CHECKING OUT

an original screenplay by

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FADE IN:

INT. ROOM - DAY

A PICTURE of a YOUNG BOY, around six, in a school uniform. An ELDERLY WOMAN'S HAND glides across the picture, slow, reminiscent. Her fingers stop at the boy's smiling face, then run down the length of his school uniform tie.

INT. MEN'S ROOM - DAY

A middle-aged MALE'S HAND runs down the dark purple silk surface of his tie, daintily and with an air of professional competence. The fingernails are bitten down to the quick but otherwise immaculate. His hand moves up to his neck to tighten the tie's knot, and to REVEAL

PHIL, early forties, tall and well-groomed, in front of the mirror in a men's room of what appears to be an institutional or corporate building.

His white shirt is well-pressed, its stiff collar cutting into his neck.

He leans towards the mirror, turns on the water and allows it to flow for a few seconds. He scoops up a handful and quickly pulls it to his face.

As the cold sends an anticipated shock through his skin he draws a sharp sigh and straightens himself. Droplets gather at the tip of his chin.

He looks at his Blackberry PHONE lying on top of a faded green folder beside the sink. He frowns, closes his eyes.

He yanks his tie off in one agitated pull, crumples the fabric in his fist and then stops to consider his own reflection in the mirror.

Squinting, his lips tighten into a hard narrow line, he leans forward again.

The expression on his face changes again as his lips curl into a smirk, he chuckles and shakes his head as if recognizing the absurdity of whatever situation he is currently contemplating.

He pulls up the collar of his white shirt, loops the tie around his neck and with consummate efficiency pushes the knot high into the collar. Quickly dabs his face, crumples and chucks the tissue towards the garbage can. It misses and lands on the grey tiles.

Phil picks up the phone and folder. Leaves.
INT. GLASS CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

Phil walks down a long narrow glass corridor, his gait precise and hard. A NURSE in a white scrub dress passes.

NURSE
Good morning, Mr Reider.

PHIL
Morning, nurse. How's she doin' today?

NURSE
She's doing fine! Such a beautiful day today, you should take her for a walk.

PHIL
Sure, a bit of sunshine won't hurt.

INT. ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Phil enters through a heavy white door and stops for a moment as the door falls shut.

The room is sparsely furnished. A simple desk, two chairs. A single oil painting on the wall showing an ancient galleon emerging from a storm, its sails ripped and torn. A red acrylic vase with a single flower on the sill. The window is set ajar, allowing a light breeze to send gentle ripples through the white gauze curtains.

An ELDERLY WOMAN, mid to late sixties, sits on a chair by the desk. Her thick grey hair is bound in an elegant hairbun. She looks relaxed, though there are mild traces of resignation in her eyes.

She places what looks like a picture upside down in front of her on the desk as Phil approaches.

Phil takes a seat across her.

PHIL
Sorry I'm late, Mom. Traffic.

He musters her with a sharp glint in his eyes. She looks at her son for a brief moment before turning her eyes towards the oil painting.

PHIL (CONT'D)
Such a beautiful day today, let's got for a walk later.

He opens his folder and rummages through papers, places a few sheets and an expensive-looking black pen on the desk.
PHIL (CONT'D)
But first, I...uhm...I need to inform you that I've been appointed as your legal guardian. Means I have authority over all your affairs, legal, living arrangements, everything.

He pulls out his Blackberry, a quick check for messages before he clunks it next to the folder.

PHIL (CONT'D)
Makes things a helluva lot easier, for you I mean, and with a view to your expenses in this institution in particular.

Phil signs his name at the bottom of a form and pushes it towards her.

PHIL (CONT'D)
Bunch of vampires, trying to suck you dry before you breathe your last. I've had a discussion with the director, that old hag. Assured her that I'll sue the hell outta her if they overcharge you by a single cent.
(points to form)
Anyway, I've given instructions to the bank, so that's taken care of.
(leans back, interlaces fingers behind his head)
Now you got yourself a lawyer, a secretary and a caretaker all in one. And I don't even get to charge you my usual hourly fee.

He chuckles but there is no reaction from his mother. She doesn't seem to register what he's saying, her gaze and facial expression remain unchanged.

PHIL (CONT'D)
Alright then.

