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Chump Change, A Moral Tale of Misogyny and Accountability: A Screenplay

Christopher S. McDonald

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**CHUMP CHANGE
A MORAL TALE OF MISOGYNY AND ACCOUNTABILITY:
A SCREENPLAY**

Christopher S. McDonald

An Abstract Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate
School of Lindenwood University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Communication

1998

ABSTRACT

This Culmanating Project is a full-length motion picture screenplay titled *Chump Change*.

Chump Change is a moral tale of the accountability that a young misogynist named Clay has to face when his long-suffering wife, Lena, pulls the rug out from under their marriage. As Clay struggles to put his life back together while fighting Lena for the custody of his son, he has to face up to his own responsibility for his plight.

As Clay develops more consciousness about the darker side of his own nature, he searches for the answer to the question. "Can people really change?" He aspires to enlightenment, but fears that his inability to create meaningful change may be insurmountable.

Clay's newfound self-awareness is put to the test when he starts to date the spunky Caitland. Caitland, by all accounts, seems to have it all together. She is self-confident, secure in her sexuality, and always one-step ahead of any game-playing that Clay tries to bring to the relationship. Clay falls hard for Cait, and finds strength and maturity in the example set by Cait, even when the pressures of a custody battle for his son are at their peak.

But the weight of Clay's past problems with women, authority, and ghosts of his childhood prove to be too much when Clay meets Cait's overbearing father. Clay sees in Cait's father his own botched upbringing and the man that he was destined to become had he not been forced out of his rut. Clay explodes in front of Cait's parents, embarrassing Cait and effectively ending their relationship.

It is the loss of Cait, finally, that teaches Clay that a little personal sacrifice is a small price to pay for maintaining important relationships.

Chump Change's themes of misogyny, layered symbolism, and dual interpretation were all inspired by other cinematic releases, as was its experimentation with a protagonist that may be unlikeable. These modern movies, *Oleanna*, *Smoke*, and *In the Company of Men*, influenced the style and content of the screenplay that is the core of the *Culminating Project*, and are discussed at some length.

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COMMITTEE IN CHARGE OF CANDIDACY:

Michael Castro, PhD.
Chairperson and Advisor

Assistant Professor Carolyn Scott

Adjunct Assistant Professor Peter Carlos

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Preface

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language is not particularly interpretive of the word *misogyny*. “Misogyny: hatred of women.” Period. Three words. And a misogynist? Simply “one who hates women.” How does one *hate* women? What constitutes hate? Where is the line between disrespect and hate, and who defines that line? In our time, the word *misogynist* is another in a series of pejorative scarlet letters handed out by any of an entitled underclass (here women).

For purposes of discussion as it relates to commercial and literary entertainment product, there is a need to define misogyny by smaller, more identifiable criteria. These criteria are as follows:

- Violence against women for which there is no displayed act of consequence.
- Lack of women characters, or under-representation of women as power characters.
- Use of women as a “prize” to be won by male characters.
- Degrading or disrespectful nomenclature or references to women made by men.

Long before Humphrey Bogart snatched the gun from the shaky hand of Mary Astor in *The Maltese Falcon* and slapped her for the impudence it took for a woman to point a weapon at a man, misogyny was an accepted practice in Hollywood cinema. The perspective of time has given us the chance to slap our collective foreheads at the rampant pre-1960's use of overt

racism and ethnic stereotyping in old movies. When was the last Disney release of *Song of the South*? We sit and watch old black and white serials on the Arts & Entertainment Channel and nostalgia gives way to bewilderment that such ridiculous plot structures could have held even the most naive imagination hostage. After 100 years, the poetry of Kipling endures although misogynistic and ethnic stereotyping are common themes. As author Edward Ball said when speaking of his book on his family's history as slave owners: "One can not fairly expect one to be more enlightened than their age" (NPR).

And yet, even in these times of vocal feminist enlightenment, strong misogynistic themes run unabated through popular cinematic product. In the 1997 blockbuster, *Titanic*, Billy Zane's character can not completely make the jump to villainy until he slaps Kate Winslet out of her breakfast chair. And the collective American psyche but sighs, relieved that they can now cheer the misfortune of Zane's character with a clear conscience. There is no outrage, just the comfort of a reasonable assurance that this character will meet some just and horrible fate; crushed under a tumbling smokestack or perhaps disemboweled by a genetically errant Tyrannosaurus Rex (neither of which comes to pass). Questioning this trend in accountability for misogynistic behavior in the era of Jerry Springer as a Neilson king does not bode well.

