

How To Ruin A Second Marriage

By

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EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Text overlaid in black:

"45% to 50% OF FIRST MARRIAGES END IN DIVORCE"

Followed slowly by:

"60% TO 67% OF SECOND MARRIAGES END IN DIVORCE"

Text dissolves revealing a bright, sunny day.

Cars pull into the parking lot of the modern catholic church.

Several GUESTS walk past the interchangeable marquee:
"CONGRATULATIONS AMY & JAMES!"

INT. SACRISTY - DAY

The Groom, JAMES (36) fit, handsome a full head of thick black hair, paces in the tiny space.

Best Man GEORGE (37) short, bespectacled, prematurely balding, primps in the reflection of a large golden crucifix.

GEORGE

Looking good here. You all set?

JAMES

No worries on my end.

GEORGE

Big step, man. Hope you learned from your last go round.

JAMES

George, come on, I was like twenty-three, I'm not even the same guy. That was just...

GEORGE

Stupid.

TEEN GIRL'S VOICE (O.S.)

You guys decent?

George turns towards the voice, pulls back startled by the garish vision entering the room.

A GIRL ALTAR SERVER (16), facial piercings, goth make up, pale skin, totally out of place, strolls in, followed by Frank (40), a burly muscle head.

ALTAR SERVER

This dude says he needs to see--

Long ring covered fingers ending in jet black nails make air quotes as her collection of silver bracelets JANGLE along her wrists.

ALTAR SERVER (CONT.)

--"the lucky groom".

The hulking figure maneuvers past Satan's young soldier, hand extended.

FRANK

Hey, James, right?

Confused, James accepts the handshake.

FRANK (CONT.)

Frank Johnson. Amy's husband, sorry man, ex husband.

Overly protective, George gravitates towards the pair.

JAMES

Oh, hey, nice to meet you! Thought we would've met before today.

FRANK

Yeah, well, it happened so quick. I don't come 'round her much no more, just to see Clair, you know how it is.

GEORGE

No, how is it, Frank?

Frank turns to George.

FRANK

Well, you knows, da divorce and all...child support, alimony, back and forth, she really raked me over the coals, man. Anyways, I just wanted to say good luck.

GEORGE

You mean congratulations.

JAMES

Uh, thanks...Clair's a sweet girl.

FRANK

You got a kid, too?

JAMES

Danny, yeah, he's seven.

FRANK

Any more on the way? Just wonderin' that it's so quick and all---

GEORGE

That's really frank of you, Frank. Great question. You know, playing the odds and all, it's amazing Amy's not pregnant. Yeah...James, don't you think that's like, insane? Let's see, you and Amy met six months ago, that's roughly thirty days per month...say, maybe, three encounters per day...let's do the math. You remember your multiplication tables, right Frank?

Embarrassed, James stares holes into his best man.

A very uncomfortable SILENCE.

FRANK

Right. Well, just wanted to introduce myself.

ALTAR SERVER

Everyone done waving their junk around? Showtime's in five minutes.

FRANK

She's really happy, man.

GEORGE

You just told us you weren't around much, how do you know she's happy?

James steps between the miniature Alpha Male and the flustered Frank.

JAMES

Listen, it was really nice meeting you, sincerely. I'm sure we'll see more of each other.

FRANK

Lookin' forward to it. Hey, you lift? I go to this gym on Grant...

GEORGE

Let me usher you back to your seat there, Frank.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Several displays of beautiful flowers line the altar.

George escorts Frank down the side steps towards the pews.

FRANK

What's your problem, brother?

GEORGE

No problem here, Frank. I just really take my role of Best Man seriously. So, why don't you go back to your seat and if you get any crazy ideas about trying to get your ex wife back prior to the "I do's", I will rip that forty-seven inch twig off at the shoulder and introduce it to your prostate, ok?

FRANK

You got it all wrong, man. I don't want nothin' to do with Amy. Look, you really wanna protect your friend, tell 'em if he don't walk now he's gonna wanna hang himself in less than a year.

Frank bends down so he can be at eye level with this Little Napoleon, pats him on the shoulder, like an adult who just gave a child candy.

FRANK (CONT.)

Just some advice from a guy who's been there.

INT. CHURCH CRYING ROOM - DAY

STACIE (44), the tall, confident, attractive Maid Of Honor, peers through the window of the curtained makeshift dressing room.

STACIE
That bald runt is talking to your
ex!

AMY (O.S.)
Who?

AMY (40) the beautiful, radiant blond bride, nervously races to the doorway mindful of her flowing train.

AMY
Crap! I didn't think he'd actually
come...

STACIE
Forget him! This is your day,
everything's going to be fine.

CLAIR (12), lanky and geeky, firmly entrenched in that awful chasm of life between girl and teen approaches.

CLAIR
Mom, do I really have to walk with
him?

AMY
Clair, come on, it's just a few
steps up to the altar. He's going
to be your brother.

CLAIR
He eats his boogers!

AMY
I'm not asking you to hold his hand
or anything, please?

Stacie sashays to the full length mirror, inspects her beige gown.

STACIE
These things never end up
looking the way they do in the
shop! I read some they pipe scents
into the air ducts to convince you
it looks great, then you put it on
for the big day and....

AMY
Are you kidding me? You look
beautiful! Wait until the
reception, plenty of single guys
from James' work will be there.

STACIE

They're all the same. Can't trust
any of them!

In the mirror's reflection, Amy drops her veil concealing the genuine disappointment caused by Stacie's off the cuff remark.

INT. BANQUET HALL - NIGHT

The raucous reception is in full swing.

Guests old and young dance the Electric Slide. Beautiful fresh flowers surround the room, smiles all around.

At the corner of the bar a Brandy snifter sits full of match books featuring a cartoon version of the Bride and Groom over the date "APRIL 12, 2011."

Stacie, unlit cigarette in hand, flirts unsuccessfully with the much to YOUNG LATINO BARTENDER.

Full of swagger, George approaches the Maid of Honor with two flutes of champagne.

Without taking her eyes off her prey, Stacie waves her hand shooing the Best Man away.

DANNY (8), shy and sloppy in his ill-fitting tux, sits at the Head Table, nonchalantly picks his nose.

A guest sipping champagne catches his eye. He spies a full glass unattended right beside him. He takes a tentative sip...not bad. He downs the remainder with one long guzzle.

Amy and James cuddle on the dance floor, blissful in the promise of their new life.

INT. BANQUET HALL - LATER

All the SINGLE LADIES gather for the bouquet toss. Stacie towers over her competition.

Smiling, Amy turns her back to the cluster of desperate women, tosses the flowers high over her shoulder.

The bouquet spins through the air end over end in slow motion.

CUT TO:

INT. JAMES & AMY'S BEDROOM - DAY

James, hair grayer, cheeks chubbier, sleeps with a pasted smile on his drooling face. A ripped t-shirt depicting Shakespeare covers his rising and falling chest.

A clump of dead weeds land unceremoniously on the Bard's face, a PLOP like crap hitting a dry commode.

AMY (O.S.)

Three days ago James! You told me
you were going to pull these
things! The Realtor is coming any
minute!

He groggily opens his eyes. From his blurry, slowly focusing perspective Amy appears, looking nothing as she did on their wedding day.

Unwashed hair, crazed eyes, fingers pointing, wearing a tattered pink robe.

AMY (CONT.)

You do realize we have to sell this
house before we can build a new
one, right?

She storms from the room as her rant continues.

AMY (O.S.)

I swear to God, you have no respect
for your home! Oblivious, just
plain lazy. Unbeliv....

James rolls from bed as her MUFFLED LITANY continues down the hall.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

A school calendar held to the open refrigerator door with a Spongebob magnet reads "MARCH 2015".

A dry erase board reads: "CUT GRASS (NOT DONE!), PULL WEEDS (DONE BY ME!), SAND AND PAINT PORCH (NOT DONE!)"

James appears empty handed from behind the open door. He looks towards the kitchen table where Amy, still in her robe, drinks coffee.

AMY

I'm getting groceries tomorrow.

A blank stare between husband and wife. Amy's half blind Chihuahua CHA CHA viciously BARKS at him from her lap.

AMY (CONT.)

Oh, get over yourself! You try staying home with a four year old and taking care of this house!

INT. FAMILY ROOM - DAY

SOPHIE,(4), a sparkle in her beautiful blue eyes, sits on the floor in her pink pajamas, an educational program BLARING from the television. An Easter coloring book open in front of her, crayons strewn about.

Creeping past wedding and infant pictures adorning the wall, James sneaks up behind his daughter, admires her artwork.

JAMES

Flowers aren't supposed to be black, honey.

SOPHIE

They can be any color you want.

JAMES

They're beautiful, just like you.

He leans down, tickles his daughter, provoking a scream of giggles. He picks her up, studies her smiling face.

JAMES (CONT.)

You know, when that tooth finally falls out I'm making a necklace out of it.

Sophie shakes her head.

SOPHIE

I don't want a necklace!

JAMES

Not for you, for me!

SOPHIE

No! The Tooth Fairy gets it!

JAMES

Well, I know the Tooth Fairy, she'll give it to me.

SOPHIE
No you don't!

JAMES
Sure I do, I used to date her
sister.

SOPHIE
Daddy! Stop!

AMY (O.S.)
You're going to be late!

EXT. PALMER TRUCKING - DAY

Trucks and WORKERS bustle about the dock, a bustling sea of multicolored hard hats and safety goggles.

INT. JAMES' OFFICE - DAY

James types furiously, pauses to review his work, lips moving silently.

TOMMY (26), a younger, more rugged version of James enters with a box of doughnuts and two coffees.

James quickly shuts off his monitor.

TOMMY
Hungry, boss?

JAMES
Always! Thanks Tommy.

James snatches three doughnuts.

TOMMY
Man, no breakfast again?

James tries to respond through a mouth full of custard.

JAMES
How...hard...is it....to..buy
groceries? I thought things would
be different this time.

TOMMY
No better the second go round, huh?

JAMES

She's just changed so much, she's not the woman I met at that ball game at all. She doesn't even like sports now...she's just...

TOMMY

Nasty? Sorry, boss. Jenny's the same way, man. I haven't seen one cent from my paycheck since we got married. I seriously have no idea where it goes! You know, I have to ask when I want something, anything! I had to promise to clean the garage tonight just to buy these damn doughnuts.

James continues wolfing down his makeshift breakfast.

JAMES

She was so sweet when we met...she loved everything I did, I actually thought I was saving her from...something...now---

TOMMY

She always has cash, I mean like extra. She doesn't work...I don't get it.

James takes a huge swig of his coffee.

JAMES

Get receipts.

They both stare at each other, the irony of the statement makes them both chuckle.

TOMMY

Great idea, that would go over like a fart in church!

JAMES

That's another thing! She won't even let me go to mass anymore.

TOMMY

Didn't know you were religious.

JAMES

That's not even the point. Since Sophie was born, church has been off limits. She had a problem with

JAMES
 the way the priest talked to her during the baptism. Apparently, if you don't get your first marriage annulled, a child from your second marriage doesn't exist, at least in the eyes of the church.

TOMMY
 Consider yourself lucky. Wish I could sleep in on Sundays. Hey, Smithro's stirring up the fellas up again, thought you'd wanna know.

JAMES
 Can you handle it? I know he can be intimidating and all, I just got a lot of work to do with this merger.

TOMMY
 Sure, I got it. Still think our stocks gonna triple?

EXT. MIDDLE SCHOOL PARKING LOT - DAY

A beat up SUV slows in front of the school. Danny, now thirteen, fully in the black t-shirt stage of life, saunters to the car, earphones in, carrying a back pack.

James opens the passenger door from the driver's seat.

JAMES
 Hey kiddo! Happy Birthday!

No response. Overbearing RAP trickles from the earphones.

JAMES (CONT.)
 Hey!

DANNY
 HI I SAID!

James pulls the closest earphone from his ear.

JAMES
 How's your birthday going?

DANNY
 Can you take me to Game Stop to get War Slaughter Ten?

Danny puts his earphone back in place.

EXT. GAME STOP PARKING LOT - DAY

Windows down on this seasonable day, James pushes "CALL" on his steering wheel.

BLUETOOTH

Calling.

AMY (O.S.)

(exasperated)

Yes!

JAMES

Hey, it's me. Everything ok?

AMY (O.S.)

Sophie! You're not getting another one! What?

JAMES

Sounds like you got your hands full.

AMY (O.S.)

Always. What is it?

JAMES

Hey, Danny wants a game for his birthday, can I put it on the card?

AMY (O.S.)

How much is it? Can you get a used one?

A FATHER AND SON exit Game Stop, walking past James' car. The father hears the stern tone of Amy through the bluetooth and chuckles. Embarrassed, James rolls up the window.

JAMES

Amy, it's his birthday...

AMY (O.S.)

Whatever, do what you want.

JAMES

Need anything while I'm out.

AMY (O.S.)

At Game Stop? Is that a joke? Listen, we ate already, I had the girls out so I don't know what you want to do for dinner.

JAMES

Ok...

Defeated, the bluetooth now dead, James looks over to Danny, who, at some point, has removed his earphones.

DANNY

Get some balls, dad.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Danny's eyes devour his new game manual as James lavishes butter on a roll.

Without looking up, Danny extends his hand. Sighing, James sacrifices the roll to his son.

Prepping another roll, James notices an ELDERLY COUPLE seated across the room.

They speak to each other just out of his earshot.

James watches as the older man nods off. The wife places her utensils down, waits patiently.

James bites into the bread, smiles as he watches the man slowly revive, picking up his fork, resuming his meal.

The woman gently picks up her fork, continues mouthing the paused conversation.