Phil grabs his folder and phone, gets up and strides towards the door. About to pull the door latch he stops in his tracks.

PHIL (CONT'D)
(without looking at her)
And, one more thing - this role does not include the 'son' bit. No court can order that, nor can your money buy that.
(MORE)
PHIL (CONT'D)

(beat)
See you tomorrow.

Door slams shut.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. ROOM - MORNING

Phil enters, same suit and tie. His mother is seated in the same chair as before. Phil takes his seat opposite her, places folder and Blackberry on the desk.

PHIL
Bad news, Mom.

He opens his green folder and rummages through papers. He pulls out one particular sheet and studies it.

PHIL (CONT'D)
Remember Amy? My fiance?
(chuckles, bitter)
Lasted all of six months until she couldn't bear you anymore and gave up. That was ten years ago, mother, if you care to remember.
(looks up)
I'm sorry.
(eyes back to sheet)
Anyway. Amy Taylor is suing you for unspecified damages. Claims your emotional abuse and cruelty destroyed her relationship with her fiance, Mr Phil Reider -- yes, that's me -- and, most critically, directly resulted in her contracting PTSD. Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, for your information.
(puts down sheet)
That's usually diagnosed on soldiers who were tortured by the enemy. It's considered very serious.

He looks at his mother, an expression of accusation and despair on his face.

PHIL (CONT'D)
And which frames her case nicely.

He picks up the sheet of paper again. His eyes flick across the bottom part.

PHIL (CONT'D)
She's undergone expensive therapies which haven't helped, can't shake off an addiction to a jumble of antipsychotic shit the doctors gave her, and

(raises head)

if she wins this you stand to lose everything you have. Maybe even go to jail, despite your...condition.

Phil gets up and walks towards the window. He runs his fingers slowly up the flower's stem, gently fondles the petals.

PHIL (CONT'D)
Ten years, mother. First you destroy my relationship with Amy for reasons beyond anyone's comprehension, and then...you chuck me away like used tissue paper. Like you did to my father before I even knew the concept of a Dad.

He turns to face her.

PHIL (CONT'D)
I hadn't planned on ever seeing you again. But you decide to check out early and force me back into your life.

He walks back to the desk and picks up his Blackberry.

PHIL (CONT'D)
I'm gonna call the judge.

He dials a number and starts pacing around while waiting for an answer.

PHIL (CONT'D)
Oh hello, Judge Wieden, this is Phil Reider. Mrs Regina Reider legal guardian, my mother...exactly, the Tylor Reider case, I ...yes, yes. Judge Wieden, look, uhm, I'm afraid I'm in no position to represent my mother in this particular case, so I hereby request you to kindly revoke my appointment. I'm sure any PD would be sufficiently qualified to -

(listens)

actually, I am making this request because of a serious conflict of

(MORE)
PHIL (CONT'D)
interest, that is my relationship
with Miss Tylor -
(listens)
uhm, yes, past relationship, you
see my mother ruined
everyth...No, no, we're not involved
anymore, that's the point, but the
residual pain prompts me to claim
a continuing emotional connect -

The door opens and the nurse sticks her head in.

NURSE
Everything ok here?

Phile cranes his neck away from his phone and covers it with his free hand.

PHIL
Absolutely, nurse. I just need
to deal with a couple of
administrative things. I'll take
her for a walk shortly.

NURSE
Your mother would definitely enjoy
the sun today.

She leaves. Phil continues with his phone call.

PHIL
But...I...I do object, your honor!

He listens, a stunned expression appears on his face.

PHIL (CONT'D)
Collateral damage? Do you have
any idea what this woman did to
me, her...her only son? This may
sound ludicrous to you but I am,
legal and otherwise, entitled to
join Miss Taylor as coplaintiff,
and
(visibly agitated)
and there's is a limit to what I
can be reasonably expected to
endure, this is --

His face red, Phil paces up with the phone pressed against
his ear. His mother's eyes follow him.

Phils stops at the door, lowers his head.

PHIL - HIMSELF
(almost subservient)
Yes, Your Honor. You have a nice
weekend, too.
Phil walks slowly up to the desk. He slips the Blackberry into his jacket, places his hands on the desk and leans towards his mother.

