

"HOLDING COURT"

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FADE IN:

INT. ERIC'S CAR - EVENING

ERIC and COURT are driving to Izzy's apartment for a dinner party. ERIC sits in the driver's seat wearing a TIGHT NAVY BUTTON-DOWN and OFF-WHITE CHINO PANTS, while Court wears a PASTEL TANK TOP, CHUNKY ORANGE CARDIGAN, and CUFFED COURDUROYS. Court is laughing, and Eric is sipping a GRAPEFRUIT SPARKLING WATER. The mood is light.

COURT

-which is ridiculous! Jesus, if he was walking around today, would fucking hate the catholic church! It's this huge fucking institution with all this fucking money and like a million pedophiles, and like number one, that's what Leviticus was actually talking about, and number two, there's this verse in the New Testament where Jesus is talking and he's like... it's something like it would be easier for a rich- or...

ERIC

It would be easier for a camel to pass through the eye of the needle than-

COURT

-than for a rich man to enter the gates of Heaven, and it's like guys Jesus was a communist, socialist, anarchist guy. He hated institutions and loved the poor, so like, why would the Catholic church even exist? They should give away all their money and- and you! You're going and giving them money and legitimacy every week!

ERIC

Hey I don't give them money! I just show up.

COURT

But why! You know they're bad! Just don't go!

Eric groans.

ERIC

But then I'll feel guilty.

COURT

(very loudly)

BECAUSE THEY TAUGHT YOU TO!!!

ERIC

And it worked!!! Don't you lecture me on fucking Christian morality, you WASP-y piece of shit! You just show up and sing a little song, drop a twenty in the basket and fuck off, you liberal bastard!

COURT

But my church is cool!

ERIC

Mhm.

COURT

Can I have a sip of your drink?

ERIC

Yeah sure.

COURT

I don't know why I've been so thirsty recently. You said the thing tonight is like a meditation thingy?

CUT TO:

A STANCHION SIGN reading "Mindful Meal for Male-identified Midwesterners" stands on a creaky hardwood floor. As a speech begins, zoom out into...

INT. IZZY'S DINING ROOM - EVENING

Izzy's faux Victorian dining room is full enclosed, with doors on all sides. Around the table sit RICKY, RYAN, ERIC, COURT, JOE, JAXON, and BUTTON (with three per side and in that order, so that Court sits at the head of the table). In front of all seven attendees, there are ELABORATE PLACE SETTINGS, each of the innumerable dishes and utensils is unique and seemingly thrifted. The composition is spread over a RED (VELVET?) TABLECLOTH, which next to the RED PATTERNED WALLPAPER gives the whole scene the impression of a Matisse. IZZY stands in a LOOSE CROP TOP, CRISP WHITE SLACKS, and a LONG ROBE, cinched at the waist with a VINTAGE LEATHER BELT.

IZZY

Deep exhale... long exhale... deep
inhale... and long exhale... feeling the
weight of your shoulders... on your
spine... acknowledging your stress... and
breathing...

(she inhales)

...it all out...

All the guests have their eyes closed and sit in various states of comfort. Button has their head tilted all the way back against their seat, so that their chin points directly upward. Izzy quietly retrieves a COPPER POT from a GOLDEN CHAFING DISH and begins to ladle out servings of BRIGHT GREEN, SILK-SMOOTH SOUP into everyone's soup bowls. All that can be heard is the CLINKING OF DISHES and DEEP BREATHS.

IZZY (cont'd)

...continuing to focus on your breath...
and starting to notice the sensations
around you as they appear to your mind...
how does the room feel? Is it warm or
cool? How does the room sound? Let all the
little sounds come to you, equalizing...
your senses...

She finishes serving the soup.

IZZY (cont'd)

On your next deep breath, smell the food. Smell the peas. Smell the mint. Smell the celery. Smell the onions. Smell the black pepper. Smell the fresh Wisconsin butter. Do not think about Wisconsin... Now take a deep, deep breath, and release the sound of your heart into the world, groan and scream like the day you were born.

