

**GROUND UP**

**BY: CHRISANTHI BURCH AND EMMA MOULAS**

**Scene 1:**

*Opens in a messy living room, EASTON is cleaning up (folding blankets, picking up trash, etc.), he moves past a photo of WESLEY, and looks at it for a moment, reminiscing on the good times he had with his brother. PETER enters from stage right and looks at EASTON holding the photo.*

PETER : I miss him too.

EASTON: *(setting the photo down)* What?

PETER : We all miss him, E. I'm grateful for you stepping up and helping your mother and I, you know how hard this has been on us.

EASTON: *(deflecting the question )* Yeah, I know.

*EASTON sets the photo down on the coffee table and continues cleaning. PETER walks over to his son and attempts to pat him on the back in reassurance but EASTON ducks out of the way picking something up off the ground. PETER goes to pick the photo up and sits down, recognizing the lacrosse stick WESLEY is holding.*

EASTON: *(pointing to the lacrosse stick gesturing the photo towards PETER)* Did we ever find Wes's lacrosse stick? His lucky purple one? ( *Quick beat between EASTON and PETER*) You know, the one he had when he scored that winning goal in the last few seconds of our championship game against the Vikings, when the entire student section swarmed the field?!

PETER: Oh, yes. *(almost laughing.)* I remember that game.

EASTON: That was such a great day!

*Both EASTON and PETER realize a day like that will never happen again.*

PETER: I'm sure it's somewhere around here.

*EASTON sets the photo back on the coffee table and continues cleaning, PETER begins to grow tired and moves over to sit on the couch. EASTON notices and lets out a sigh knowing there is nothing he can do to help his father's depression. PETER rests on the couch and EASTON places a blanket over him and then exits stage right to get another trash bag. MIA enters stage left in a frenzy and throws her briefcase on the couch and the papers in her hand on top of them, papers fly everywhere and PETER is awakened by the sudden noise and movement, he groans, not able to move/wanting to rest longer. MIA begins picking up her papers as EASTON returns with a trash bag from stage right.*

EASTON: Hey, Mom! How was work?

MIA: Fine. (*EASTON pretends as though no conversation took place and continues cleaning. Beat.*) Peter, why the hell are you sleeping again? Didn't I tell you to make dinner?

PETER: (*Sitting up*) Mia, I haven't gotten around to making dinner yet. I've been cleaning the house all day and-

EASTON: (*almost under breath*) I've actually been cleaning the house all day.

PETER: Don't interrupt me. Anyway- I just haven't gotten around to it.

MIA: I told you this morning you should've had it done before I got home. That way you could've actually accomplished something positive today. And we could all eat dinner **together** instead of eating separately like how we did before. . .

*She trails off knowing it is a sensitive subject for the family. MIA quickly turns to her briefcase and opens it, getting out work, PETER lays back on the couch.*

EASTON: (*exiting stage right carrying a trash bag*) So I'm making dinner tonight then?

MIA: If you wouldn't mind.

EASTON: (*Obviously irritated as this happens way too often*) Not at all.

**Scene 2:**

*Opens in the dining room, PETER and MIA are on the ends of the head of the table with EASTON on the upstage side, there is an extra chair downstage with a plate but no food implying WESLEY'S spot. The dinner is silent, only awkward eating.*

EASTON: *(to interrupt the silence)* So, um, it's my turn to host the lax team dinner.

MIA: What do you mean?

EASTON: The team dinner. Coach keeps telling me to remind you that we need to host some time this season, but Jack said he could host my assigned night if it's too much for us.

MIA: He said that? What makes him think we're not equipped to host?

EASTON: Well, I mean look around. We're not exactly-

MIA: We're perfectly equipped to host! We need to show your team that we're okay. Plus, the cars on the street will let the neighbors know The Wisell's are back!

EASTON: But we-

MIA: Yes! We'll host! We're doing it! It shouldn't be too much to manage, just let me know what time it'll be and I won't work late that night. Peter, you'd have to shower and look presentable for once. You think you can do that? *( PETER begins to speak up but is immediately cut off by MIA continuing her rant)* And we'll have to cook something for dinner, something nice, something bold enough that says "we're A-okay" but not too bold where they'll think we've slaved all day. I don't know- something like, umm, lasagna?

EASTON: *(Fully stressed out)* Sure.

*Beat.*

PETER: *(finally looking up from playing with his food. Calmly)* Mia, Jack is insisting he take this round on team dinner. We should let him. Everyone will understand.

MIA: No, we're hosting. Right, Easton? Don't we want to show your teammates we're doing better?

PETER: *(sternly)* No, Easton doesn't want the team over! He's okay with Jack hosting this week. We'll do it some other time.

MIA: Easton **wants** to host. He **wants** to show his team his family is no longer broken, and never **was** broken.

PETER: Mia, we're all trying our best and I know we cope differently, but the least you could do is not force a team dinner on us!

MIA: *(getting heated)* Oh?-

EASTON: *(knowing the fight his parents are about to have, butting in)* Actually- I said it's fine. It shouldn't be too much trouble to stop by the grocery store and get a boxed one. It's fine, Dad.

