that they insisted you were... that they wanted you to be... maybe that they *needed* you to be.

RILEY

So you're saying I shouldn't have told them?

MORGAN

No. Not saying that at all. If you didn't say anything, yeah, maybe you could have stayed there longer, but what would be the point? It's not likely they would wake up one day suddenly able to handle something they couldn't the night before. So you live a lie for... what? Another few months... maybe another few years... but it's a crappy trade. Living a lie for the illusion of being accepted. In some awful, ironic, painful way, it's probably better to learn that now. Once and for all. Most people live lies their whole life, making friends by pretending to be what they think other people want. Never finding the courage to just be themselves.

RILEY

Sick culture.

MORGAN

No argument there.

RILEY

Somehow this feels worse.

MORGAN

Probably because it is. You lost a hell of a lot more than a friend or two. Truth is, no matter what you think, you're never ready.

RILEY

To be homeless?

MORGAN

No. Not homeless. You can prepare for that. You're never ready to be rejected. Or, maybe better said, to face that rejection. How can anyone get ready for that kind of thing?

RILEY

I don't know.

MORGAN

You can't. All you can do is follow the instructions.

RILEY

And they'll make everything alright?

MORGAN

No. They're just instructions. You're the one who'll make everything alright.

RILEY

Okay. So tell me these magical instructions.



MORGAN

Hang on.

*(He fishes out some chocolate and hands it to her.)*

Here.

RILEY

Chocolate? This helps make sense out of them or something?

MORGAN

I don't know. Maybe. But that's how it went when I was taught them. Seems like a good tradition.

*(Riley smiles, and accepts the chocolate. She takes a bite.)*

Step one. Understand that there's a lot more than just one issue going on right now. It all feels like this big "I was kicked out" mess, but there's a ton of things all knotted together here. People you trusted are questioning your judgment, maybe even your sanity. People you love have told you, in one way or another, that they don't love you back. Oh, and of course on top of everything you have no place to stay, no food to eat, no safety net for all the other crap that life throws at you. You need to recognize that it's a lot, and that it'll take time to deal with all the different pieces. This isn't going to all be resolved next month. Be patient with yourself.

*(Riley just stares at Morgan, struggling a bit to hold it together.)*

Step two. Deal with the immediate needs. This is the obvious one that you already guessed. You have to sleep. You have to eat. If you can't do those, you can't handle anything else. And the rest is really important. But fortunately, you're also going to find out pretty quickly that a lot of stuff you thought you needed... not so much. You can survive on a lot less than you think. Trust me.

RILEY

Morgan, honestly, I'm running a little low on trust right at the moment.

MORGAN

Yeah. I bet. But that's what makes it more of a leap of faith than a roll of the dice.

RILEY

I'm a little low on faith too.

MORGAN

Anyway... Step three. Understand why you want to go back.

RILEY

I assure you, I don't want to go back.

MORGAN

And I assure you, part of you does. You may have a whole furnace full of fury right now, but what's making it burn so hot is the internal conflict. Part of you wants to go back, and another part is hating yourself for feeling that way. You can lie to me about it all you want, but you have to come to grips with it within yourself.

RILEY

Easier said than done.

MORGAN

Nothing about any of this is easy. Six days, so you've definitely figured that out by now. But it'll get easier. And then you need to start looking at things from a new angle. That's what Bobbi said to me when I was the one eating the chocolate. She said, you know how people say 'Home is where the heart is'? Most think that means that your home is where you *find* your heart. Where you grew up, where your family lives... all the things you love from your past. And maybe that works for some people. Maybe. But you... you, Riley... you need to flip that around now. Your old home isn't where you're going to find your heart anymore. That place is just gonna hold pain. Instead, you need to put your heart somewhere else. It can be a place, like this beach is for me, but it doesn't have to be. It can be a person, an ideal, a purpose... whatever's right for you. And wherever you *put* your *heart*, that's going to be your home from now on.

RILEY

How do you know where to put it?

MORGAN

Different for everyone. Only you can decide that. When you're ready.

RILEY

So, that's it? The whole three step program?

MORGAN

No. Four steps. The first three are only there to get you ready for the fourth.

RILEY

Okay...

MORGAN

Step three was ‘understand why you want to go back’. That’s really important. You can’t deny the desire. You *need* to understand it in order to deal with the fourth and final step, which is this: Understand... that there’s no such thing as going back. Ever. For anyone, in any situation.

RILEY

I don’t believe that. No, I can’t *accept* that. I won’t just say “oh well, fuck my parents and my whole life, time to move on.”

MORGAN

Whoa. That’s not what I’m saying. Not at all.

RILEY

It sure sounded that way.

MORGAN

Okay, let me try this a different way. You ever play those old computer adventure games where you go around doing stuff, and you make these choices. Attack the troll or try to talk your way past it to go across the bridge?

RILEY

I suppose. Some.

MORGAN

And if you were like me, you saved the game before you made the choice so you could reload it and try the other option in case you picked wrong.

RILEY

Maybe.

MORGAN

Of course you did. Everyone does. We want life to be like that. We want to believe we can find a way back to where we were so we can fix the mistakes, correct the wrongs. But it can’t happen. There’s no saved game in real life. Every instant of every day, you change. Everyone changes. With every new life experience, you become a different person. Even if tomorrow you wake up, and like in that Groundhog movie you find it’s a week ago... it still wouldn’t be the same, because *you’re* different. Even if you hadn’t told them, could you ever really see your parents the same way again, the way you saw them a week ago when you weren’t sure how they would react?

RILEY

No. I... No.

MORGAN

Fact is, everyone is changing. Every day. Every moment.

RILEY

Well, it sucks.

MORGAN

It is what it is. It sucks when you don't like how things go, and it's great when things make you happy. Here's how Bobbi explained it to me. Imagine that you broke your arm. It's probably going to heal, but even if it does, you still broke your arm. Maybe the knitted bone will be weaker than it used to be. Maybe it'll be stronger. But even if it knits to be exactly the same as it was before, you still broke your arm. And you know it. *You* have changed. Whatever you did to break it, you probably won't do that again the next time, right? The thing is, Riley, we only grow forward in time.

RILEY

*Grow* forward... interesting way to put it.

MORGAN

Most people who suffer trauma think that the goal is to get back to where they were before the trauma happened. But that just isn't possible. If you spend your life trying to swim upstream, all you're going to do is stagnate. You are where you are. Now. Today. This moment. And you need to realize that the question isn't how to get back to where you were, to *what* you were. The question is where do you go from here? From who you are... from where you are now.

RILEY

Food. Shelter.

MORGAN

For the moment. But ultimately, the answer is 'home'. Wherever you decide to put your heart.

RILEY

And if I don't want to lose my family?

MORGAN

Anything's possible. Maybe as you move forward you'll find a chance to build new relationships with your parents. Maybe not. Depends on what kind of people they are, what you want to invest in. But it won't ever be the same. And honestly, that's probably for the best.

*(They fall silent.)*

RILEY

That's a lot to remember.

MORGAN

Well, if you ever need a reminder... or half a sandwich... you know where I'll be.

RILEY

Right.

*(She stands up.)*

Thanks. For...

*(Morgan nods, and they share a moment of mutual understanding.)*

Really. Thanks. Wish I had something to give you in return for...

MORGAN

That's not how it works. All the important stuff lies ahead. Focus there.

RILEY

I... I will.

*(Morgan nods in response. Riley gives him a smile, then retrieves her detector and wanders off. Lights out.)*