So why the concern? Isn't the Hollywood industry everyone's strawman, from Wall Street to Washington D.C.?

One cannot take too seriously an industry so unilliterate and commercial that it names Russ Meyer among its commercially successful practitioners.

Before one can completely dismiss the medium from literary contention, one has to reckon the presence and success of Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright David Mamet as one of Hollywood's premiere screenwriting talents. Mamet, twice nominated for the Academy Award for screenwriting, has penned such critically and commercial successful films as *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, *The Verdict*, *House of Games*, *Hoffa*, *The Untouchables*, *The Edge*, *Wag the Dog*, and *The Spanish Prisoner*. He has also written the screen adaptations of his ground-breaking plays *American Buffalo*, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, and *Oleanna*.

Mamet himself is one of film's most vehement critics. When asked about the effect of Hollywood and mass media on the theatre, Mamet is not kind. In an interview with Matthew Roudane, he says the following:

[The Hollywood Establishment is] flooding the market with trash. [There is] taste and need for a real theatrical experience, which is an experience in which the audience can come to commune, not so much with the actors but with themselves and what they know to be true. . . Everyone's pallet has been dulled to an extraordinary degree by the mass media. (np)

Yet Mamet consistently uses all of the previously defined examples of misogyny throughout his dramatic and screen work

in an unapologetic reoccurring theme. George Mason University Film and Media teacher Cynthia Fuchs illustrates this paradox in her scathing review of the cinematic version of *Oleanna* for the *Philadelphia City Paper*.

"Surely Mamet is an energetic, politically aware artist (His film *Homicide* is a remarkable study of cop-movie conventions, racism, and anti-Semitism)" (Fuchs). And yet Fuchs is rattled by the way feminist issues are treated in the film. She intimates that all of the potential for dialogue on power and position is lost in the hysterics narrow definitions of irresponsible feminism.

And here lies the conundrum. Can misogyny be a thematic not only in the moral abyss of commercial entertainment, but in cinematic works of literary worth as well?

Chump Change aspires to tell a tale of misogyny and accountability in an era of ethical vapidness, and do this in a script that pays homage to successful literary thematical structure. It is the influence of many similar films that inspired the various structural elements found in *Chump Change*.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Misogyny as a Marketable Theme

The inspiration for the writing of *Chump Change* came from several fronts. First, while studying the script for David Mamet's *Oleanna* for a theatre audition, I was reminded of the powerful duality in the interpretation of events that happen in this play and the movie of the same name.

Second, the careful layering of thematic symbolism in Wayne Wang's *Smoke* was an inspiration to write a movie that was discursive of more than any single linear plot.

Third, *Chump Change* is an examination into the viewer's commitment to an unlikable protagonist. Sundance Film Festival award winner, Neil LaBute's *In the Company of Men*, is a perfect example of a screenplay that tests the audience's resolve to follow two very unadmirable men as they viciously churn the life of a young deaf woman.

And finally, in researching feminist positions on misogyny in film, I was awakened to the sharp distinction between misogynistic plots and themes that carry a certain amount of accountability for inappropriate behavior, and those films for which there is a pretense that misogyny is acceptable status quo. One need only look at the example of how the production

of the film *Fatal Attraction* deviated from a moral tale of a man accepting accountability for reckless behavior to another androcentric story of what Pulitzer Prize-winning feminist Susan Faludi calls "light women vs. dark woman" (Faludi 117). This example initiated my focus on writing accountability into the fate of *Chump Change's* misogynistic protagonist.

This essay will expand on each of these influences, and how ideas and structure put forth by various cinematic works had a profound impact on techniques and structure used in the scripting of the screenplay *Chump Change*.

Oleanna

David Mamet's play, *Oleanna*, is a frightening look at a pompous college professor (John) and the female student (Carol) whose inability to understand all of John's classroom pontifications triggers a backlash of underclass power. Carol goes to John for help, but John's inability to connect with the girl on her level comes boomeranging back at him in allegations and accusations that cost him his tenure, his new house and, ultimately, his family.