James' smile vanishes slowly as he witnesses the type of relationship he always envisioned.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

James sits alone on the beat up sofa watching a movie.

His cell PINGS, a text message.

Checking the phone, the message reads: "AMY: I CAN HEAR THAT CRYSTAL CLEAR FROM UP HERE! TURN IT DOWN!"

INT. JAMES & AMY'S BEDROOM - LATER

Her head covered by a pillow, Amy tries to drown out James' LOUD SNORING. A small hand reaches out, shaking her.

SOPHIE
Mommy...Mommy...

AMY
Baby, what is it?

SOPHIE
Get up!

Amy leans up, looking past her husband to the alarm clock:
"5:42 AM". Cha Cha pokes her head out from under the covers.

AMY
Oh, baby, go back to sleep, it's
too early...

SOPHIE
I'm hungry.

James rolls over, snatches Amy's pillow, plants it over *his*
head, continues to slumber.

INT.FAMILY ROOM - DAY

The cheesy morning talk show BLARES from the television set.

In her robe Amy sips coffee, transfixed by the bubbly
female TV HOST and her EXPERT guest. Sophie, surrounded by
Barbies, plays on the carpeted floor.

TV HOST
These carbon monoxide alarms, how
many should each household have?

EXPERT
That varies, Ann, newer homes often
have them pre-installed---

James enters, prepared for work, already defeated by the
promise of a torturous day.

JAMES
Can *that* get any louder?

Amy's eyes shoot daggers at her spouse.

She reaches for the remote, mutes the sound.

AMY
Just because you don't watch the
news---

JAMES
That's not news, Amy.

GROWLING, Cha Cha peers out from inside Amy's robe.

AMY
Clair has to work tonight, you need
to take her.

JAMES
Uh...and you can't because....

SOPHIE
I have swimming, Daddy!

AMY
No, I'm actually taking her to *sign*
up for swimming. Last year I was in
line for two hours, so if you'd
rather do that---

JAMES
Ok, fine, fine!

INT. JAMES' TRUCK - DAY

James stops at a red light, reaches into the glove box,
pulls out a tattered pack of cigarettes. Studying them, his
concentration is broken by a HONKING.

He looks up to see the light is still red. He slams the
cigarettes back into their prison, checks the rear view.

Behind him a rusty pickup BEEPS at THREE TEENAGE GIRLS (17),
wearing short skirts and heavy makeup, smoking.

The trio sit under a billboard featuring a smiling, female
REAL ESTATE AGENT: "IF YOU WANT TO SELL, CALL NELL!"

James squints, recognizes one of the girls.

More INCESSANT HONKING as the light is now green, the backed
up line of traffic not pleased with James' SUV, the driver
apparently ogling the Lolitas.

Frustrated, he drives off, rubber necking the girl, which
doesn't go unnoticed as she races in the opposite direction,
pitching her cigarette.

INT. PHARMACY - DAY

Amy, cell phone snug against her ear, browses the safety section studying the selection of carbon monoxide detectors.

AMY

Dad, this isn't a good time for us either. We're trying to sell our house, it's way too small now with Sophie.

A LOUD ARGUMENT distracts her from her conversation.

Down the aisle, a SURLY OLD MAN berates his ELDERLY WIFE.

SURLY OLD MAN

Just read it to me, for Christ's sakes!

Squinting, his wife has a hard time reading the vitamin bottle in her hand.

ELDERLY WIFE

I can't read it without my glasses...

SURLY OLD MAN

Useless!

AMY

Nothing....Let me call you back.

Sophie rushes to her mother carrying a swimming noodle.

AMY (CONT.)

They'll have those at class.

Amy approaches the couple.

AMY (CONT.)

Would you like me to read that to you?

The man turns his aggravated gaze to this interloper, greeting her with a scowl. His wife too frightened to respond.

AMY (CONT.)

Ok....

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - DAY

Danny opens his locker amongst the bustling hallway. JEFF, his classmate hovers beside him.

JEFF
Let's see it, quick!

Danny pulls out an open carton of milk from a flowered paper bag. Jeff opens it, smells it, producing a confused face.

JEFF
You're crazy, bro!

INT. PHARMACY - DAY

Sophie and Amy wait in line behind the elderly couple.

The HANDSOME YOUNG CLERK scans the vitamins.

HANDSOME YOUNG CLERK
That's eleven forty-two.

SURLY OLD MAN
Did you bring the coupon?

ELDERLY WIFE
Oh....no....I left it on the table.

SURLY OLD MAN
Christ in thecrippler cross face,
Ellen! What the hell good does that
do us?

Amy watches, disgusted.

HANDSOME YOUNG CLERK
Well, you could always bring it in
with the receipt, we could give you
the credit that way.

SURLY OLD MAN
Now why the hell would I want to do
that?

AMY
Excuse me.

All three turn their attention to her.

AMY (CONT.)
 Can you tell me when you moved your
 douches to the front of the store?

Her comment soars over the head of the couple, but produces a genuine grin on the clerk's face.

HANDSOME YOUNG CLERK
 It's only temporary, ma'am.

INT. SOPHIE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Amy plugs her newly purchased carbon monoxide detector into the wall outlet.

The SOUND of the door opening from the basement brings a smile to her face. Cha Cha BARKS incessantly.

AMY
 I'm in Sophie's room!

No response, she continues to fiddle with her new purchase.

AMY (CONT.)
 James?

INT.FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Amy rounds the corner clutching Cha Cha to see James coloring with his daughter.

SOPHIE
 That should be blue, your favorite,
 right daddy?

JAMES
 I like blue.

SOPHIE
 Stay in the lines!

JAMES
 I'm trying my best, baby.

AMY
 Nell put the pictures online today.

He continues to color, responding without looking up.

JAMES
Still want to do this, huh?

AMY
This house is too small.

James looks up prepared to deliver his memorized speech.

JAMES
We can just barely make the
payment's we have now. Danny's
never really with us, Clair's going
to be graduating---

AMY
You can't wait for *that*, can you?

GROWLING, Cha Cha leaps from her arms, prances over the open coloring book, face to face with James.

SOPHIE
Cha Cha! You're ruining it!

James pushes the pest away with one hand, sending her sprawling towards her master.

JAMES
It's not ruined, baby.

Amy snatches up her pet.

AMY
It's getting there.

INT. JAMES' CAR - NIGHT

Awkward SILENCE as James drives Clair, (17) to her job. She wears a waitress' uniform, white and proper.

Stopping at the same light as earlier, looking over at the real estate billboard, James turns his attention to Clair.

JAMES
I saw you today.

CLAIR
I was gone before you were.

JAMES
Right over there, smoking with some
girls.

CLAIR

No.

JAMES

I know it was you, Clair, come on.

CLAIR

You're always trying to get something on me. You didn't see me!

She pulls a GOLD HEART LOCKET, hanging from her neck, up to her mouth, nervously chews on the chain.

JAMES

Look, I was your age once. I've skipped my share of school.

CLAIR

So?

JAMES

Your mom doesn't need this---

CLAIR

What does mom need?

JAMES

I just mean, she's got a lot on her mind, she'll go nuts if the school calls...

CLAIR

They won't. My dad wrote me an early dismissal.

JAMES

So it was you?

CLAIR

I didn't say that. Can you just drive a little quicker, I can't be late again.

James proceeds to drive, shifting his eyes towards the glove box, knowing temporary bliss is just an exhale away.

CLAIR (CONT.)

You won't tell her, will you?

INT. JAMES & AMY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Through the open bedroom door, Amy quietly exits Sophie's room from across the hall. She enters her bedroom, begins to undress.

She studies her naked body in the dim light of the room, looking first at her breasts, which slightly sag, then to her stomach, investigating for stretch marks, finding none.

Finally, she turns around, staring at her backside, lifting a cheek with one hand, releasing, watching it fall. Self doubt, then unjust disgust take over.

She looks beautiful, but in her mind she is an atrocity.

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

MONTAGE

Amy showers using several floral body washes, shampoos and conditioners.

She blow dries her hair.

She puts a small amount of make up on.

CUT TO:

INT. JAMES & AMY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Wearing a towel, looking stunning, Amy opens a dresser drawer, reaching far into the back retrieving a sexy piece of pink lingerie.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

CLACKING keys resonate louder than the television in the dimly lit room.

James, entranced in front of his computer, fingers fly furiously across the keyboard.

Amy, in her bathrobe quietly creeps barefoot down the stairs, circumnavigating the text books, toys and shoes littered about.

Reaching the next to last step, the wood CREAKS.

Startled from his work, James intuitively turns off the monitor, leaving only the flickering light from the television across the room.

He turns to the stairs only to see Amy's bare feet quickly retreating upwards.

INT. VA HOSPITAL HALLWAY - DAY

Several ancient veterans sit in wheelchairs oblivious to their environment.

PAP (92), a weathered, yet handsome man, rests in his wheelchair, staring out the window at a LANDSCAPER, (35), planting tulips.

AMY (O.S.)

Hi, Pap.

Not hearing his granddaughter, his eyes spark to life when he sees Sophie materialize.

SOPHIE

Hi!

A large smile develops across his wrinkled, unshaven face.

PAP

Who's this beautiful girl?

SOPHIE

Sophie!

Amy leans in and kisses him on the cheek.

AMY

They haven't shaved you in days!

PAP

HUH?

EXT. HOSPITAL COURTYARD - DAY

Sophie watches the landscaper plant the flowers.

Under the shade of an old oak, Amy shaves Pap with a disposable razor, using a Styrofoam cup as a basin.

She plops the razor into the cup, pulls paperwork from her purse.

AMY
I need you to sign these.

PAP
What is it?

AMY
It's for your Veteran's benefits, I
have to keep fighting with them to
keep you here.

PAP
Oh, boy...I don't have my
glasses...

She points to the paper.

AMY
Right here, Pap.

Pap, tongue sticking out in concentration, his face
half covered in Barbisol, attempts to still his shaking,
withered hand, finally resulting in a signature.

PAP
Amy, when I go, I want you to take
my money for your new home.

AMY
You'll be around for awhile, Pap.

PAP
Bull feathers! You promise me.

She begins to shave the other half of his face.

AMY
We're fine...Daddy could use a
little help though.

PAP
HUH?

AMY
(loudly)
I said Daddy asked me for help with
him and Mommy's house.

He puts his hands in the air like a magician unveiling a
trick.

PAP

Oh, boy....I've helped them enough.

SOPHIE (O.S.)

Mommy! Look!

Amy turns, a fresh tulip held inches from her face.

SOPHIE

He gave it to me!

Amy looks across to the pleasant landscaper. She holds onto his kind face, returns a polite smile.

INT. JAMES' OFFICE - DAY

James enters, shocked to see an immaculately dressed, THORNTON, black,(52), sitting at his desk.

THORNTON

There he is!

JAMES

Mr. Thornton, didn't know you were coming down today.

THORNTON

Just want to make sure all our "t"s are crossed and "i"s dotted for next month.

James takes off his hard hat, places it on the water cooler.

JAMES

Getting there. Tommy's still got some things from transport to give me, but we'll be ready.

THORNTON

Tommy Fullerton?

JAMES

Yeah, you remember him from the Labor Day picnic?

THORNTON

You know he's laid up at West General?

James stares at his boss blankly.

THORNTON (CONT.)

His wife put a claim in earlier today. Seems somebody rolled him in the parking lot of that diner on forty-eight, last night she said.

JAMES

I didn't see him today....

THORNTON

Well how could you? Guess he got messed up pretty bad, beat him half to death.

Looking out his office window into the dock, James' eyes lock onto a HULKING MAN (early 20's) pretending to sweep the floor.

The man, noticing he is being observed, lights a smoke, props his broom under his arm, smirks at James.

INT. JAMES & AMY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The DIN of Danny's video game heard through the wall. James pulls on a pair of sweats and his Shakespeare T-shirt.

Amy, already in her robe glares at him.

AMY

Can you not hear that?

JAMES

DANNY! TURN IT DOWN!

Immediately, the sound vanishes.

AMY

You don't have a lick of sense! It took me an hour to get her to bed and you're yelling? You can start getting her down!

Ignoring his wife, James enters the bathroom.

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

James opens the vanity drawer, pulls out a flattened tube of toothpaste. Amy enters.

He prepares to put the last remnant of toothpaste on his brush, holds up the tube for his wife's inspection.

AMY

I'm going to Costco tomorrow!

JAMES

Tommy's in the hospital. I think one of the dock guys beat him up. It's bad. I'm going to see him in the morning...should have went tonight, but Danny's here.

AMY

Why does that matter? You hardly said two words to him anyway, he just locks himself in that room in front of his video games.

JAMES

Christ! Just one god damn time, could you show some sympathy? I just told you my friend got hit with a brick, is in the hospital and all you have to say is I don't spend time with my son!

Pointing his toothbrush at her with one hand, squeezing the tube with the other, the volcano of emotion and angst erupts.

JAMES (CONT.)

I'm a good man, Amy, a real good man. I'm a great father to Sophie, I provide for this family, I don't go out drinking with George...

Obstinately, she takes her toothbrush out of the holder and pretends her husband isn't in the room.

JAMES (CONT.)

I quit smoking for you! I haven't even looked at so much as a Playboy since we've been married! You know what? I don't even think I have a sex drive left!

She snatches the flattened toothpaste from his hand, squeezes out the pea sized final drop of paste onto *her* toothbrush, flings the empty tube into the trash can.

Triumphantly brushing her teeth, she stares him dead in the eye.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Danny's bedroom door slowly opens into the still dark hallway. He pokes his head out like a skittish turtle.

Silently, he tiptoes down the hall, past the SNORING emanating from his father's room.

Danny freezes as Cha Cha GROWLS from inside the bedroom.