*(Beat.)*

PETER: *(quieting his anger)* Fine.

*Everyone goes back to eating, there is awkward silence until broken by MIA loudly standing, not pushing her chair in, and exiting stage right.*

### Scene 3:

*MIA is running around trying to make the house look as put together as possible, folding blankets, fluffing pillows and putting them in a perfect position on the couch, and moving*

*furniture to the ideal place. EASTON is getting out plates and utensils, placing them on the table.*

*PETER enters stage right wearing a nice polo shirt.*

MIA: Ahh, look how nice it is- you, looking presentable.

PETER: *(Sarcastically)* Just for you, honey.

MIA: Easton, how much longer 'til everyone arrives?

EASTON: Like forty-five minutes.

MIA: Okay, can we have a little family meeting at the table?

*The two reluctantly sit down in the same seats they were sitting in at dinner. MIA finishes straightening up therefore the boys have to wait on her, and then finally she sits down at the kitchen table.*

MIA: Okay, quick reminder. Let's be on our best behavior and show that we are in good spirits. Because we are. It's that simple, right? (*Not necessarily wanting an answer.*)

PETER: *(Forcefully)* Mia, everyone sympathizes with us.

MIA: You don't know that, I know for a fact they talk about us behind our backs.

PETER: *(under his breath)* You're paranoid.

MIA: What was that? (*Peter shakes his head*) Easton, tell your father he needs to be in a good mood tonight. Because clearly, he won't listen to me.

*EASTON looks at his mother blankly.*

MIA: The Wisell family name has been tainted, obviously, and we've been through a lot. So much so that people can't even talk to us without saying "I'm sorry for your loss," or "I'm here for you," or "If you need anything, let me know." I'm sick of it, honestly. Yes, we've been through a lot, but we're stronger than ever! This dinner is the best way to show everyone that we're fine!

EASTON: Mom, it's okay that people think that way of us. We still need to heal which takes actual time and effort. Plus, they're just trying to help. I mean look at us right now, we're bending over backward just to make our house decent enough for a high school lacrosse team.

MIA: The only reason our house is a mess is because your father won't clean anything up.

PETER: *(rolls his eyes)* Really, Mia?

MIA: Really! I get home late and Easton has school and lacrosse every day. Do you know what you do? Nothing. If you're not even going to show up for his games or meet the teacher night or anything in general, the least you could do is clean **your** shit!

PETER: *(Getting sick of his wife's attitude)* I know you're stressed out but there is no reason to take it out on me, who is trying my best to love and support **you**. You've done this to yourself, you know that? You work late more nights than not, picking up more projects than you can handle. And you barely even pay attention to us. When was the last time we had a conversation, not a talk, but a real conversation? *( Growing anger)* When was the last time you talked with your son without mentioning the loads of housework you've put him up to or the stress you're enduring? You say we're better than ever, but c'mon snap back to reality, are we?

*Beat.*

*MIA stares at PETER, she opens her mouth trying to form words. At a loss, she stands, leaving her chair pushed out, she goes to the living room, opens her computer, and starts typing away. EASTON and PETER stay silent and look at each other, EASTON is upset with his father for how he spoke to his mother but also understands him, PETER is still angry and lowers his head. After a few seconds of typing the doorbell rings. The team is here. Everyone takes a deep*

*breath. MIA's deep breath concludes with her closing her computer and putting on a smile.*

*Blackout.*

#### **Scene 4:**

*The dim light barely illuminates the living room. It is night and the team has already left. EASTON is sitting on the center of the couch holding the same picture of him and WESLEY. He looks at his watch counting down from 4 until the hand reaches 12.*

*EASTON: To the picture, Happy birthday, Wes. We miss you. (Beat.) So much.*

*He continues staring at the photo, deep in thought, until his emotions overwhelm him and he starts crying. He quickly begins to try and conceal his tears, almost embarrassed that he can't stay strong for his brother so many months later. MIA enters from the unlit kitchen and stares at her son from across the room. She looks sympathetic but upset at the same time. EASTON continues to wipe his tears as he notices his mother.*

*EASTON: It's his seventeenth birthday, you know.*

*MIA: (strongly) I'm aware.*

*EASTON: At least, it would've been if he were still here. ( He stands) And we would've been celebrating, hanging up the Happy Birthday banner, setting out the grocery store doughnuts, and putting his presents right by his chair to open in the morning. And I would have woken him up screaming "happy birthday to you" in his ear 5 minutes before his alarm went off just to piss him off a little bit, even though deep down I knew he loved it. ( Imitating WESLEY) "Uhhghhhh you couldn't have let me sleep for five more minutesssss" ( EASTON laughs a bit to himself.)*

*MIA: (Abruptly cuts him off) Hey, that's not the case anymore. Uhh, you still need to tidy up from dinner and you've got school tomorrow?*



EASTON: (*Clearly frustrated*) Yeah I know.

MIA: How do you think it went?

EASTON: (*Dismissive*) Fine. (*He sits back down, ignoring his mother.*)

MIA: Good. (*There is an awkward silence between the two. EASTON is itching to say something and mumbles under his breath. MIA can tell.*) What?