In the play, the conflict between John and Carol is structured in such a way that the interpretation that you bring to the play (as a result of your sex or station) has a lot to do with your interpretation of what happens to John, the protagonist. Some would think that he get his just deserts, and some would think that he is exploited beyond the limits of reason? There is one

camp that sees it as a moral tale of reckless, patriarchal power, and another that sees a moral tale of reckless empowerment of a politically correct, irresponsible underclass. *Oleanna* is a play that sparks a lot of interpretive debate in the theatre lobby and in the car on the way home.

Critic Roger Ebert illustrates this in a prelude to his review of the cinematic version of *Oleanna*:

Experiencing David Mamet's play *Oleanna* on the stage was one of the most stimulating experiences I've had in a theater. In two acts he succeeded in enraging all of the audience - the women with the first act, the men with the second. I recall loud arguments breaking out during the intermission and after the play, as the audience spilled out of an off-Broadway theater all worked up over its portrait of... sexual harassment? Or was it self-righteous Political Correctness? (Ebert)

The "dumbed-down" movie version of *Oleanna* (also penned by Mamet) is less interpretive. John's plight tilts just an *M*th degree closer toward his victimization. John has greater collective permission from the viewer to call Carol a "Vicious little cunt" and chase her with the intent of smashing her over the head with a chair.

It is the sheer interpretive duality of the conflict in the play that was close to my consciousness when writing *Chump Change*. The life experience one brings to reading the script should affect the degree to which one considers the protagonist,

Clay McCutcheon, held accountable for his sins.

This interpretive duality in *Chump Change* is put to the test early with the inciting incident of action. After two instances of Clay sexual brutalizing Lena, he arrives home one night to find his wife moving her lover into the house. Both misogynistic and non-misogynistic males alike are likely to see this move by Lena as a preemptive, retaliatory holocaust, while female and underclass viewers are likely to see this as a rational move by a victimized woman trying to protect herself.

Likewise, in Mamet's play *Bobby Gould in Hell*, the character of Bobby Gould begins the play much as the same character left off at the end of *Speed the Plow*. Bobby, Mamet's self-professed alter ego, is a Hollywood producer. At the conclusion of *Speed the Plow*, Bobby rejects a chance to enlighten the populace by producing an upscale movie about self-actualization in favor of a shoot-em-up schlockfest that will "put asses in the seats" (53). In *Bobby Gould in Hell* we have the chance to see what kind of accountability Bobby will be held to as a result of years of misogyny, deception, and abuse of his power. Like John in *Oleanna*, and Clay in *Chump Change*, part of Bobby's penance is his fall from the perceived height of his power to find out that he is fodder for societal engines of the underclasses. And, like the other two characters, there is a certain amount of retribution "piling on" that either breeds sympathy from the audience or creates a sense of closure.

Like the cinematic version of *Oleanna*, and *House of Games*,

Mamet continues to explore the theme of the over-empowered and irrational female as a metaphor for the sword of accountability in *Gould*. In this modern retelling of *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, Satan calls Bobby's ex-girlfriend as a character witness. Not only does this character of Glenna seal Bobby's fate with her opportunity to see accountability for Bobby's relationship shortcomings (large and small), but she refuses to leave the Netherworld until Satan complies with her terms on the severity of Bobby's punishment. Again, this is relevant to a certain amount of duality in the interpretation of Bobby's plight. Is this a karma-comeuppance? Or is this excessive punishment? The experience with jilting that one has will determine their interpretation of the conflict. Glenna probably sums up her indifference to Bobby Gould's newfound regret with this telling line: "You are nothing to me but your actions towards me on a particular day." In essence Glenna is saying that we are the sum of the way we treat others.

The delicate balancing act of interpretive duality inspired me to resist the mainstream trend towards defining a troubled protagonist by forcing the audience to bear witness to the protagonist's scars of victimization. I do not challenge that *Chump Change's* Clay McCutcheon has done damage for which he must suffer consequences. Following the episodic arc of the character's progression does not depend on an interpretation of if the protagonist has suffered enough, or too much. It should be enough that he suffered.