AMY (O.S.)
Quiet! Lay down!

He proceeds down the hall.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

James enters the hospital room with a bouquet of flowers.

JENNY, Tommy's very pregnant wife, sits in a chair, exhausted and concerned.

Tommy, head swollen, bruised and stitched, sleeps. A bundle of IV's and breathing tubes enter his deflated body.

JENNY
He's in and out.

JAMES
I'm so sorry about this, hun.

JENNY
They didn't take his car, his watch, not even his wallet. I don't get it. He's such a peaceful man.

JAMES
They'll find him.

JENNY
I know I'm not supposed to, but I need a coffee. Do you want one?

JAMES

No, I'm fine. Of course, yeah, go,
take your time.

Jenny rises, softly kisses her husband's swollen forehead, wipes a tear from her eye. Holding her lower back, she waddles to the exit.

James places the flowers on the window sill. He looks out at the parking lot.

TOMMY (O.S.)

(labored)

We dating now, boss?

He turns his attention to his bedridden friend, eyes lively beneath the puffy, bruised lids.

JAMES

I don't date married men. Think I'm
some kind of home wrecker? Jenny
looks great.

TOMMY

All pregnant women look good...

JAMES

You see who did it?

TOMMY

Yep.

JAMES

Did you tell the police?

TOMMY

Nope...you told me to handle it..I
will. Might take a day or two....

EXT. DANCE STUDIO - DAY

Amy's van pulls into the parking lot. Hurriedly, she exits, opens the rear door.

AMY

Come on, we're going to be late!

As she waits for Sophie to unbuckle the car seat, her eyes wander across the street to St. Anne's Church.

The letters on the interchangeable marquee read "WELCOME FATHER KINDER".

Sophie exits wearing a black dance singlet, carrying a McDonald's Happy Meal box.

CUT TO:

INT. DANCE STUDIO - DAY

Several MOTHERS watch the YOUNG DANCERS through the studio glass as they cavort, curtsy and spin.

Amy pulls her cell from her purse, dials a number, turns to look out the exterior window towards St. Anne's.

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)
St. Anne's Parrish.

AMY
Yes, hi, I was calling about Father Kinder. Is he a new priest?

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)
He's a visiting priest from Sedona. He'll be with us for a week. Do you know him?

AMY
Uh, no....so Father Whitehall is still there?

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)
He surely is.

Disappointment crosses Amy's eyes.

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)
Do you need to speak with him?

AMY
No, no thanks...

Amy disconnects the cell phone.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Clair, Sophie and James sit at the dinner table as Amy presents her culinary creation, Cha Cha prances at her feet.

CLAIR
I'm not really hungry, mom, I ate at work.

AMY
You didn't work today.

CLAIR
I met some friends there after
school.

James turns his gaze from the incoming meal to his step
daughter. Amy slops food on his plate drawing his attention
back to dinner.

JAMES
What is this?

AMY
Dinner. Brussels sprouts, squash,
tempeh---

JAMES
Tempeh?

AMY
It tastes just like meat, but
better for you.

Sophie glares at her serving.

SOPHIE
Yuck!

AMY
You're going to take a courtesy
bite, Little Miss.

JAMES
I can't eat this.

Amy stares daggers at her husband.

AMY
You can and you are. Look, honey,
daddy's eating it, too.

James makes a half-hearted attempt to swallow a forkful.

JAMES
I'm sorry....I can't.

SOPHIE
I want chicken nuggets!

JAMES

Me too.

CLAIR

I've got a paper that's due
tomorrow.

Clair takes her virgin plate to the kitchen as Amy fumes.

AMY

Are you trying to promote childhood
obesity?

JAMES

I just don't like it, I'm sorry.

AMY

How would you know you don't like
it if you've never tried it?

JAMES

Oh, come on, you know that doesn't
work on me.

James reaches over to his standing wife, with one hand
attempts to playfully pull her towards him.

Instinctively, with rage, Amy slaps him across the face.

SOPHIE

Mommy! I'll eat it, look!

Sophie spoons the dirty orange brown stew into her mouth.

James, stunned, angered, rises from his chair. Fear crosses
Amy's face, then bravado.

He storms from the kitchen. Clair, speechless at the sink.

CUT TO:

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

Without turning on the light, James plods down the stairs
tramping on Sophie's toys and flip flops with each step.

Storming through the cubbyhole under the stairs, he roots
through boxes, pulls out a half empty bottle of Wild Turkey.

He crosses to his desk, snatches a coffee mug, empties the
remnant into his waste basket, pours a drink.

He takes a gulp causing his face to contort. He studies the bottle, pours another mug, takes another gulp.

JAMES

AMY!

SCUFFLING across the ceiling above him, the door to the basement SLAMS open.

JAMES (CONT.)

GET DOWN HERE!

Slowly, Amy's feet, then legs appear as she descends the stairs, hesitant, prepared for battle.

He storms towards her, whiskey bottle in one hand, coffee mug in the other.

JAMES (CONT.)

Taste this.

AMY

I'm not gonna drink that!

JAMES

It's way watered down! Taste it!

Defiantly, she snatches the cup, takes a sip.

AMY

So?

JAMES

CLAIR!

Clair appears at the top of the stairs. Her sudden appearance implying she was there the entire time.

Fearing for her mother's safety, she stands her ground, cordless phone in hand, ready to call for help.

JAMES (CONT.)

Did you get into the booze?

CLAIR

What?

AMY

Whatever! You're crazy!

JAMES

Did you get into the booze?

CLAIR
No! That stuff is nasty!

AMY
What are you doing?

JAMES
Stop lying!

CLAIR
Mom?

Amy storms up the stairs.

AMY
Come on Clair, move!

CLAIR
I hate you!

Clair flings the cordless phone at James, hitting him in the shoulder. The basement door CRASHES closed behind them.

James retrieves the phone from the floor, dials a number.

INT. DIVE BAR - NIGHT

James sits, several empty beer bottles and shot glasses in front of him. The cigarettes have finally won the war as he takes a long, pleasing drag listening to a FAMILIAR VOICE.

GEORGE (O.S.)
In front of your kid?

James turns to face his now fully bald best friend.

GEORGE (CONT.)
And you know it was her girl,
right? I mean who the hell else
would be sneaking whiskey?

JAMES
She smokes, too. Caught her
ditching school with her friends.

GEORGE
Maybe it's Amy. Maybe she started
closet drinking. That would be
really messed up, I mean with her
watching the baby all the time.

JAMES

She's not really a baby anymore.

George finishes his beer, signals for two more.

JAMES (CONT.)

Amy's not drinking. She's too involved in trying to sell the house...says we need a bigger one.

GEORGE

Sure she's talking about the house?

JAMES

We haven't hung out in years and you're going to bust my chops?

GEORGE

Just saying women are strange, that's all. They're always looking for something new and exciting. You got four bedrooms--

JAMES

Ha! Exactly!

James recites his memorized defense to this fresh audience.

JAMES (CONT.)

The payments are doable...just barely, Clair will be out of the house soon...Danny rarely comes over...I think she hates him.

GEORGE

Who?

JAMES

Amy...both of them I think, they never talk to him, it's like he doesn't exist...then, when I hang out with him, he's happy, sort of...but I get the cold shoulder from her. Screwed either way.

GEORGE

Such is life...but a boy needs his dad, man.

The HAGGARD MALE BARTENDER places two new long necks in front of them. George reaches for his wallet.

JAMES (CONT.)

I got a tab.

GEORGE

That's why you picked this toilet?
Cause they'll give you credit?

James holds up his lit cigarette.

JAMES

One of the only places left. God,
do I miss these things! She made me
quit four years ago.

George studies his friend, shaking his head.

GEORGE

She still doesn't work?

JAMES

Not since Sophie was born. You ask
her she'll tell you she works
everyday, harder than me. She
actually believes it, too...

GEORGE

You just gotta put your foot down,
man! Leave her, show her who's
boss!

JAMES

There is no putting down of
feet. I can't leave.

GEORGE

Why the hell not?

JAMES

Sophie....and she means well....I
think. I don't know, how could I
afford to be by myself again?

GEORGE

Look, you told me you're due to hit
some serious money with this work
merger, right?

James takes a swig of beer, lights another smoke.

JAMES

It's looking that way.

GEORGE

You gotta leave her *now*, man. If you wait until you get that dough, she's entitled to a good chunk of it, and that's totally wrong! You've been at Palmer for decades! That's your money, she doesn't deserve any of it. Hell, she doesn't even have a job, the court would probably give her it all!

JAMES

Georgie, I love you, but you are crazy. If I left her now, they would force me to give her alimony anyway, and child support....I'd be sleeping on your couch, ain't gonna happen.

Like a switch has been turned on, George becomes more animated.

GEORGE

That's if you leave her.

JAMES

Right, that's what I said.

GEORGE

What if she leaves you?

JAMES

She's not going to leave me, I mean unless I cheated on her or something, and I wouldn't, but if I did, she would take me for every penny anyway.

GEORGE

Oh, Jimmy....you'll never change. You never see the bigger picture. Joey Cheech, remember him?

JAMES

Baddest man since Clint Eastwood.

GEORGE

Exactly! Remember he was dating that hot Latin girl from Emerson? She was so into him, and he had a reputation for never dumping a girlfriend, or cheating on them, right?

JAMES

Yep. Visionary that Joey.

GEORGE

And she was way into him, but he had that code he lived by. She wanted to marry him when we were juniors, so what did he do?

JAMES

What did he do?

GEORGE

He forced her to realize she was too good for him. I remember he just acted like a total douche bag. That didn't work, so he even asked her best friend...oh man, come on...the redhead..

JAMES

Melanie Hutchins?

GEORGE

Right! He got the inside scoop on what would really piss her off, then he played the role to perfection.

JAMES

He ended up going out with Melanie most of our senior year.

GEORGE

That's not the point, man! The point is, he got *her* to dump *him*. She felt good about it, like it was her idea and he was just a jerk off, she thinks she won out on the deal, but actually Joey Cheech did.

James polishes off his beer, considering George's logic.

EXT. JAMES & AMY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Serenity. In the distance, the REV of a speeding vehicle breaks the silence, increases in VOLUME, appears at the top of the quiet, desolate street.

James' truck careens into the driveway, Classic Rock THUMPING from the radio, lurches to a halt inches shy of the garage door.

Engine still running, the door opens as the MUSIC reverberates across the still neighborhood.

James stumbles from the car, cigarette clenched in his lips. Realizing he didn't turn the motor off, he reaches in and turns the key.

He SLAMS the driver's door, proudly holds up his key chain, locking the door as the alarm makes a FEMININE CHIRP.

Approaching the basement entrance, he views Amy's meticulous rose garden, beautiful even in the moonlight.

Smiling through his cloud of smoke, he UNZIPS his jeans and urinates on the flowers.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

The door from the basement slowly opens into the dark hallway. James plods down the hall, in his mind, ninja quiet.

Reaching for the handle of his locked bedroom door, he faintly, hears Cha Cha SNARLING from inside.

Turning around, he notices Sophie's door is open.

CUT TO:

INT. SOPHIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Standing at the doorway, he turns on the light. No Sophie, fully made bed calling his name. Her Princess Clock reads "2:15".

He closes the door, extinguishes the light, plops face first onto the plush, flowered bedspread.

INT. HALLWAY - LATER

The hallway, silent and dark.

An ear piercing, HIGH PITCHED WAIL resonates throughout the house.

COMMOTION! RUSTLING! Amy's bedroom door flies open.

CUT TO:

INT. SOPHIE'S BEDROOM - LATER

James, passed out blissfully on the princess bed, oblivious to the SIREN'S WAIL, much louder here in Sophie's room.

Amy bursts in, instinctively cups her hand over her nose.

AMY
GOOD LORD!

She yanks the Carbon Monoxide detector from the wall outlet, tries to silence it. Finally, she rips out the battery.

AMY (CONT.)
It reeks in here! You trying to
conjure a demon?

James rolls over, attempts to get his bearings. Immediately holds his head in the throes of a hangover.

JAMES
Wha...whoa...shit....

Cha Cha enters, barking insanely at the threat in Sophie's bed. Amy, hand firmly clamped over her mouth.

AMY
Your freaking gas set off the
detector!

Sophie enters, very concerned, biting the nails on both hands jammed into her mouth.

JAMES
God...I'm going to throw up...

AMY
No damn wonder!

Amy waves her hands in the air, trying to fumigate the room.

SOPHIE
It smells like an elephant!

Clair rushes in.

CLAIR
What's going on?

James leaps from the bed, plunging past the trio as the dog snaps at his ankles.

The SOUND of the bathroom door opening, the CRASH of the toilet lid introduced to the tank. The vile GRUNTING of regurgitation.

SOPHIE
Daddy's sick?

A sly smile crosses Amy's face.

AMY
That's because he didn't eat his
dinner.

The BARKING changes to a quick WHIMPER as Cha Cha returns to her mother's presence, threat negated.

EXT. PALMER TRUCKING - DAY

Several workers, huddled around the hulking figure from earlier, smoke cigarettes, drink coffee, entranced by the spinning of his tall tale. This is SMITHRO (32).

SMITHRO
Man, I'm telling you mooks, she
says she's nineteen, no way, not
with a body like that! Haven't even
started to work her yet.

The loudspeaker CRACKLES to life.

JAMES (O.S.)
Dylan Smithro, to the Foreman's
Office. Dylan Smithro.

WORKER
Somebody's in trouble!

SMITHRO
I ain't *in* trouble, men, I *create*
trouble.

INT. JAMES' OFFICE - DAY

Smithro, BLUE hard hat in hand, stands defiantly in the doorway.