All attendees inhale. Button's mouth opens first, as they let out a groan halfway between pained and erotic. The rest of the guests follow suit. Joe screams as if he's just noticed a knife in his back; Ricky keens like a grieving mother; Ryan timidly lows with furrowed brows; Jaxon makes a sustained and strained humming sound like a single-serve coffee machine; Eric pushes air stiffly through his throat until his voice falters; Court only makes a shy beep, like a car whizzing past. Button's sound continues long past everyone else's has ceased. All is silent except a few suppressed sobs, coming from Eric.

IZZY (cont'd)

(smiling)

Please, try the soup.

Everyone slowly opens their eyes and adjusts to the warm, sensual light of the many PLAIN WAX CANDLES. All but Eric, Court, and Ricky begin to eat, moving like awakened statues. Court instinctually clasps Eric's hand and rubs it with his thumb.

COURT

(mouthed, attentive)

Are you okay?

Eric nods.

RICKY

(mouthed)

Are you okay?

Eric nods, again.

While all guests gently begin to eat the pea soup, Izzy retrieves a crusty LOAF OF SOURDOUGH BREAD and a large HARDWOOD BOWL. She begins tearing the loaf into bite-size pieces and placing them into the bowl like it's a dance, scored by the CLINKING of little spoons. After tearing the entire loaf of bread, she uncorks an unmarked BOTTLE OF RED WINE and pours it into a CERAMIC GOBLET next to the bowl.

IZZY

All of us seek God. We ask them "why?... why all of this? Why?... why?" They are quiet. And when they do respond, they say:

(making eye contact with each guest individually, serenely)

"You are the bleeding man. You are the bleeding man... and I am the moon."

Eric's crying grows louder. Izzy begins to dip pieces of bread into the wine and hand-feed them to the guests as she speaks.

IZZY (cont'd)

It is only food. It is only bread. It is only wine. There is no body. There is no blood. There is no answer. It is only food. Eat the food. Feel the way the wine soaks the bread. Press it against the roof of your mouth with your tongue. Notice the symmetry of nature. You are the bleeding man.

She feeds Button, Jaxon, Joe, and Court, who take the bread with eyes closed. As she is moving to Eric, he can no longer contain himself, and one very loud sob escapes his lips. He stands quickly, and his chair honks like a goose.

ERIC

Sorry, excuse me.

CUT TO:

INT. IZZY'S BATHROOM - A MINUTE LATER

Eric sits on the TOILET with his head in his hands, failing to hide his sobs behind a wad of TOILET PAPER. The door creaks open, and Court enters quietly, closing the door behind him.

COURT

Hey man, you okay?

ERIC

(clearing his throat)

Yeah sorry. Sorry. I don't know what that was, I guess...

COURT

Do you wanna go?

ERIC

No! No, I'm okay. Just affected I guess.

Court kneels in front of the toilet, embraces Eric, and kisses him.

COURT

That's good! Maybe you can cry now. Like one drop and now this all the time, 24/7.

ERIC

Uh... are you planning on going over to that kid's place after this?

A pause.

COURT

No, probably not, why?

ERIC

I just... I don't know. I'm feeling kind of weird about it. Just seeing you with him makes me think about like... seeing-like being in high school and-

He laughs.

ERIC (cont'd)

It's stupid. But I don't know. Just maybe don't tonight? And we can talk about it more?

COURT

(very genuine)

Yes, it's stressful! I know you have a lot of problems with all that, and I can totally see how this situation would be sensitive for you. And everything you're feeling is so real and so valid, and I love you, okay? We can talk, we can always talk.

ERIC

Yeah. I love you too. Thank you.

They kiss again. Court leaves the bathroom.

CUT TO:

INT. IZZY'S LIVING ROOM - A MINUTE LATER

AN EXPENSIVE-LOOKING RECORD PLAYER crackles out an OLD-TIMEY WALTZ. The dining table is pushed to the side of the room, and the guests dance gingerly in pairs, Button with Ryan, Joe with Ricky, Jaxon with Court, and Eric with Izzy. All of them are whispering in each other's ears, but only Eric's whispers are audible.