Smoke

The theme of *Chump Change* is the question “can people *really* change?” Any good theme should be supported by layers of increasingly obscure thematic symbolism. And in order for it to be “good” symbolism, the writer can not tie the understanding of the plot progression to even the most obvious theme. If the audience doesn’t “get it”, they are still entitled to understand what happens. Like good poetry, how much one takes from the work should be entirely dependent on how much one wants to involve oneself in the symbolic minutia, but there still should be a level that works on a literate plane. One of the very best cinematic examples of this layering is Wayne Wang’s brilliant movie, *Smoke*.

The key to the symbolic onslaught is set up early when Paul (William Hurt) tells a little story to the fellows at the cigar shop, including Tommy (Giancarlo Espisto) and Auggie (Harvey Keitel), about how Sir Walter Raleigh and Queen Elizabeth settled a bet as to whether or not smoke had weight.

PAUL

Once, he made a bet with her
that he could measure the
weight of smoke.

AUGGIE

You mean weigh smoke?

PAUL

Exactly. Weigh smoke.

TOMMY

You can't do that. That's like weighing air.

PAUL

He did. It's strange. It's almost like weighing someone's soul. Sir Walter was a clever guy. First he took an unsmoked cigar and he put it on a balance and weighed it. Then he lit up and smoked the cigar, carefully tapping the ashes into the balance pan. When he was finished, he put the butt into the pan along with the ashes. And he weighed what was there and he subtracted that number from the original weight of the unsmoked cigar. The difference is the weight of the smoke.

This simple exchange sets up several of the symbolic themes that make this movie more than just a series of episodic vignettes. First, there is the simple theme of loss. Virtually every character in *Smoke* represents some kind of loss. Paul has lost his pregnant wife to a stray bullet and with that his ability to write. Auggie loses out on a deal to sell a large shipment of Cuban cigars for a huge profit. Rasheed (Harold Perrineau Jr.) has lost his family. Thomas Jefferson Cole Sr. (Forrest Whittiker) has lost an arm. Ruby (Stockard Channing) has lost an eye and her daughter.

The related theme is that nothing is *really* lost; and for every perceived loss there is something gained in the transition. Paul finds peace with his demons, and in that, a story. Rasheed and Thomas, long estranged father and son, find each other. Auggie finds that he has a daughter of his own. Ruby finds forgiveness from her ex-husband (Auggie). Likewise there is \$5000 dollars of heist money that travels from character to character. Every time a character loses the money to another character, that character gets something valuable as a result of the loss. Rasheed uses the money to pay for accidentally destroying Auggie's shipment of Cuban cigars, keeps his job, and deepens his friendships with Paul and Auggie. Auggie uses the \$5000 to replace his damaged cigars, which nets him an extra \$5000 that he gives to Ruby. Ruby uses the money to help their daughter out of a tight spot.

And the idea that a soul can be measured by examining the difference between the person a character starts out as and the person they end up as result of their loss experiences is a wonderful theme for anyone that really, *really* wants to delve into the inner ideology of the movie. None of the symbolism or reoccurring themes are necessary to understand the surface story of three families struggling to put themselves back together after everything has fallen apart. And this is the beauty of *Smoke*; it works on many levels. The viewer can watch it over and over and see a slightly different film each time.

In the Company of Men

Neil LaBute's bold, experimental work, *In the Company of Men*, influenced *Chump Change* on many different levels, but none so much as the tenacity in which it put forth not one, but two of the most unlikable protagonists in film history. *In the Company of Men* tells the story of two men, Chad and Howard, who both have recently been left by their girlfriends. Chad channels his bitterness into a plot to seek revenge on the female sex as a whole, and talks the vulnerable Howard into playing along with his scheme. Both men working for an unnamed, pressure-cooking "business" begin the movie in a series of airport scenes where the audience learns of their troubles with women and that Howard has been promoted to lead "The Project" in a small, unnamed midwestern city (the film was shot in Ft. Wayne, IN) for six weeks. Chad unfolds an incredibly cruel plan. He and Howard will find a vulnerable, delicate "Cornfed Beef-eating Midwestern girl" and both of them will woo her with more affection than she has ever experienced in her life. Then, at the end of their six week project, they will both leave her simultaneously and with extreme cruelty. And so the plan unfolds, only the woman they end up targeting is beautiful, charming, and deaf.