James, showing the signs of his rough night, sits behind his desk.

JAMES

Have a seat.

SMITHRO

No thanks. Rough night, boss?

Long SILENCE as the two study each other.

JAMES

On a work note, enough of the socializing. More work, less play. I know you're union, but there's nothing in the contract about workers entitled to playing wiffle ball in the warehouse or dice on the docks.

SMITHRO

Since you asked so nice, sure.

JAMES

This part of our dialogue isn't taking place...Tommy's really bad. His wife said the doctor's don't know if he's even going to be able to so much as take a piss again by himself.

SMITHRO

Horrible. That means he likely ain't gonna be able to use that thing for other activities I bet. His poor wife...wonder what she's gonna do?

James leaps from the chair, Smithro, ice cold.

JAMES

Got something you want to tell me?

SMITHRO

This talk...still ain't taking place?

James winces in pain from standing up so quickly. Reaches a hand to his head. Composing himself, he returns his attention to the defiant worker.

SMITHRO (CONT.)

Sounds to me like Fullerton was in the wrong place...at the wrong time...trying to throw his weight around with somebody he shouldn't

SMITHRO (CONT.)
of. Bad combination. You like to
throw your weight around too,
don'tcha boss?

Smithro pats James on his pot belly.

He puts his hard hat back on, eyes still locked to
James'. A wicked smile forms as he exits.

EXT. JAMES & AMY'S HOUSE - DAY

Amy stands in the bright sunshine studying her rose garden.

Gently, she examines one of the sagging petals, something
isn't right.

She notices a cigarette butt in the flower bed. Her
concentration broken by a voice from inside.

SOPHIE (O.S.)
The phone's ringing! The phone!

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Amy paces holding the corded kitchen phone.

AMY
I'm only his step parent...did you
try his mother?

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)
He said she's been working out of
the country since last week.

AMY
What do I need to do?

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)
Well, someone will have to come and
get him, he won't be permitted back
until it's addressed at the school
board meeting.

AMY
Right...ok, we'll be right there.

She gently returns the phone to the cradle, picks it up
again, dials a number, pauses, then hangs up.

EXT. MIDDLE SCHOOL PARKING LOT - DAY

Sophie exits the school first, skipping ahead of Amy and a downtrodden Danny.

Amy opens the door to the idling minivan, Sophie climbs in through the passenger door tumbles her way to the back.

Danny, dazed, stands in front of the door as if it leads to an execution chamber.

AMY

Am I going to have to throw you in?

INT. AMY'S MINIVAN - DAY

Sophie watches cartoons from the fold down DVD player. Amy drives, staring directly ahead. Danny turns to his stepmother.

DANNY

What did dad say?

AMY

He doesn't know yet.

DANNY

I'm so stupid.

AMY

Yep. Anyone who brings alcohol to school can't be very bright.

SOPHIE

What's 'co hall?

AMY

Nothing baby, watch your movie.

DANNY

Where am I going?

AMY

Well, you can't go to your mother's now, can you? Did you think you would get away with this?

DANNY

He's going to take my PS4 away.

AMY
Gee, you think?

EXT. JAMES & AMY'S HOUSE - DAY

James pulls into the driveway. Exiting the car, he grabs a take out coffee cup and walks towards the basement door.

INT. DANNY'S ROOM-DAY

Danny stares out his window, nervously watches his father, knowing his young life is about to get very terrible.

From Danny's vantage, James takes the lid off the cup, pours the remnant of swill over Amy's roses.

James, looking to ensure that no one is watching, "accidentally" tromps through the flowers on his way into the house.

INT. BASEMENT - DAY

James makes his way up the stairs trying to navigate past the endless cluster of toys, shoes and purses.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Amy stands at the stove, back to the doorway, flipping veggie burgers, preparing for the inevitable confrontation.

SOPHIE (O.S.)
Are you still sick daddy?

JAMES (O.S.)
All better baby.

JAMES
Cha isn't barking at me.

Amy, back still turned.

AMY
She's in Clair's room.

JAMES
We have to talk about her, Amy.

AMY
About what?

JAMES
Come on! The whiskey she took.

The opening Amy has waited for! She turns confidently, spatula in hand.

AMY
You're sure about that, aren't ya?
Well I got a call today...

Something catches her eye over James' shoulder. He turns to follow her gaze.

Danny stands in the doorway, tears streaming from his eyes.

JAMES
Buddy, what's wrong? What are you
doing here?

James crosses to his son, wraps his arms around him. Danny actually reciprocates, cries harder, looks to Amy.

JAMES (CONT.)
What is it? It's ok...

Witnessing this outpouring of emotion from father and son, Amy's vengeance dissipates.

AMY
I met to tell you....

He breaks the embrace with Danny, they both turn to look at her, Danny's eyes plead for a reprieve.

AMY (CONT.)
He called the house today...after
school...he wanted me to get him.

JAMES
You could have called me, Danny.

AMY
Said he really missed you.

James hugs his sniffling son even tighter.

JAMES
Danny, you know you can come here
anytime, your mom is fine with
that, too.

Danny mouths the word "thanks" over his father's shoulder to Amy. She nods returns to flipping the burgers.

INT. DANNY'S ROOM - DAY

Shirtless, sleeping peacefully, thumb in his mouth, Danny snores much like his father.

The door opens, Amy in her robe holding Cha Cha turns on the light.

AMY

Get up!

No response. She kicks the mattress, tosses the dog on the bed.

AMY (CONT.)

Danny!

DANNY

WHAT! Oh....sorry...

AMY

Get dressed. Like you're going to school. Go sit in the garage beside the van, Sophie's side so your father doesn't see you.

Rolling out of bed, he puts on his shirt, Cha Cha prances around him.

INT. JAMES & AMY'S BEDROOM - DAY

James stands in front of his closet, takes off his t-shirt, throws it into the overfilled hamper.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

The phone RINGS as James, dressed for work, makes his way past Sophie.

Amy looks at the caller I.D. "Loan Counseling".

JAMES

You going to get that?

AMY

Nope.

James scribbles something on the dry erase board posted on the refrigerator, silently exits the house.

INT. GARAGE - DAY

An open text book on his lap, Danny hears the feminine CHIRP of the truck locks. Slowly he rises, peers out the dusty garage window to see his father driving away.

The garage door springs to life revealing Amy.

AMY

Ready?

INT./EXT. HOUSE - DAY

MONTAGE

Danny cuts the grass.

He pulls out an electric sander from the garage tool chest.

Amy vacuums the house.

Sophie watches Scooby Doo.

Danny sands peeled paint from the back porch.

Amy shows Danny how to roll paint over the porch boards.

Amy gathers laundry from room to room, pauses to study James' overfilled hamper.

Danny, weed whacker in hand, smiles as Amy and Sophie attempt to resurrect the rose garden.

END MONTAGE

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Danny crosses off several items from the dry erase board as Amy speaks on the phone.

AMY

Tonight?...I can be here...Nell,
what do you know about them?...

Amy holds her crossed fingers in the air.

AMY (CONT.)

They are?

At the bottom of the board, Danny reads in huge block letters: "MY LAUNDRY IS FULL! (NOT DONE!) J."

INT. NEW CONSTRUCTION MODEL HOME - DAY

Sophie exits the lavish powder room.

AMY

Did you wash your hands?

SOPHIE

Uh huh!

A SALESMAN (50), dress shirt, power tie, smiling, recites his pitch.

SALESMAN

Just ten percent down holds the lot. To be totally transparent, there's only going to be six more released during this wave.

Danny chases Sophie through the upstairs.

AMY

Kids! This is not a playground!

SALESMAN

They're fine, I've got two of my own. Plenty of room for a growing family.

AMY

I'm sorry, how much is ten percent in actual money?

SALESMAN

Well, that depends on which style you're interested in, what features, finished basement, a deck, granite counter tops, sky really is the limit.

Amy's eyes wander throughout the beautiful, fully furnished kitchen and dining room, smiling at the floral arrangements.

Awestruck, as all potential buyers are, she loses her self in thought wondering what it would be like to call this palace "home".

SALESMAN (CONT.)

If you don't mind me asking, what can you afford? Are you renting?

AMY

No, there's a mortgage, the house is actually listed.

SALESMAN (CONT.)

Well, most of the time, we require a sales agreement from your buyers to get things moving, that is if you plan on using our financing. Did you want to run some numbers?

AMY

Sure...I have to confess, our credit isn't squeaky clean...

SALESMAN

Whose is?

INT. MODEL HOME OFFICE - DAY

The salesman punches numbers into the computer. Amy nervously sits, shifts her gaze back and forth from his screen to Danny and Sophie cavorting outside the window.

Her cell phone rings.

AMY

Excuse me, I have to take this.

He doesn't acknowledge his potential buyer, continues to click away at the troubling figures.

EXT. MODEL HOME - DAY

Amy, a hand over her free ear, talks on the cell out of earshot of the tag playing children.

Sophie, LAUGHING, ducks behind the blooming shrubbery, eluding her brother.

Marching to Danny, cell extended, Amy hands him the phone.

AMY

Get your mother on the phone.

EXT. JAMES & AMY'S HOUSE - DAY

Amy stands in the driveway, holding a SNARLING Cha Cha. James, Danny and Sophie pile into the minivan.

AMY

No junk food! Make sure she gets broccoli! And baby, you have to take a bath when you get home!

James enters, readjusts the drivers seat, rolls the window down to address his wife.

JAMES

I see you cut the grass.

AMY

Did you hear me? No junk food!

Danny leans up from the back seat as James rolls up the window.

DANNY

Man up, dad. Taco Bell.

INT. DINER - NIGHT

Clair blushes, pours coffee for a CUSTOMER seated at the counter.

CUSTOMER (O.S.)

I'm serious, doll, all the girls have 'em now.

CLAIR

I don't know, it just seems like it would really hurt!

CUSTOMER (O.S.)

Nah, just for a second or two.

A male hand reaches up, a brief caress to her GOLD HEART NECKLACE.

CLAIR

I couldn't afford it anyway.

She blushes as it is revealed that the customer is...

SMITHRO

You know, I'd pay for it...if you show it to me when it heals up.

Flustered, she looks up to see her family, minus Amy, enter the diner. She pulls away, leaving Smithro's hand hanging in the air.

SOPHIE

Clair's here!

Clair takes three menus and place settings to a window booth.

Smithro swivels in his stool. He winks at the sour faced James, who proceeds to usher his children into the booth pretending not to notice.

JAMES

So, what's the special tonight?

CLAIR

Fried chicken.

SOPHIE

I want that!

CLAIR

No way, mom would kill me if I let you eat that!

DANNY

Can I get a milkshake?

SOPHIE

Me too! Chocolate!

JAMES

Kids, come on. Let's find something healthier.

SOPHIE

I want a milkshake and fried chicken! Daddy, I have to go potty.

JAMES

Really? Clair, can you take her?

CLAIR

What? I can't just escort customer's kids to the bathroom.

SOPHIE

I'm five, I can go myself! Do not come back there!

Sophie heads down the hallway to the restroom. Smithro notices Sophie's departure, puts his coffee cup down, rises and saunters in the same direction.

CLAIR

So...

James' attention follows Smithro as he passes the booth.

JAMES

I don't know...hold on.

James quickly stands banging his knees into the table. He darts towards the restroom.

DANNY

How 'bout that shake now, ma'am?

CLAIR

You are such a tool.

INT. MEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

A beautiful, blue crystal, shines brightly like a raging star.

Suddenly, the gem is pelted, ravaged with a stream of water.

Pulling back, the small immaculate men's room reveals, Smithro at the urinal, pissing on the blue urinal cake.

The door springs open, James enters, frantic.

SMITHRO

Hey boss. See anything you like?

JAMES

Stay away from my daughter!

SMITHRO

Whoa, I just had to drain Johnny Longbone, for some reason he was getting restless. She's cute, by the way.

JAMES

She's five years old you sick bastard!

Smithro gives a few shakes.

SMITHRO

Mmmm. Yeah...I didn't mean that one.

He turns, faces James, places "Johnny" back in his pants. ZIPS up. Without washing his hands, he approaches James, stopping face to face.

SMITHRO (CONT.)

Now, if you excuse me, my coffee's getting cold.

Smithro raises his right hand and gives a playful, threatening tap to James' cheek with his germ infested palm.

INT.DINER - NIGHT

James walks up the hallway holding Sophie's hand. Danny sits at the booth, no milkshake in front of him. Smithro looks over from his seat at the counter.

JAMES

Come on.

DANNY

Where are we going?

JAMES

McDonald's.

Through the kitchen, Clair watches them exit.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Sophie plays in the tub with various Barbie dolls and toys.

Amy proceeds to wash the child's hair, pouring water from a plastic pitcher filled by the running tap.

AMY

So did you have fun with Danny and Daddy?

SOPHIE

Yep. We saw Clair, then daddy took us to McDonald's.

Amy's water pouring ceases in mid stream.

AMY

McDonald's? Are you sure? What did you get?

SOPHIE

Chicken nuggets, french fries...he let me get a milk shake, but I'm not supposed to tell you that part.

AMY

Danny! Come sit with your sister!

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

Mouth silently moving, James reads from large blocks of text on his computer screen.

The STOMPING of quickening feet above causes him to look up. Like a herd of bison, Amy CHARGES down the basement steps.

AMY

What kind of idiot are you!

Speechless, not even able to stammer, James puzzles over the intrusion.

AMY (CONT.)

McDonald's? I'm here trying to show off the house and you take her to McDonald's? Do they serve broccoli at McDonald's, James?

JAMES

Wait, hold on, you don't understand--

AMY

No, apparently you don't understand!