PHIL
(scrimen tone)
Seems you're gonna have it your way. As usual.

He picks up his folder and legal pad, pain and disgust all over his face.

PHIL (CONT'D)
Do excuse me, mother, but I'm not in the mood for a walk right now. I'll call the nurse and ask her to take you.

He leaves.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. ROOM - AFTERNOON

Phil, same suit and tie, enters. His mother is seated in the same chair as before. Phil takes his seat opposite her and pulls out several papers from his green folder.

PHIL
Now. I've been trying to find precedents that may apply to this case and to see if there may be just a faint possibility to absolve you at least partially of your guilt and protect your considerable wealth which you stand to lose every single cent of, and, well...frankly...I, I do not see a chance in hell.

Throws a piece of paper towards her. His mother looks at it but remains silent.

PHIL (CONT'D)
As your counsel I advise you to admit that you intended to cause serious emotional damage in order to ruin Amy's -- Miss Taylor's -- engagement to your son. That you intended to ruin her life.
(beat)
If you repent, or at least pretend to, we may be able to obtain a certain modicum of leniency.
(MORE)
PHIL (CONT'D)
I shall argue that your, your
misanthropy and, and your
malevolence are deeply rooted in
your childhood. I have --
(points at sheet)
-- elaborated, rather eloquently
and persuasively I am not ashamed
to say, on how your nanny abused
you emotionally and physically
during your pre-school formative
years and caused irreparable
character flaws.
(beat)
It's really in your best interest,
mother.

A smile appears his mother's face, her previously vacant
expression somewhat animated.

PHIL (CONT'D)
Funny, right?
(smiles)
Glad to see that something is
registering.

She continues to smile, her lips part as if about to say
something, but then she closes her mouth again.

Phil rises.

PHIL (CONT'D)
So, I take it we're aligned here.
This trial will be over soon and
then I don't have to waste my
time any more. I don't care if
they fine you a billion dollars
and if you get what you deserve,
the only reason I'm doing this is
because it's my professional
responsibility.

Agitated, he paces back and forth.

PHIL (CONT'D)
Your failures are yours, not mine.
Your life's yours, not mine, so
don't try and pull me back into
it now.

He stops in front of the window. His hand reaches up
towards the flower. He pulls it out of the vase, places
it on his arm, swaddles it like a baby.

He then pinches the flower's head and snaps it off. Yellow
petals and the corolla fall to the ground. Phil stares
at the decapitated stem in his hand.
His mother rises, she looks at her son for a few moments, walks to the door and opens it. Still in the doorframe, she turns her head towards one end of the corridor.

MOTHER
Nurse. Your assistance, please.

The sound of steps scurrying towards the door.

TWO MALE NURSES and the female nurse appear and move towards Phil.

NURSE
Mr Reider. Let's go and get some rest before dinner.

Phil doesn't react. The nurse notices the mutilated stem in his hand, she touches his arm. He yanks it away.

NURSE (CONT'D)
Mr. Reider, please.

He ignores her and begins caressing the torn flower.

NURSE (CONT'D)
I'm happy to call Dr Unger if you're not feeling comfortable.

Phil turns his head and stares at her. Anger flushes across his face in thick colors, his eyes glinting with rage.

PHIL
Alright then!

He throws the torn flower stem to the ground, storms out, the two male nurses follow him closely. They disappear.

MOTHER
(to female nurse)
How's he taking to it?

NURSE
Too early to say, it's been four weeks only, aberrations are normal, the body tries to fight or adapt to the medication. It affects the brain chemistry. Probably another month or so before Dr Unger knows if it's working.

MOTHER
I understand. Maybe it's better if...

NURSE
(nods)
Let's give him a few days.
MOTHER
I'll be back next week then. Do give me a call if there are any issues.

NURSE
For sure, Mrs Reider.

The nurse picks up Phil's folder and Blackberry and hands it to his mother.

NURSE (CONT'D)
We removed the SIM card to make sure he doesn't harass anyone. It's probably better if you take the phone now so we can wean him off another cue of the past.

Phil's mother takes the folder and phone. The women exchange courteous smiles and leave the room.

NURSE (CONT'D)
We'll take good care of your son.

The door closes with a metallic clank.

END.