Howard (Matt Malloy) begins the deception, just to humor the charming but overbearing Chad (Aaron Eckhart), but ends up falling in love with Christine (Stacy Edwards), who ends up

being more attracted to the handsome Chad. The evil side of Howard then takes over, lashing out in anger and betrayal at Christine's honorable attempt to untangle what began as juggling the affections of two men.

Chad, however, is evil through and through. With an unabashed relish for his own lack of conscience that has not been done justice since the character of Richard III, Chad maintains a certain charm about his evilness while delivering lines like "I don't trust anything that bleeds for a week and doesn't die," and "Let's hurt somebody." In a review for the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, Michael H. Price writes:

LaBute is treading brashly onto David Mamet's turf here, and the newcomer's work is so ferociously good, it bears comparison with that of the master of confrontational dialogue. The contemptuous discourse is pure acid. As with Mamet in "House of Games" and "Glengarry Glen Ross," LaBute seems to view life as one big confidence racket and to have little pity on the people who like it that way (Price).

It was this balance of a charming, yet thoroughly unlikable protagonist that inspired the character of Clay in *Chump Change* to be a combination of charming and mean-spirited; searching to reign in the limitations of his own conscience.

One might even find an unintentional lesson in *In the Company of Men*: While it was critically raved and an award-winner at the Sundance Film Festival, it was also the last in its Festival class to find a distribution company.

Fatal Attraction

And finally, in a moral tale of misogyny, there has to be a modicum of accountability for character behavior that is dangerous, illegal, and has real world consequences.

These are the influences that affected the character development and structure of *Chump Change*. While most of the uncomfortable scenes of domestic violence are followed with a comedic scene to balance the viewer's comfort level, the story is entirely about a young misogynist coming to terms with the damage that he has done to himself and his family.

There is a certain amount of modular "changeability" to the blueprint of *Chump Change*: The character of the protagonist's mother, Donna McCutcheon, can be removed for time constraints without greatly affecting the plot. Several of the "guy friends" characters could be combined to thin the number of actors needed. And the ending could -by design- be made into a happy ending by placing the estranged girlfriend character in the back of the church when Clay makes his speech of enlightenment. But the *accountability* of Clay for his life as a reckless husband can not be removed from the script without causing the story to implode.

The lesson learned from the potential to twist a moral tale of accountability in the wrong direction comes from the illustration of what happened in the production process of the blockbuster movie *Fatal Attraction*.

The original story for *Fatal Attraction* was penned by British screenwriter James Dearden as the subject of a short film. In his original script, an errant, flirtatious husband seduces a vulnerable young woman named Alex. Suffering from a broken heart and ill-treatment at the hands of this man, she becomes so distraught that she slits her wrists and dies slowly; so slowly that the man has a chance to run to Alex's apartment, hold her as she finally dies, and ultimately understand the price of his reckless behavior. The script concludes with the man's struggle to reconcile his guilt for what he has done.

Dearden says that he originally "intended the story to explore an individual's responsibility for a stranger's suffering." He wanted to "examine how this man who inflicted pain, no matter how unintentionally, must eventually hold himself accountable" (Faludi 117, 118).

The *Fatal Attraction* project first went to fledgling director Sherry Lansing, who fell in love with the feminist vision of the original script. She said that she sympathized with Alex, and she thought it was refreshing to see a movie where the man was held responsible for his recklessness (118).

I've always wanted to do a movie that says you are responsible for your actions... And what I liked in the short film was that the man is made responsible. That there are consequences for him (Faludi 118).

But then the movie moved to Paramount in Los Angeles to be expanded into feature length, and moral tales about accountabil-

ity were not the kinds of films that the studio system wanted to make in the 1980s. Dearden explains:

My short film was a moral tale about a man who transgresses and pays the penalty. But, it was felt, and it was a feeling that I didn't particularly agree with, that the audiences would not be too sympathetic to such a man because he was an adulterer. So some of the onus for the weekend [infidelity] was taken off his shoulders and placed on the girl's (118).