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Danny sits on the floor near the tub as Sophie continues to obliviously play. The entire conversation audible through the floor vent.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

JAMES

There was this guy--

AMY

I DO NOT CARE! You are so thick! I work all week to make sure she eats properly and you force junk on her?

James stands from behind his desk, enough is enough.

JAMES

Knock it off! I know you give her junk, too!

AMY

That's the exception! Occasionally she gets a reward--

JAMES

So you can reward her, but I can't?

AMY

Look at you! You want her to end up like you? Fat, out of shape, obese? You're a heart attack waiting to explode! You do want you want to yourself or Danny, you're not doing that to my daughter!

Leaning over his desk, finger aimed at himself.

JAMES

So I'm fat, huh? And you're the only one that can parent her, is that it?

AMY

Yeah, that's it! And you have a jake in your nose!

Amy spins and storms up the stairs, leaving James to rub his nose, seeing if said booger falls out.

EXT. PORCH - NIGHT

James smokes, deep in thought. His eyes turn to the rose garden.

From the upstairs window, Amy watches filled with contempt.

She turns from the window as James saunters towards the flower bed.

INT. JAMES & AMY'S BEDROOM - DAY

James throws his underwear onto a pile of dirty laundry near his overfilled hamper.

Shirtless, he looks at himself in the mirror. gives himself a male breast exam. He watches as his man boobs plunge and shake.

He attempts a muscle pose, sucks in his gut.

JAMES

Crap.

EXT. HOSPITAL COURTYARD - DAY

Amy and Sophie arrive in the courtyard to see Amy's father, Larry (63), decked out in a pricey Hawaiian shirt and sandals, sitting with Pap.

SOPHIE

POP POP!

LARRY

Hey baby! Where's my hug!

AMY

Daddy, I didn't expect to see you.

Her father's large arms embrace the child as he looks up.

LARRY

Just wanted to check in on
Pap. Does he look thin to you?

Pap nods off in his wheelchair as the released Sophie skips towards an oak tree.

AMY

He's sick, dad.

LARRY

No, I know, I know. Did they tell
you how much time he has?

An uncomfortable silence.

LARRY (CONT.)

I mean, I just hate to see him suffering. I wouldn't want this...feel free to put a pillow over my face if I make it that long, you know what I mean?

The sound of BRISTLES ON CONCRETE distracts Amy. Turning, she sees the landscaper, sweeping mulch from the sidewalk.

They lock eyes. He tips his hat and smiles. She returns the smile as he proceeds with his task. Sophie gathers mulch from under the oak, throws it in the air.

AMY

He's sleeping, let's wheel him back into the room.

LARRY

Listen, hun, did you think anymore about our conversation? Things are getting dicey.

AMY

Sophie! Put that mulch down, you're making more work for...

Amy turns again to the landscaper.

LANDSCAPER

She's fine, she's fine...Charlie, by the way.

Smiling, Amy returns her attention to her daughter.

AMY

You're making more work for Charlie!

LARRY

Ames? Our situation?

INT. GYM - DAY

James, holding a duffel bag, stands at the desk filling out paperwork. Completed, he hands it back to the tone female TRAINER.

TRAINER

Ok, Mr. Mitchell, everything looks in order. I just need a credit card for the recurring dues.

JAMES

Right.

James fumbles through his wallet, pulls out a credit card. Handing it to her, his fingers nervously thump the desk top as she runs it through the reader.

CUT TO:

James wears an old baggy t-shirt, loose sweatpants.

He wanders through the gym, studies incredibly in shape hard bodies, both male and female, pumping iron, working elliptical machines and furiously running on treadmills.

Out of his element, he settles on a stationary bike. Placing earphones on, he begins to peddle, fast at first, then slowing to a crawl, gasping for breath.

A macho hand reaches for James' shoulder, causing his feet to flail off the bike, shocking him from his "workout".

Looking up, he pulls the earphones out catching the tail end of the interlopers introduction. There he stands, grinning...Amy's muscular ex husband.

FRANK

..see you here!

JAMES

(wheezing)

Hey...Frank...

FRANK

Good for you, man! Just sign up?

JAMES

Yeah, today.

FRANK

Hey, I'm heading out for a drink, want to come with?

James looks around the gym, knowing his idea doesn't seem so bright after paying his fees.

JAMES

Yeah, I'm just about done.

INT. JUICE BAR - DAY

Not what James had in mind, they sit at the juice bar. Frank drinks a protein shake, James sips an iced tea.

FRANK

And my girl? Haven't seen her in a week or so, how's she behavin'?

JAMES

Yeah, I should mention this...and please, don't take it the wrong way, ok?

FRANK

Starting to act like her mother, huh?

JAMES

Not exactly...she skipped school the other day...I didn't tell Amy cause it would turn into a big scene, you know?

FRANK

Oh, I know!

JAMES

She said you wrote her an early dismissal. Is that true?

FRANK

I wrote her somethin' to get out of school, she said her mom wouldn't do it. Senior Skip Day, they have that when you were a kid?

JAMES

They did...my point, Frank, is...do you think that's a good idea? I mean, Amy would lose her mind and---

FRANK

Brother, look, now you can't take this the wrong way. Amy is a freakin' lunatic!

The door to the juice bar opens as a WEIGHTLIFTER enters with his Mastiff on a chain leash.

FRANK (CONT.)

Sometimes you gotta do what you gotta do, reel her in. I never get to see Clair, she's at that age. If I can do somethin' for her that Amy won't, so it goes, ya know?

The weightlifter places his order as the enormous dog makes eye contact with James.

FRANK (CONT.)

That don't mean I'd let Clair do anything she damn well pleases, ya know. How 'bout this, man to man, father to father....if you think Clair is ever pushing the boundaries, let me know 'bro. Deal?

James turns his attention from the canine to Frank.

JAMES

Yeah, of course....look, I have something I need to do.

He rises, patting Frank on his enormous shoulder as he walks away.

FRANK

No worries, see you at the Ironhouse tomorrow! Hey, need a spotting partner?

EXT. JAMES & AMY'S HOUSE - DAY

Danny gently pitches an oversize wiffle ball to Sophie. She misses with her large pink bat by a good foot.

James pulls into the driveway. Without looking at his father, Danny addresses him.

DANNY

Mom called, you have to drop me off after dinner.

SOPHIE

Daddy! Watch!

James exits his vehicle, making his way to the back hatch.

JAMES

Oh, I think you'd rather watch
this.

Opening the rear door, a precarious MUTT lumbers out of the
back, tail wagging, mouth drooling.

SOPHIE

A dog!

The friendly dog runs to the squealing Sophie, licking her
face he turns his attention to the ball in Danny's hand.

Danny tosses the plastic sphere across the yard as the dog
darts to retrieve it, running through the dying roses.

DANNY

Oh, man, you are so in trouble!

JAMES

Wait a minute, you're the one who
told me to get some balls, right?

DANNY

What's his name?

Sophie chases after the frisky hound, yelling over her
shoulder.

SOPHIE

Balls! His name is Balls!

Danny and his father share a genuine laugh as Cha Cha, looks
out the window.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

James, kneeling, silently experiencing the RAGE spewing from
Amy's mouth, holds Balls by his collar.

AMY

We're trying to sell this
house! Not a lick a sense! We
already have one dog that you don't
give a darn about!

JAMES

Cha Cha is your...whatever it is.

Cha Cha appears from behind Amy's feet, her one non glaucoma
infected eye stares at the originator of the insult and this
new beastly threat.

AMY

You can't just go out and make a decision like that! What is wrong with you?

JAMES

Really? I can't make decisions now?

AMY

Not by yourself, no!

JAMES

Says who? You?

AMY

You make stupid decisions! All the time! I swear!

JAMES

You got one thing right....I do seem to make stupid decisions. COME ON KIDS!

James turns to leave with the newest family member.

JAMES (CONT.)

We're taking Balls for a walk, then I'm dropping Danny off at Vicki's.

Amy begins to utter a syllable, stops, deciding again to play her trump card.

AMY

Maybe you should talk to Vicki when you're over there.

JAMES

What the hell does that mean?

Danny runs into the kitchen, out of breath. His appearance deflates the wind in Amy's sails.

DANNY

Can I walk him first?

AMY

Nothing. It means nothing.

INT. CLAIR'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Clair reclines on her bed, laptop open, wearing an impish smile. She types slowly, hits enter. Immediately her hand nervously fidgets with her gold heart necklace.

The screen reads: "PrincezzClair99: can't...cam broken...???" She waits anxiously for a reply.

The response pops up: "Irocyurwurd: will have 2 git ya a new 1 be4 the pearcing."

An annoying YELPING takes her attention away.

CLAIR
Somebody shut that thing up!

INT. JAMES & AMY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Amy props herself up on her elbows in the darkened room, the WAILING even louder.

James, unaffected, his snoring trying to compete with the lonely dog somewhere in the house.

AMY
James! James! Go take care of your decision!

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

The door from the outside opens, a bleary eyed James and a way too energetic Balls enter.

James removes the leash and places it on his desk next to a clock in the shape of a semi truck, engraved with "FOR TWENTY YEARS OF SERVICE WITH PALMER TRUCKING".

The clock face reads "1:34".

Plopping into his chair, he fires up the computer, Balls resting at his slipper clad feet. He proceeds to type.

INT. FAMILY ROOM - DAY

With tired, bloodshot eyes, James makes his way past Sophie, playing in front of the television. He is immediately greeted by his new best friend, happy to see his master.

Amy stands in the doorway from the kitchen, coffee mug in one hand, Cha Cha in the other.

AMY

You better clean that up before you leave.

JAMES

What?

AMY

You don't see that? Unbelievable!

His bleary eyes scan the room.

JAMES

You know what? I got two hours of sleep last night, so can you just spell it out for me like I'm a child?

She points behind the easy chair.

AMY

Right there, a whole pile of poop way to big to belong to my dog.

James inspects the mess.

JAMES

I'm late. Just clean it up.

He opens the door to the basement, back to Amy, a concerned, evil smile plastered on his tired unshaven face.

She stands, dumbfounded by the disrespect.

INT. JAMES' OFFICE - DAY

James multitasks as he talks with George on speakerphone.

GEORGE (V.O.)

Good for you, man! Think it's going to work?

JAMES

She's definitely pissed off. This is just stupid...I really feel like an asshole leaving her with all that shit to clean up. Why am I doing this again?

GEORGE (V.O.)

Just keep doing what you're doing. Joey Cheech would be proud!

Through the window, James sees Thornton rapidly approaching.

JAMES
George, I gotta go!

James quickly disconnects the call just as his superior storms into the office.

THORNTON
We have some very, very serious
issues here Mitchell!

JAMES
We do?

James rises from his seat, begins to pace.

THORNTON
You have a decision to make.

JAMES
What are we talking about?

THORNTON
Fullerton. Doesn't look like he's
returning anytime soon, if
ever. You can't just keep
delegating his duties to the
underlings. We need a replacement
now.

Thornton takes over James' chair.

JAMES
I've been personally overseeing all
his orders since he's been gone, I
haven't---

THORNTON
Then you're not doing a very good
job. Kirkland's had issues with
their last three deliveries. They
threatened to drop us and go with
Van Way.

Flustered, James opens a filing cabinet.

JAMES
I didn't get any exception repo---

THORNTON
Close the drawer James!

Following the shocking tone of the order, James turns to his superior.

THORNTON (CONT.)

This merger could change all of our lives, you know that. We've all worked way too hard for this. If we start losing customers to other vendors, it's not going to bode well. I know Fullerton's your friend, but this is our livelihood.

JAMES

I understand...of course.

THORNTON

By the end of the day one of these dock workers gets a promotion.

He hands him two folders. James reads from the first.

JAMES

Ernie Puhala....I meant to forward HR his resignation letter. He's leaving next week.

THORNTON

Leaving? To where?

Reluctant, James looks up from the file.

JAMES

Van Ways. I could talk with him---

THORNTON

Bullshit! Traitor....

Thornton rises from the chair, crosses the room and opens the door.

THORNTON (CONT.)

Your decision is easy then. By the end of the day, clear?

James nods in acknowledgment as his boss leaves. Opening the second file his face sours. The name on the paperwork reads: "Smithro, Dylan A."

INT. LUXURIOUS OFFICE - DAY

Danny opens the door of the spacious, plush office, permitting Amy and Sophie inside. Behind her desk, VICKI, (41), dark haired, dark skinned, very attractive, speaks in French on the telephone.

Amy takes in the surroundings, impressed with what the corporate world has to offer. Sophie's eyes are immediately drawn to an aquarium housing dozens of salt water fish.

DANNY

Come here, I'll show you the baby sharks.

Vicki places one finger up, silently asking her standing visitor to let her finish her call.

VICKI

Nous serions plus que disposé à traiter la commande. Suivons pour la semaine prochaine? Toujours un plaisir, au revoir.

Hanging up, she waves a hand for Amy to take a seat.

VICKI (CONT.)

Sorry about that. A girl's got to earn a living.

AMY

I see. So, he told you?

VICKI

He did.

AMY

Everything?

VICKI

I had to water board him. So, we're all going to the meeting?

AMY

That's why I'm here...James doesn't know.

VICKI

He told me that too. You know I've never been one to meddle, but can I ask why you aren't telling him?

Amy looks to the children tapping the aquarium glass.

AMY

He's very stressed lately...

VICKI

Palmer Trucking still first in his heart I bet.

AMY

He's a good guy, Vicki! I'm just trying to protect him.

VICKI

Look, I get it, I do. But he's going to find out sooner or later. Alcoholism runs on my mother's side, I should have been more observant.

AMY

Yeah, well, I think Danny's pretty much scared off of it, at least for the short term.