ERIC

-and it wasn't like I knew what I was doing either. And I remember specifically that it was so cold, we kept having to put our clothes back on and warm up. I never really saw him after that. I mean it was the last Thanksgiving before our grandpa died, so I saw him at the funeral, I guess. But yeah, I was twelve, which at the time felt incredibly late, but of course now I think about being twelve like I was eight or six. He was fif... sixteen? Fifteen or sixteen. I totally forgot about

(MORE)

ERIC (CONT'D)

that. He has a kid now. She's in middle school. It's so weird. I feel like I know so little. Like not a lot has really changed in my life in the last ten years, and he has a fucking teenager. I don't know.

Long pause. Eric is looking at Court, who is giggling and whispering very close. Each boy's hot breath on the other's ear is almost visible.

IZZY

(to everyone)

Aaaaand thus concludes the wiener waltz.
Everyone sit.

The guests move to get their chairs.

IZZY (cont'd)

On the floor. Legs crossed.

She pulls her two neighbors' hands together as she goes to retrieve seven BLUE-AND-WHITE CHINA PLATES, each adorned with a different PHALLIC FOOD, standing erect in the center. She sets them out, one in front of each guest, over the course of her speech.

IZZY (cont'd)

Join hands. Close your eyes. Notice the temperature of your neighbors' hands. Are they hot? Are they sweaty? Are they cold? Are they rough? Are they holding your hand tightly? Are they shaking? Remember all the things you were just told. Hold those truths. Hold the truths that you didn't hear, too. Hold the complexity and incomprehensibility of the range of human experience. And hold the structures into which you have been forced. And acknowledge how they have destroyed you. Turn them over in your mind. See them for what they are. See how they stole from you. Rise to your knees, eyes still closed.

The guests all do so.

IZZY (cont'd)

Now open your eyes. See in front of you, these seven phallic foods. Hold no disdain for yourself, your submissiveness. Submit to your desire to fall. Submit to your desire to serve. Hold onto your neighbors, and love the erection. Eat the erection. Remaining on your knees and holding your neighbors' hands, eat every erection. Make your way around the circle as this dainty, incapable thing. Feel your body accepting its position as a thing to be penetrated. Become the thing. Consume the structures that you love and hate. Acknowledge your fear of and envy for the feminine. Claim your beauty. Claim your seductiveness. Claim the grace of your body, with its hard lines, with its coarse black hair, with its softnesses and its hardnesses. There is nothing man about you. There is nothing man about you. Shirk your violence, shirk your domination, shirk your hatred. Regress. Regress. Regress until you are a babe in the womb. Regress. Regress.

Izzy takes a deep, deep breath.

IZZY (cont'd)

Now straighten your backs. Look at each other. See the things you all have become, and love each other. Love each other in the way people know best. Kiss each other. Kiss and kiss and-

CUT TO:

INT. IZZY'S BATHROOM - A MINUTE LATER

Eric sits on the toilet lid again, rubbing his eyes and clenching his fists. His panicked BREATHING is the only sound. He sits for a long time, shaking his leg. The door CREAKS open and shut.

ERIC

Babe can you actually just give me a second?

JOE'S VOICE (O.S.)

No.

ERIC

Joe?

JOE'S VOICE (O.S.)

No.

Eric looks up to see a STRANGE PERSON, who looks exactly like Joe, except they are completely nude, have no genitals, and are made up like a 1980s Bette Midler impersonator.

ERIC

Whoa.

STRANGE PERSON

Sh.

They place their hand on Eric's forehead. Everything falls into PITCH DARKNESS.

STRANGE PERSON (cont'd)

Once there was a boy who had a chain inside him. It started inside his belly and came through his navel and was strung to the back of a truck that dragged him along. "The forward momentum," people would say to him, "is such a gift. So few ever get to experience the rush of being alive." But the time burnt his skin as he bounced off the dirt, flailing and pockmarked. Around him, all the other people seemed so delighted. And one day, he finally cut the chain and fell. He fell, curled, into the past, into the secret bars, into Tuke paintings,

(MORE)

STRANGE PERSON (CONT'D)

into the Wildean code, into the boarding houses and the hospitals, into the Symposium, into this idea that is not real, this perfect conservative happiness. Around him the old men stammered and grunted and were quiet, and he took his place. His guilt faded to apathy, his love grew to fill the space he made for it, his heart began to slow and settle into an easy and familiar pace. It was not perfect, but it was still.