EASTON: (*Slumped*) What?

MIA: Why are you acting like this?

EASTON: (*Growing anger and frustration*) Like what?

MIA: You've got an attitude right now. I don't know if you're just tired or whatever but drop it.

EASTON: (*Irritated*) I need to drop it? How 'bout you?

MIA: **Excuse me?**

EASTON: (*Stands*) Just forget it. I'm going to bed.

MIA: No, we're talking about this. What?

EASTON: Just drop it. I'm done.

MIA: What!?

EASTON: (*Suddenly*) You're the reason no one can move on. You need to stop pushing Wesley away like he didn't even exist. (*Beat.*) "He's not with us anymore," I get it. But he's still a part of this family. The same week he died you moved all his stuff back into his room and have had the doors shut ever since. When are we going to address this? (*EASTON shakes his head in frustration.*)

MIA: I-

EASTON: *(begins walking towards MIA,)* No. You're forgetting we have a family of **four**. Did you forget? Maybe, because you're not even here anymore. I go full days without seeing you. Dad just sits on the couch and can't even move anymore. Have you even looked at him? He needs help. Just open your eyes and actually look at us. Every single one of us, as a family, are struggling. And you do nothing but pretend we're just perfect. Stop! How 'bout you stop working and show up for once. Stop making me do everything. Stop telling Dad to "just get better already." JUST CUT IT OUT!

MIA: **Easton!**

EASTON: **Mom, we all need help.** WESLEY NEEDED HELP! You say therapy doesn't work but at least see it as a change! And we obviously all need it because we can't even go a day without snapping at each other. *(PETER enters from the kitchen watching the rest play out but not interfering. He heard from upstairs.)* Mom, I can't take it anymore. Watching us all be this way. I- I- *(EASTON's voice begins to break and he can no longer form sentences. He starts to back away from his mother realizing what he said.)*

*Beat. (realizes what he said as he backs away from MIA)*

*Beat. (turns or drops head as if he can't even look at his mother)*

*Beat. (MIA reaches out for EASTON)*

*Beat. (MIA drops hand as contemplating next words)*

MIA: *(weakly)* Listen, E, I'm trying. I don't mean it to be this way. I guess I just found it better to avoid or pretend everything was normal than, well, what it is. I know I've put too much pressure on you, you're the only one here that I can still actually be a mother to. But, it's too much. You don't deserve the way I've treated you. You don't deserve to lose your brother- your built in best friend, you don't deserve any of this. You've been nothing but supportive and tried

to help me when I should've been the one helping you. (*Turning to PETER.*) And you. (*Walking towards her husband.*) I'm sorry, I know I've been taking things out on you, it's just- (*her voice breaks*) Wesley, my son, **our** son, you know. He's our baby, I- I know we're not, but I feel responsible. I can't handle it. I haven't felt anything like this. Actually, I don't feel. I'm just...numb. So much is weighing me down. (*Turning to EASTON.*) I can't do it anymore. I want our family of **four** back but it won't ever be the same. I've been trying to find our family of three, but building from the ground up isn't easy. Wesley will always be here with us. He shows up in this house everyday and he will always stay in our hearts, and our memories. I need to change. I'll be better. For us. For Wesley. (*She starts crying uncontrollably, making some of the words run together.*) MIA walks toward her son, and EASTON, at first, backs away but then realizes MIA is being sincere for once and goes in for a hug. This is the first genuine hug the two have shared in a long time so it is meaningful to both of them. PETER watches from the side lovingly, knowing his family is taking the first steps to heal. He walks up to them and joins in their hug.

### Scene 5:

*Lights up in the living room and kitchen. PETER is asleep on the couch with a blanket over him. MIA enters stage left and sets her briefcase down on the couch gently. She goes near PETER and lightly wakes him up. PETER sits up leaving room for MIA and she sits next to him. The two start a conversation where the audience can see that they are getting along well and look like they love each other fully again. EASTON enters stage left, hair messy from practice, he is carrying his lacrosse bag and a beat-up lacrosse stick. MIA reaches out to him to say hello but EASTON walks past, his airpods in, not intentionally ignoring her. He walks into the kitchen and*

*sets his things down on the table. MIA stands, walks toward EASTON, gets him a Gatorade and tries to start up a conversation saying “I’ve got something for you. Stay here for a second” he sits down to drink the Gatorade and MIA exits stage right. EASTON and PETER look at each other confused, MIA reenters stage right holding the purple lacrosse stick shown in the photo of EASTON and WESLEY. EASTON stares at it shocked she found it after such a long time. He carefully takes it from his mother, thanking her. They hug. PETER looks at MIA lovingly, knowing she is trying her hardest to fix her relationship with her son. PETER and MIA look at their son and smile. MIA and EASTON strike up a conversation about how their days went while PETER looks under the coffee table to find disc that says “Christmas 2011,” PETER waves MIA over to the couch and shows her, the two sit next to each other as EASTON sits on the floor with his back against the couch. PETER puts it into the TV and they sit around reminiscing on the memories of the past as the lights fade out. Blackout.*

**THE END.**