VICKI

I'll have him at the meeting. And listen, I just want to thank you for watching out for him....for both of them actually.

Amy, flattered, lips holding back a smile, nods.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - DAY

Tommy, struggling to perch from his wheel chair, looks through the maternity ward glass. Several NEWBORNS sleep, cry and coo amongst their new universe.

James, tired, unshaven, appears in the reflection.

JAMES

Ouch! He's ugly as a bag of assholes, just like his pop.

Tommy responds to the reflection.

TOMMY

They say when a baby's born, somebody you knows dies. Looks like you might be the proof. You OK?

JAMES

It's nothing...work.

Struggling, he turns to James.

TOMMY

I'm still on the payroll, you know.

James' gaze holds on the newborn Fullerton.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - LATER

Weak, pale, a shell of his former self, Tommy stares off in the distance.

JAMES

Maybe now is the right time to tell someone.

TOMMY

No! I'm not a stool pigeon! The first day of my son's life and I'm gonna start teaching him *not* to be a man?

JAMES

They're going to give him your position, Tommy. You've got to tell someone---

TOMMY

I said no! And what's this they stuff, huh? You're the one that dishes out promotions.

JAMES

Thornton threatened me...

TOMMY

Look, you're my friend, which makes me your friend. I can appreciate your spot here, but you need to appreciate mine.

A long silence between the two.

TOMMY (CONT.)

I will take care of him...you can count on that. It may be later than I want, much later maybe, but that bastard will get paid back in spades!

Tommy begins to cough violently. He punches his clicker, administering pain meds into his IV.

JAMES
I'll take care of Smithro.

TOMMY
(coughing)
You? Have you...looked in
a...mirror...lately?

JAMES
I'll figure something out. I've got
to get back. Congratulate Jenny for
me, OK?

James stands, heads for the room exit.

TOMMY
Jimmy...

He stops, turning over his shoulder.

TOMMY (CONT.)
Whatever...you
decide...I understand.

EXT. JAMES & AMY'S HOUSE - DAY

James tiredly exits his vehicle, coffee cup in hand. He walks to the rose garden, looks to the dying flowers, prepared for the ritual of destruction.

A change of heart, he yawns, enters the house.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Stunningly dressed, Amy marches about the kitchen, barking orders to the family.

AMY
There's wheat pasta in the fridge,
it just needs to be heated
up. Throw some vegetables in the
microwave for Sophie. Sophie! Make
sure he makes you vegetables!

No response. James, very haggard and sleep deprived, half listens to the litany in the doorway.

AMY (CONT.)

Save some for Clair, she'll eat when she's done filling out the college applications. Can you proof read them?

JAMES

Anything else, boss?

AMY

Yes, tons! Sophie needs a bath, wash her hair and make sure you put conditioner in it. If you absolutely have to let her watch t.v. before bed, make sure it's something nice, none of the Scooby Doo garbage, it gives her nightmares.

JAMES

Got it. Where are you and Stacie going?

Gathering her purse and keys she heads to the basement door.

AMY

I told you, she called and really needs to talk about something. I'll be home when I'm home. Get her down early. Pasta in the fridge, vegetables, bath, nothing scary, bed. You can handle this, right?

JAMES

Do you think I'm some kind of idiot? I got it!

She descends the basement steps. James immediately turns on the television. Hearing another muffled order from his spouse, he mutes the television.

JAMES (CONT.)

What?

AMY

(distantly)

Let the dogs out twice!

INT. FAMILY ROOM - LATER

Sophie, wearing a costume princess dress, sits on the floor next to her yawning father, sprawled on the easy chair, a baseball game just beginning on the television.

Balls the dog chews a rawhide bone in the corner.

JAMES
Hungry yet?

SOPHIE
Nope.

JAMES
You're getting a bath soon.

SOPHIE
When?

James stands, stretches, his belly exposed from his old, too small t-shirt.

JAMES
As soon as I proof read something.

INT. CLAIR'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Clair on her bed, laptop open, wears only a sports bra, shorts and her ever present GOLD HEART NECKLACE. Grinning, she types and fidgets with the charm.

Cha Cha, perched on a pillow beside her looks on through one milky, disapproving eye.

CLAIR
Don't judge me, dog.

A quiet knock on the door goes unnoticed.

The unlocked door opens to James, greeted by this uncomfortable sight.

JAMES
Your mom wants me to---

Immediately slamming the computer shut, throwing a stuffed animal over her chest, Sophie is embarrassed then enraged by the intrusion.

SOPHIE
Oh my God! Don't you knock?

JAMES
Sorry...uh, your mom, she---

SOPHIE
Get out of here! I don't barge in
on you!

Retreating, he closes the door.

EXT. MIDDLE SCHOOL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Vicki exits first with her arm around her son, followed by Amy. Thunder rolls in the distance.

VICKI
Well, you didn't make out so
bad. And don't think you're going
to be sleeping in, watching movies
and video games for the next ten
days, you're going to be learning
French.

DANNY
Ok, I know.

VICKI
I could use a stiff drink. Want to
join me?

DANNY
Really funny, mom.

VICKI
Not you...

Vicki turns to address Amy.

VICKI (CONT.)
Unless you have to get back, I
understand---

AMY
Yeah, wine sounds good.

VICKI
Let me drop him off. And listen...

She turns back to her son.

VICKI

...I'm trusting you. You stayed at our house alone for almost a week by yourself without anyone's permission or help. You're being punished, think you can get yourself to bed with no t.v. or shenanigans? You know I'll know if you don't.

Danny nods in agreement. Amy unlocks her minivan.

VICKI

Where do you want to meet?

Amy smiles, the approach of a night out with a former nemesis, now turned ally.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

The familiar sound of James' SNORING emanates from the family room. Sophie drags a chair to the refrigerator.

On the dry erase calendar, she sees the date "April 12th" circled with a red heart.

She opens the door, attempts to pull out a Tupperware container, only to have it fall to the floor with a dull THUD, wheat pasta and sauce splatters all over the linoleum and wall.

INT. CASINO - NIGHT

Amy and Vicki sit at the crowded bar, wine glasses in front of them, each focused on their tabletop slot machines.

AMY

Frank was only ever concerned about body building, protein shakes, egg whites...drove me insane!

VICKI

Then you go to Jimmy. I kept telling him his metabolism was going to slow to a crawl.

They continue to feed bills into the machines.

AMY

He doesn't look that bad for a guy in his forties...I like a little

AMY
 something to hold on to, when the
 times comes for me to actually be
 holding onto something.

VICKI
 Uh oh...he's pulling the
 infrequent sex routine?

AMY
 (hesitantly)
 Well...it's hard, I'm so wiped out
 after getting Sophie to bed, and
 he's always in the basement late---

VICKI
 Doing what?

AMY
 I'm not sure...

VICKI
 Well, he's not surfing for porn I
 bet, he never really had that Alpha
 Male sex drive.

AMY
 He used to...the sex drive I mean.

The FEMALE BARTENDER arrives with two fresh glasses of
 Merlot, placing them next to their still half full drinks.

FEMALE BARTENDER
 Courtesy of the handsome gentleman
 at the corner.

They both turn to see their generous admirer, Charlie the
 landscaper, holding up his beer in a distant toast. They
 return the salute.

VICKI
 That for me or for you?

Amy can't help but smile.

INT. BLACKJACK TABLE - LATER

Charlie studies his cards laid out on the table. The dealer
 shows an eight of clubs, Charlie a ten of hearts and a four
 of spades.

CHARLIE

Hit me.

The dealer tosses a seven of diamonds, then proceeds to throw his cards, first a four of hearts, then a king of diamonds...bust for the dealer.

AMY

Nice!

Charlie smiles to his new friend. Vicki, gathers her belongings.

VICKI

I've gotta run, Amy. Behave yourself!

She gives Amy a sly smile, receiving a grin in return.

VICKI (CONT.)

Charlie, nice meeting you. Thanks for the drinks.

CHARLIE

My pleasure, hope you don't take my luck with you!

His sincere smile rests on Amy as he stacks his winnings. Reveling in his attention, she doesn't notice a NEW PLAYER arrive at the table.

NEW PLAYER (O.S.)

Break a hundred please.

Looking to acknowledge the new player, she discovers it to be George, his disapproving stare drags Amy back to reality.

AMY

I really should go.

CHARLIE

Ok...I can walk you out.

AMY

No, no I'm fine.

She rises.

CHARLIE

The offer still stands.

George's glare becomes even more bitter.

CHARLIE (CONT.)

About doctoring up the rose garden...I can take a look on Sunday.

AMY

Oh...right...nice meeting you.

Quickly, Charlie puts together this sudden departure relates to the newcomer.

She hurriedly exits as bets are placed, George's eyes burn holes into the handsome gambler.

INT.FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Sophie stands, still in her costume dress, fingertips from both hands inserted in her chocolate stained mouth, eyes wide with fear.

On television, a rerun of The X-Files has reached the frightening climax.

An empty bag of chips rests at her feet, next to a fresh pile of dog crap. Amy's ascending FOOTSTEPS are no match for James' ROUGH SNORING.

Amy enters, immediately enraged by the scene.

AMY

It's past midnight! Why are you up?

Sophie runs to Amy, the child's face burrows into her mother's thighs.

AMY (CONT.)

James!

Picking up her traumatized daughter, with force she extinguishes the television.

She kicks the chair, producing a protective BARK from the sleeping Balls, shocking her husband into the land of the living.

AMY (CONT.)

What is wrong with you? Have you lost your mind?

Fatigued, he attempts to get his bearings, realizes quickly he is in serious trouble.

JAMES

What? I must've fallen asleep---

AMY

She was watching aliens!

SOPHIE

Mommy! Don't say that!

The shaken child cries, punching at her mother.

AMY

Eating junk? She's not in her pajamas! She hasn't taken a bath!

JAMES

I'm sorry, I didn't get any sleep last night---

AMY

One night was all I asked for!

Amy turns with her child clutching her for dear life.

As she departs, she steps squarely into the middle of the dog dropping, unaware she is tracking the feces throughout the house.

James stands in shame as Balls trots over, licking his master's bare feet.

EXT. PALMER TRUCKING - DAY

A circle of workers, all in BLUE hardhats, surround Smithro, now donning the promoted RED safety helmet.

They pass around papers, smiling at what they see.

WORKER

Damn, boss, you weren't kidding!

SMITHRO

That's right! Don't hog it Mullins, share with everybody, break's almost over.

James walks past the group on his way to the office, staring holes at the new foreman.

SMITHRO (CONT.)

All right, all right, give em back. Back to work!

From his office, James notices Smithro folding the papers, placing them in his back pocket.

INT. MARGIE'S OFFICE - LATER

Amy sits in front of MARGIE,(60), as Sophie colors in an activity book.

A look of true disappointment painted on Amy's face. From behind the desk, Margie offers her condolences.

MARGIE

I'm sorry honey, you know if I could I would. You're a darn fine nurse, but the board is hiring like crazy from the schools, and these youngsters are willing to work for peanuts.

AMY

It's ok, I understand.

MARGIE

Look, I can make some calls to outside the network, see if any of my friends can help, but I'm afraid it's going to be the same 'ole story. If you want me to get you in the mix at the current rate, I can put you in as an emergency on call?

AMY

Thanks, Margie, really. Uh, can I let you know?

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

James enters from the garage, heads towards the stairs.

Learning from his past mistakes, he turns on the light in order to navigate the landmine of shoes and toys.

The light reveals a CLEAR PATH, not a single encumbrance.

CUT TO:

INT. FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

The house is church quiet. He walks around the silence, noticing none of Sophie's crayons or books, no barking Cha Cha, no angry spouse.

JAMES
Hello...I'm home...

The silence is broken by the RINGING of his cell phone. He answers it.

JAMES (CONT.)
George?

GEORGE (O.S.)
I gotta talk to you man---

JAMES
Let me call you back.

GEORGE (O.S.)
Wait! It's impor---

James hangs up, continues to look around mystified. He enters the kitchen.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

He opens the door to the refrigerator, takes out a Diet Coke, opens the can, closes the door.

Immediately his eyes are drawn to the dry erase board : the red heart surrounding "April 12th", now covered by a large BLACK "X".

INT. AMY'S PARENTS DINING ROOM - NIGHT

ROSE, Amy's mother, (62) enters the dining room carrying a delivery box of pizza. She places it on the luxurious table in front of her seated husband, Amy and Sophie.

ROSE
Here we go! Is there a special little girl who likes peperoni?

SOPHIE
I do! I do!

AMY
 Mom, don't you have anything better
 for her?

Amy's father takes two large slices, plops them down on his antique china plate, pulling the sliced meat from the top.

LARRY
 Hey, Soph, watch this.

He places the peperoni near the floor, Cha Cha madly devours the treat.

AMY
 Dad, we don't do that! She'll get
 diarrhea!

LARRY
 Oh, come on, let her live a little!

ROSE
 Ok, prayers before we eat!

AMY
 Um..., we don't do that either...

ROSE
 Amy Marie! You don't say grace?

AMY
 Mom, please---

ROSE
 Come on Sophie, hands together...

Sophie follows her grandmother's lead.

ROSE (CONT.)
 Bless us oh Lord for these thy---

AMY
 Mom!

LARRY
 What's the problem? Jesus!

AMY
 This is a mistake...

ROSE
 Honey...don't say that...you're
 both welcome here for as long as
 you need. And if Clair gets tired

ROSE
of staying with her friend, we can
pull the sofa out downstairs.

AMY
That's not what I mean...I'm sorry.

LARRY
Look, you know we want you
here. We just have a set way of
doing things, you adapt to us, we
can try to adapt to you. It'll be
fine, now can we please eat?