Long silence.

ERIC

What?

STRANGE PERSON

This is not a moral truth; I speak only to your impulse.

The bathroom returns, and the figure is gone. Eric sits on the toilet.

CUT TO:

INT. IZZY'S DINING ROOM - A MINUTE LATER

Eric stands in the doorway, the entire group in a pulsating mass of person, a veritable orgy of sensuality. They do not have sex, but they do engage in indulgently graceful touches, the grazing of fingertips, and theatrically seductive glances.

A beat.

Eric looks at the ground and frowns.

CUT TO:

INT. ERIC'S CAR - LATE NIGHT

Eric focuses on driving as Court, glistening with sweat, his CARDIGAN now thrown in the back seat, revels in his bliss.

COURT

And it's like wow! Y'know like all of these things that have been holding me back, and I'm like... so... I don't know! It's like there is no reason not to believe in all these things I thought were hurting me. Like why shouldn't I believe in God? I can believe in whatever God serves me, regardless of whether or not that God is real y'know? Ugh! Wow.

Court's phone BUZZES. He smiles as he begins to type. Eric glances over at the screen that Court is definitely not trying subtly to shield.

ERIC

Hey uh... I think I want to close our relationship.

Pause. Court locks his phone and looks to Eric.

COURT

Well we can talk! I mean I'm not- you know I'm not going over to Jaxon's place tonight?

ERIC

(slowly, carefully)

That's not- look I just... I think that I am feeling pressured by queer society into being more okay with things than I am. And I think I might be more conservative than I thought I was.

Long pause.

COURT

I mean... I don't think you're conservative. You do go to mass every week, so...

ERIC

Look. What if we just take a month and not have sex with other people? Then we can talk about it and see how we're feeling.

COURT

I don't want to do that.

ERIC

Okay. I just think... I don't know if the experience that I had tonight was the same experience that you had tonight, but I realized a lot of things about what I want. And one of those things is not having sex with other people, at least for right now.

COURT

I think... maybe let's talk about this tomorrow.

Eric nods and looks at the road.

CUT TO:

INT. ERIC'S BEDROOM - EARLY THE NEXT MORNING

MORNING SUNLIGHT spills in from the SLIDING-GLASS DOORS to Eric's balcony. His bedroom is neat, with TASTEFUL YET PERSONAL WALL ART and several HEALTHY HOUSE PLANTS. Eric sits on the edge of the bed, only wearing JEANS; he looks at Court, who lies asleep, the WHITE SHEETS draped to make him appear as a classical nude statue of some soldier boy. Eric touches his body and makes a small sound.

CUT TO:

INT. TRADITIONAL CHAPEL - THE SAME MORNING

Eric kneels at the front of a chapel, where a PRIEST is giving communion to a sparse crowd of CHURCHGOERS. As the priest approaches Eric, he extends his hands, one atop the other.

PRIEST

Take this, the body of Christ.

ERIC

Amen.

The priest presses a COMMUNION WAFER into Eric's palm. Eric looks at it. He inhales deeply. He eats it. He closes his eyes. He prays, meditates, is present.

PRIEST

Take this, the blood of Christ.

ERIC

Amen.

Eric takes the CHALICE from the priest and drinks.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKESHORE TRAIL - LATER THE SAME DAY

Eric lies on the grass with his eyes closed. He sees it, him and God and history and time and love and fate and chaos and chance and society and people and things and cities and-

RICKY

Eric?

Eric opens his eyes to see Ricky and Ryan, both dressed spiffily in KNEE-LENGTH SHORTS and PATTERNED BUTTON-DOWNS, standing over him on the grass. Ricky wears a PINK HAT embroidered with "daddy!".

RYAN

What are you doing?

A pause.

ERIC

Praying, I think.

RICKY

Ah, fuck yeah.

ERIC

What are you guys doing?

RYAN

We go on walks every morning.

ERIC

Oh. That's really nice.

RYAN

Yeah it is. Where's Court?

ERIC

Probably sleeping.

RICKY

We're about to go get some lunch if you
wanna come.

ERIC

Yeah that would be really nice. Thank you.

RICKY

Of course.

Eric gets up, and the three of them walk out of sight.

FADE OUT

THE END