They commence to eating. Amy not thrilled watching Sophie
happily enjoying the unhealthy dripping cheese and dough.

AMY
I'm going to buy some groceries
later, if that's ok.

ROSE
Sure, baby. Did you bring a
cage? I don't want him running all
over the house willy nilly. This
house wasn't meant for animals.

INT. JAMES & AMY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

James throws his dirty work clothes on top of the mountain
of laundry accumulated in his closet. He looks around the
room, taking in the SILENCE. A genuine smile forms.

MONTAGE

In the KITCHEN, James explores the very rear of the open
freezer, pleased with his discovery.

The frying pan steaming, he drops four ancient, freezer
burned burgers onto the Teflon, producing a HISS like the
snake as it spoke to Eve in the Garden.

The watered down whiskey bottle, empties into a large
plastic tumbler.

Eating in the FAMILY ROOM, resembling a king in a desolate
kingdom, James rests on his easy chair, watching a ball game
with the occasional dropping of food for Balls to relish.

Behind his BASEMENT desk, he happily types, cigarette
dangling from his lips.

The sinful smoke wafts through the air. James grins, thrilled with his new found isolation.

END MONTAGE

INT. AMY'S PARENTS GUEST ROOM - NIGHT

Like an exhausted cherub floating on a cloud, Sophie sleeps in the oversize bed.

Cha Cha whimpers, encased in an overturned expensive laundry basket, her one glaucoma eye peeking through the loose wicker.

Amy works on *her* masterpiece from the open laptop. The screen reads: "To cancel your Bank Of America card and activate your new account click here".

Hesitant, she mulls over the decision she is about to make. Looking to the wall, she inspects an oil based painting of roses in a vase, causing her face to sour.

Harder than necessary, she moves the cursor over the link that reads: "CLICK HERE TO CANCEL YOUR ACCOUNT".

An open notebook beside her, she takes a pen, draws a line through "BOA", the last of several accounts listed, all victims of the slashing pen.

EXT. PALMER TRUCKING - DAY

An exodus of workers as new ones arrive signaling a shift change. Smithro, suited in his best jeans and polo shirt, ready for the weekend, exits towards the parking lot.

JAMES (O.S.)

Smithro!

Pausing only for an instant, looking over his shoulder as he proceeds, he sees James, unshaven, wrinkled clothes, gesturing for him to return.

SMITHRO

Can't boss, quittin' time!

JAMES

I need those Greenwald manifests!

SMITHRO

Sorry, left 'em in my locker and I forget the combination til Monday.

James quickly approaches the still exiting employee.

JAMES

Cut the crap! I can't close out the transfer without them!

Silently smiling, Smithro enters his Iroc, leaving James to watch the tires kick up gravel and dust.

CUT TO:

INT. LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Wielding a bolt cutter, James struggles to cut the combination lock. Finally successful, he opens the door to the locker, moving items around in search of the manifests.

Finding the paperwork, taped to the inside of the door he notices a card consisting of handwritten block letters: "MAKE YOUR OWN RULES, MAKE YOUR OWN FUTURE".

He rips the mantra from the door, only to see a picture behind it.

Printed on computer paper, a topless photo of a young girl, only her breasts, neck and shoulders visible. Around her neck is a GOLD HEART PENDANT.

James stares at the photo briefly, knowing that somehow this image is familiar.

WORKER (O.S.)

Boss! Thornton's lookin' for you!

INT. JAMES' OFFICE - DAY

Thornton rifles through James' desk drawers.

JAMES (O.S.)

Can I help you find something?

THORNTON

What type of foreman doesn't keep a bottle of booze in his bottom desk drawer?

JAMES

Sorry, can't help with that. Are we celebrating?

THORNTON

No, we are not celebrating, but you know who is? Van Ways...Rockford decided to merge with them.

JAMES

How is that possible?

THORNTON

We dropped the ball, Mitchell. You, me, all of us.

JAMES

So now what?

THORNTON

Now what? Now I go home, get drunk, tell my wife I won't be retiring early, explain to her that we'll be lucky if Palmer Trucking can last another year.

Thornton rises from the desk chair, walks towards James still standing in the doorway. He places a hand on his shoulder.

THORNTON

Have a good weekend, cause come Monday you're going to have to tell the crew.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Depressed, James again rummages through the kitchen, this time finding nothing appealing.

In desperation he grabs the only thing remotely appetizing, a package of rice cakes, from the pantry.

CUT TO:

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

Munching on the bland snack, James sits at his desk, reading the work that he has created on screen.

He clicks "Print", turning his attention to the immediate ALARM produced from the printer.

The computer screen reads: "REPLACE INK".

CUT TO:

INT. WAL MART - NIGHT

Items piled high at the end of the checkout belt waiting to be bagged:

Boxes of printer ink, hot dogs, burger patties, ice cream, chips, a twelve pack of beer, bakery cupcakes, bacon, etc. A virtual pantry full of "bachelor food".

CLERK

I ran both cards *twice*.

JAMES

I don't get it....Can you hold this stuff for me?

The clerk shakes her head in the negative.

INT. AMY'S PARENTS LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Amy studies her RINGING cell phone: "James Calling". She pushes the "Ignore" button.

ROSE (O.S.)

Amy! Can you help us with the bags?

Rising from her seat, she heads towards the open front door where her parents carry several department store bags.

Sophie stands in the entrance way, playing a hand held video game.

SOPHIE

Look Mommy! Ma' bought me a game!

ROSE

That place was a madhouse!

Larry muscles past with several purchases, resting them on the carpet. Cha Cha looks on from her makeshift basket prison.

LARRY

It wouldn't have seemed so bad if you didn't have to buy the damn' store out!

AMY

Mom, if I wanted her to play video games I would've bought her one.

ROSE
Oh, please, it's our pleasure!

AMY
That's not what I mean!

Rose kicks the door closed behind her, trying to navigate around the various packages and bags.

ROSE
Hun, you're going to have to clean
his doo doo up from the yard
tomorrow, your father almost
stepped in it and you know how
particular he is about his grass.

Silent, Amy looks down to the cell phone in her hand. "No New Messages".

INT. WAL MART - NIGHT

James pours change into the Coinstar machine, first from his oversize jug, then moving on to Sophie's piggy bank, finally to Danny's large Nascar coin holder.

His total take according to the display: "\$47.82".

CUT TO:

Cash in hand, again at the register, this time with only one box of printer ink, some prepackaged lunch meat, a coloring book, crayons and a loaf of bread.

JAMES
A pack of Marlboro reds, too.

The clerk turns for the cigarettes, scans them producing a BLIP.

CLERK
Fifty-six Twenty-Three.

Flustered, embarrassed again, James looks at the items in front of him, the realization that something from his wish list is not going home with him.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - DAY

NELL, the Realtor, (55), carrying balloons, signs and an overflowing satchel of paperwork unlocks the front door.

CUT TO:

INT. FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Only to be greeted by a GROWLING Balls, a tornado ravaged family room, and a voice coming from the kitchen.

JAMES (O.S.)

Amy?

Nell enters the kitchen with her belongings, to see James, hair wet, wearing only a towel coloring in his coloring book purchased the night prior.

JAMES (CONT.)

Oh...sorry...can I help you?

Flustered, dropping her signs, balloons rising to the low ceiling, Nell stammers out her response.

NELL

Uh...I'm Nell
Weaver...the...Realtor..

JAMES

Right, right, hi.

James stands, dropping his crayons, holding his towel to his waist. He leans over and extends his hand to the now flushed stranger.

JAMES (CONT.)

Sorry, I uh, don't usually color by myself...just making something for my daughter... I didn't know you were stopping by.

NELL

We have an Open House today.

JAMES

Oh...I wish I knew that...

NELL

(indignantlly)
Is Mrs. Mitchell here?

JAMES

Uh, no, no she's went...she's not here.

NELL

I don't know how she expects me to show the house in this condition.

JAMES

Right, right...uh...sorry about that...

NELL

Mr. Mitchell, this is my livelihood! Are you aware the agents have to purchase the balloons...and print the take home fliers...ourselves? I can think of a dozen things I could be doing today besides trying to sell your house!

INT. FAMILY ROOM - LATER

James, dressed, runs the vacuum cleaner in the family room. The earlier mess, addressed as much as his limited housekeeping capabilities will allow.

The CHIME of a muffled door bell causes him to turn off the vacuum. Walking ahead of the inquisitive dog, he opens the door.

CUT TO:

EXT. FRONT PORCH - DAY

The door opens revealing Charlie the landscaper, looking as confused as James.

CHARLIE

Hi, uh, this is twenty-eight Lilac Drive?

JAMES

Oh, the Open House has been put on hold.

CHARLIE

I'm actually looking for Amy. Amy Mitchell?

CUT TO:

EXT. JAMES & AMY'S HOUSE - DAY

Charlie kneels down, inspecting the rose garden. He looks up to James, awaiting the prognosis, as storm clouds begin to take over the sky.

CHARLIE

They could certainly use some supplements. Doesn't look like they've been watered in a week or so.

JAMES

A rose by any other name--

CHARLIE

would smell as sweet. Shakespeare.

JAMES

That's right! You're a fan, too?

CHARLIE

Some of his stuff. Not too fond of that one, it's overused a bit. Looks like rain's coming soon. You know, roses, heck, any flower, they're just like anything else, given the proper attention, they can really thrive.

JAMES

I was thinking about just digging them up and replacing them with new ones, what do you think?

CHARLIE

That's a little drastic, come here, let me show you something.

James kneels alongside Charlie, eager to gain insight.

Charlie selects a severely damaged rose, reaching under the soil to it's root.

CHARLIE (CONT.)

Now see, the soil, that's the foundation. Just like a building, if you start with a foundation that's in trouble, the structure, or in this case, the root may hold up, but not for long.

James nods in acknowledgment as Charlie moves up to the stem.

CHARLIE (CONT.)

The stem can support the bloom with nourishment, but it's only one component, and it can't do it without the fertile foundation.

Charlie's gloved fingers touch a thorn.

CHARLIE (CONT.)

Now, the thorns, do you know why they're there?

JAMES

Uh, to protect it?

CHARLIE

That's right, they aid in protecting the rest of the plant from predators, the elements...

Gently, he touches the withering petal of the rose.

CHARLIE (CONT.)

For the rose to bloom, it needs sunlight, water soil and attention. If you don't keep up with the maintenance, painting, repairs to the roof, you know...you'll get something like this one...

Reaching closer to James, Charlie pulls out a decayed, dead flower, handing it to him.

CHARLIE (CONT.)

It's really easy to sabotage a flower's growth, it's much harder to nurture it, but the return is much better, don't you think?

A THUNDERCLAP, as the skies open.

INT. BASEMENT - DAY

Charlie sits on the sofa, toweling his hair. He accepts a beer from James, who takes a seat beside him.

JAMES

Looks like I got some work ahead of me.

CHARLIE

You'll be fine once you get the hang of it.

They both swig their beers, Balls jumps on the sofa, resting between them. Charlie pets the friendly beast.

CHARLIE (CONT.)

You know, I have to tell you, your wife is one of the only family members I see on a constant basis at the hospital. A lot of those old timers are just ignored, forgotten. It's sad. She's got a kind heart.

The door from the basement opens as George enters.

GEORGE

Hey man, why aren't you calling me back?

He stops in his tracks when he sees Charlie, the threat to his friend's marriage from the casino, sitting on the couch petting James' dog, drinking James' beer.

JAMES

Hey! It's been a little busy around here.

GEORGE

Who's this?

Charlie rises, extending his hand.

JAMES

Charlie, he's a landscaper.

CHARLIE

Have we met?

George, feigning ignorance, shakes his hand.

GEORGE

I don't think so...

CHARLIE

Listen, I've gotta get back and see what type of damage this storm did to the courtyard. Let Amy know I shared all my secrets with you.

Charlie puts his beer down on the desk, one last scratch for Balls, one final handshake for James.

JAMES
Thanks again, I really appreciate
it.

As the door closes, George turns his attention to his
friend.

GEORGE
Secrets?

James smiles.

JAMES
Yeah...there's something I have to
do.

INT. GYMNASIUM SWIMMING POOL - NIGHT

Amy watches Sophie learning to kick, clutching a swimming
noodle in the pool.

Several other PARENTS watch from the bleachers as their
children are given one on one instruction.

James enters the gymnasium, scans the crowd for his wife.
George points in Amy's direction as they ascend the stairs.

Catching the two approaching from the corner of her eye, Amy
physically turns in order not to acknowledge them. James
sits beside her.

JAMES
Amy?

AMY
Leave me alone.

JAMES
Look, will you just look at me?

Standing, George watches the young swimmers.

GEORGE
No way, is that Sophie? When did
she get so big?

JAMES
George, please?

George begrudgingly leaves his friend's side, moving several
rows behind the couple.

AMY

If it's about the credit cards, you can get your own accounts, I'm not going to let you charge up stuff under my name!

JAMES

It's not about that...listen, your landscaper friend, Charlie---

AMY

I don't know what George told you---

JAMES

George? What are you talking about?

AMY

What are you talking about?

JAMES

Just...how are you doing?

Amy turns her attention back to the pool, unresponsive.

JAMES (CONT.)

I miss you and Sophie...

Still staring straight ahead.

AMY

You haven't asked about Clair. Don't miss her, do you?

JAMES

I'm sorry, you're right. How is she?

AMY

Fine, she's fine. My parents said we can stay with them until we figure out how to split up the house.

Nervously, Amy fidgets with her own necklace.

JAMES

I don't want that...do you want that?

AMY

I can't trust you, Jimmy! I need a partner, a real partner.

She turns to face her pleading husband.

AMY (CONT.)

You don't care about anything that's important! You get that dog without asking me, when you know damn well I'm the one that's going to have to take care of it! You want to fight me on the house, you spend all night down in that dungeon looking at porn---

JAMES

Whoa, I'm not looking at porn! You've never asked me what I'm doing down there!

AMY

So what are you doing down there all hours of the night? You're certainly not interested in coming into our bedroom early!

SOPHIE (O.S.)

Daddy! Watch!

Their attention is drawn to their daughter, who has spotted James in the bleachers. Sophie again kicks with the assistance of the noodle, smiling at her parents.

James' eyes tear at the sight. Amy continues to nervously pull on her necklace, watching the swell of emotion in her husband's eyes, she softens.

Noticing George's peering eyes from above, she reverts back to her hardened walled off self.

AMY

Listen, we're staying with my folks, at least until Clair graduates and moves out of her friend's place.

He wipes his eyes, looks to his wife, focusing on the gold chain.

JAMES

What do you mean?

AMY

She talked me into letting her stay with one of her friends until school's out next month, then---

A wave of realization crosses James' face.

JAMES
Which friend?

AMY
Becky, I think...

JAMES
Are you sure?

Smugly, she turns to her husband.

AMY
Why do you care?

JAMES
Shit! I've gotta go!

AMY
What?

JAMES
Listen, I'll call you later---

James bolts upright, signaling to George.

AMY
Don't you want to see Sophie?

INT. JAMES' CAR - NIGHT

Speeding through the thunderstorm, James frantically talks on his bluetooth as George looks through a manila file on his lap.

JAMES
You got the address, just meet us
there as soon as possible, ok?

STATIC is the only response, then the annoying VOICE of the bluetooth.

BLUETOOTH
Your call has been lost, please try
again.

George smirks looking into the folder.

Aggravated, with his right hand, James grabs the paper in question, crumples it up, shoves it into his pocket.

INT. SMITHRO'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Smithro sits drinking beer, watching a hunting program on the television. Clair fills out college applications at the small table in the open kitchen.

The DIN of the television, and the PELTING rain on the metal roof breaks her concentration.

SMITHRO

Hey, babe, fetch me another Bud.

Frustrated, Clair ceases her paperwork, reaches to the refrigerator and grabs a beer.

Entering the tiny living room, she hands it to her new boyfriend, his eyes still focused on the screen.

SMITHRO (CONT.)

You gonna open it?

She pulls the beer back, twists the cap, and hands it to him. As she turns to leave, he pulls her down onto his lap.

CLAIR

I'm trying to finish my work!

SMITHRO

Oh, come on baby! There's time for that later. Don't ya wanna show me how much ya appreciate me taking ya in?

He kisses her neck, moving his hands around the waistband of her sweatpants. She nervously pushes his hand away.

CLAIR

Stop...I have to finish---

SMITHRO

Finish what?

CLAIR

Please stop...

A LOUD KNOCK on the aluminum door. Clair wrestles her way off of his lap, walks towards the source.

SMITHRO

Unless it's someone selling what you won't give me, we ain't interested.

He turns his attention back to the television. Clair opens the door revealing James and George, drenched from the rain. Speechless, stunned, she let's them in.

JAMES

Come on, get your things.

Smithro recognizes the voice, turning to the front door, a maniacal smirk forming.

SMITHRO

Bossman! Want a beer? See you brought back up.

GEORGE

This him?

CLAIR

You can't make me go!

SMITHRO

And who are you, runt dick?

JAMES

Come on, just leave your stuff, let's go.

GEORGE

Why don't you find a broad your own age? You know, someone with genital warts, blind maybe?

Smithro slowly stands to face his tiny antagonist.

SMITHRO

What you say?

George CHARGES, KNOCKING him into the cheap paneling.

CLAIR

Dylan!

James takes off his jacket, attempts to cover Clair as Smithro gains the upper hand, grabbing George in a headlock, severely delivering several vicious blows to the face.

Realizing George is no competition, he pauses to look at his handy work, dropping his bloodied victim in a heap at his feet.

He turns to James, ready to take on Contestant Number Two.

SMITHRO

I dunno officers, these two
strangers just entered my home.
What's that? I was just tryin' to
defend my property. I concur, yes
sir, well within my rights...

George lunges for Smithro's leg, clutching it like a life
preserver.

SMITHRO (CONT.)

You little piss ant---

GEORGE

Show her...do it...

Smithro looks to James, unsure of what George means.

James pulls the crumpled paper from his pocket, unfurling
it, hands it to Clair.

She studies the paper, tears form in her eyes.

CLAIR

How did you get this?

JAMES

I'm sorry, Clair...he was showing
it at work...

She lunges for Smithro, hands clawing at his face.

CLAIR

You promised!

With one movement, he avoids her flaying hands and connects
with a right, dropping her to the ground.

In an instant, James attacks, only to be clocked with a
roundhouse, forcing him to his knees.

Smithro begins to STOMP on James' head, causing him to fall
prone on the floor, belly up.

Smithro's CRUSHING BOOT lands forcefully on James' chest.

SMITHRO

Smart guy, huh!

A KICK to the ribs.

SMITHRO (CONT.)
You should've minded to yourself!

Another STOMP. George crawls over to protect his friend, receiving a boot to the eye.

Clair slides up the wall, grabbing a beer bottle resting on top of the television, blood streaming from her nose.

Holding the neck, she breaks the bottle, poking it towards the advancing Smithro.

SMITHRO (CONT.)
Now, what you gonna do? You gonna cut me? Come on then, let's see what you got slut!

Wildly, she slashes the bottle at her attacker. He grabs her arm in mid air, turns the sharp end of the weapon in her hand to her face, pushing ever CLOSER.

From the open entrance, Frank appears in a damp sweatsuit, large and menacing.

Immediately he crosses to Smithro, putting him in a choke hold, causing him to drop the bottle.

Smithro charges backwards causing the struggling warriors to fall over the coffee table.

Clair crawls to the kitchen grabs her cell phone.

CUT TO:

INT. AMY'S PARENTS LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Amy sits with her parents, paying no attention to the SQUAWKING of the television.

The house phone RINGS, Rose looks at the caller i.d. on the cordless phone, deciding not to answer.

Momentarily, Amy's cell RINGS. Rose watches from the corner of her eye as her daughter answers.

AMY
Hello. Yes...when?

Tears stream down her face as she attempts to keep her composure.

AMY (CONT.)
Of course....yes...I'll be right
there.

She hangs up, tears falling even harder.

LARRY
Honey, what's wrong?

Wiping her eyes, she looks to her parents.

AMY
It's Pap...he's gone.

INT. FUNERAL HOME - DAY

The UNDERTAKER,(63), shows his selection of caskets to Larry
and Amy.

LARRY
This one's nice, it's only seven
hundred.

Amy looks in shock at the cheap wooden display.

UNDERTAKER
We understand that sometimes price
is a factor. We do offer very nice
rental units for the viewing. The
body is then transferred into a
much less expensive coffin after
the service.

LARRY
That sounds like a reasonable idea,
how much does that run?

AMY
Dad, can I talk with you for a
minute?

UNDERTAKER
Take your time, I'll be upstairs if
you have any questions.

She watches as the undertaker ascends the
staircase. Turning to her father, the bottled up anger she
has been carrying reaches a crescendo.

AMY
You are the most selfish man I've
ever met!

LARRY

Whoa, wait a minute---

AMY

No! This is your father we're talking about, you want to rent his casket?

LARRY

Wait, honey, you have to understand, you know we're having money issues---

AMY

Dad, that's your fault! Eating out every night, mom and her shopping! You just bought that boat three months ago and you're hitting me up for cash for your mortgage!

Her father realizes there is no point arguing with her. Shamed, he hangs his head.

AMY (CONT.)

Daddy, I'm sorry, but you can't do this, you can't live like this. How did you get so....out of touch?

He looks up, pale, shaken.

LARRY

Too easily. I love your mother. Always did since the first day I laid eyes on her...I promised I was always going to give her everything she wanted...and I have...

AMY

But dad---

LARRY

I still want to! Yes, she's trying, yes, she's spoiled, but I made her that way. I never, ever told her no. She's demanding, wants things just so. I follow along because I love her. I protect her, Amy. What am I supposed to do when she sees something she wants, or decides she wants to go on a trip, huh? If I

LARRY

tell her no, then she's going to want to know why. What then? I tell her because we can't afford it? She'll worry herself sick and I won't have that. I found her, Amy. That special person that I just want to make happy, no matter what.

She extends her arms to her father, who reluctantly accepts the hug.

AMY

Dad...I'm sorry...

LARRY

Didn't you want to make Frank happy? Or Jimmy? That's what good spouses do...it's a thankless job sometimes, trying to keep your loved ones happy. But really, at the end of the day...the end of our life...that's all anyone can be proud of.

Gradually, he breaks the embrace.

LARRY (CONT.)

Your mother knows how much I love her just based on all the garbage I've had to take from her over the years. She never notices all the sacrifices. She never says thank you, but she's the first one to point out when she doesn't like something I've done, but you know what? She loves me, warts and all.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - DAY

An ORDERLY pushes Tommy, dressed in street clothes, yet still very much the worse for wear, in a wheelchair down the hall. Jenny walk beside him carrying her newborn.

Tommy looks into the passing rooms, noticing various PATIENTS in different stages of rehabilitation.

JENNY

It's going to be so good to have you home again!

ORDERLY

Take it easy on him, don't send him
out to cut the yard or nothin' just
yet.

Tommy smiles at the comment, then just as quick, his mouth
drops in shock.

TOMMY

Wait! Back up!

The orderly wheels back a few paces as Tommy stares into a
room.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

From the doorway into the hall, Tommy LAUGHS, flipping the
unseen PATIENT inside the middle finger.

TOMMY

Karma, you son of a bitch!

JENNY

Tommy!

The patient attempts to return the salute, but is too weak.

Two MEN IN SPORT COATS arrive behind Tommy's stopped
wheelchair.

SPORT COAT #1

Excuse us.

They enter the room as Tommy can be heard laughing as
his journey down the hall continues.

SPORT COAT #1 (CONT.)

Dylan Smithro?

The patient, Smithro, face swollen, bruised, arm in a cast
stares at the men in front of him.

SPORT COAT #1 (CONT.)

I'm Detective Hawkins, this is my
partner Detective Simms.

Smithro's eyes dart between the two detectives.

HAWKINS

Man, you look sore...

SIMMS

Listen, we know you're jaw's wired shut, that must really suck, but we can still read you your rights.

HAWKINS

Yeah, blink one for yes, twice for no.

The detectives chuckle.

SIMMS

We got your computer here, seems you have a liking for the young stuff, huh?

HAWKINS

Oh! I saw one blink.

Smithro silently fumes.

SIMMS

You know, it's illegal to have pictures of underage naked girls on your computer, right? And when you share said pictures with others, well...what do we call that again?

HAWKINS

Trafficking.

INT. FUNERAL HOME - NIGHT

Pap is laid out in full military gear. Danny sits with Vicki and Sophie. Larry and Rose speak to EXTENDED FAMILY. Amy kneels in front of the casket.

George and James enter the viewing room, both bruised and bandaged. Stacie approaches them.

STACIE

I heard what you two did...very stupid...brave but stupid.

JAMES

How is she?

STACIE

Go ask her yourself, I think she
might like that.

James leaves to pay his respects as George points to
Stacie's left hand.

GEORGE

Still single, I see.

STACIE

Really? You're going to try to pick
me up at a funeral?

CUT TO:

James kneels beside his wife. Eyes red from crying, she
smiles at him.

AMY

You know, he really liked you.

JAMES

Yeah, I liked him, too.

AMY

How did you know about Clair and
that jerk?

JAMES

You know, I'm not as irresponsible
as you might think.

She smiles, reaching over, placing her hand on his.

CUT TO:

Frank, a bruise under his left eye, approaches Clair, still
seated in the viewing room.

FRANK

Hey.

CLAIR

Dad, I'm so sorry I did that---

FRANK

Stop. You should really be thankful
that Jimmy was looking out for you.
I wouldn't have been able to help
if it weren't for him. He's a good
dude, Clair. You're mom should be
happy.

CUT TO:

Amy and James walk towards the back of the viewing area, taking a seat in the last row. James is immediately tackled by a charging Sophie.

SOPHIE
Daddy! Guess what!

JAMES
Oh, baby, I missed you!

AMY
Go ahead, give it to him.

Sophie smiles, missing a tooth. She hands her father a small package.

JAMES
You lost your tooth!

SOPHIE
Open it!

He opens it to see his favorite tooth, made into a crude necklace.

JAMES
You remembered!

SOPHIE
Mommy said the tooth fairy would understand if I gave it to you.

AMY
Honey, go talk to Danny for a minute, ok?

Sophie runs off to get into trouble with her brother.

JAMES
So...about the house...

AMY
Yeah...you know, Danny's hardly with us...and Clair will be going to college....

JAMES
Really? You mean that?

AMY
The Veteran's money Pap left me,
Jimmy, I'm giving it to my parents.

JAMES
I don't care, just come home.

AMY
I have to ask...

JAMES
Anything.

AMY
What do you do every night in the
basement?

CUT TO:

INT. BASEMENT - DAY

James stands at the printer, waiting for the final page to spit out. Satisfied, he smiles.

He places the paper onto a large stack of typed sheets resting on his desk.

AMY (O.S.)
Jimmy, ready to take the dogs for a walk?

JAMES
Be right there!

The page resting on the top of the pile reads: "IT NEEDS TO BE THERE YESTERDAY! THE TRUE STORY OF OVER TWENTY YEARS IN THE SHIPPING BUSINESS BY JAMES P. MITCHELL"

FADE TO BLACK