After test screenings of the suicide ending, a decision was made to instead have the happy-homemaker wife (bumped down from her original working-woman personae) kill the evil and unreasonable seductress. This is the theme that Faludi calls "light woman" vs. "dark woman." And thus, Alex is held accountable for her sins, and the philandering man suffers no more than momentary marital friction for what is colored, at most, as being "bad judgment."

Again, in *Chump Change*, the element of the protagonist's accountability for his reckless actions is not ancillary to the plot... it *is* the plot. Deconstruction of this plot in the name of marketability should prove less than successful.

Conclusion

As a product of influences of these films, *Oleanna*, *Smoke*, *In the Company of Men* and *Fatal Attraction*, *Chump Change* aspires to a structure of duality of interpretation, layered theme symbolism, an engaging but unlikable protagonist, and a plot structure that ensures accountability for the misogynistic exploits of its protagonist.

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Chapter II

RESULTS

"CHUMP CHANGE"

Written by

Christopher S. McDonald

1317 N. Florissant
St. Louis, MO 63135-1153
(314) 522-0697
cmcdonald@stlnet.com

REGISTERED WGAw
Represented by: Brent J. Williams
(314) 727-1986

CHUMP CHANGE

FADE IN.

INT. TRUCKSTOP CAFE - DAY

LENA McCUTCHEON, a buxom young waitress carries an armload of plates to a table. She leans over to serve a trucker on the far side of the booth. The man nearest her helps himself to a squeeze of her bottom. She jerks and a cup of hot black joe goes spiraling towards the offender's crotch in slo-mo.

CUT TO:

SCREEN TITLE: There is gravity between everything. $F = G \frac{m_1 m_2}{d^2}$

INT. URBAN HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

CLAY McCUTCHEON, in his mid-twenties, lectures before a black-board.

CLAY

And we tend to think of gravity as some mystical force that keeps us from falling out into space, but really it is just a principal of physics. The same way that there is a measurable gravitational force between the sun and the earth, the earth and us, chicks and convertibles...

INTERCUT: CAITLAND, in her shiny new Washington University sweatshirt tools down the highway in a car packed to the gills with her things. In the midst of juggling a map, she stops to ogle a guy in a convertible. Her map gets sucked out the window.

CLASSROOM

CLAY

...so to is there a measurable gravitational force you can measure between any two items of mass. You only need to know the individual mass of each item, and the distance between them.

DARYL

You don't mean that there is gravity between everything?

CLAY

Any two items with mass, Daryl. I sure do. For instance, using our formula, we can measure the force of attraction between you and the change in your pocket. It's probably not a hell of a lot, but you can measure it just the same.

INTERCUT: Lena throws her purse into her car, flops in, and pulls out of the truckstop.

CLASSROOM

GIRL BEHIND DARYL

What about could you measure the force of attraction between Daryl and me?

CLAY

Yes, Monique. And given the differences in the two masses, I'd wager that the attraction between you and Daryl is much greater than the attraction between Daryl and the change in his pocket.

MONIQUE

Don't be so sure. He ain't never bought me flowers or nothin'.

CLAY

Well, as they say in infomercials, your results may vary.

INTERCUT: Caitland stands at the counter of a gas station looking over the map display. Lena bops up to the counter with a softdrink. Cait looks out the window at the smoke wisping out of the hood of Lena's running car.

CAIT

Is that your car? You might want to check the oil.

LENA

I couldn't care less about that stupid car.

CLASSROOM

THUG KID

Is it possible to measure how little I care about gravity?

CLAY

It has to have mass, Pablo, and unless that brain fart was the result of some cerebral tumor, it probably isn't possible. No. Pablo doesn't care about physics, but he should. I keep telling you that the answer to just about any question is in science. You still going in the Service next year?

PABLO

Yeah mon! Paratroopers!

CLAY

And you don't care about Gravity? You are plummeting to earth for a living, and you don't care about gravity?

PABLO

All I care about is where my ripcord is, and who I have to shoot when I hit the ground.

CLAY

Okay. It's a night jump. No static line. How long do you count before you pull the ripcord? Class, how fast is Pablo accelerating to the ground in earth's gravity. C'mon, think. We talked about this before. What is the acceleration of a falling object in earth's gravity?

SMART KID

Nine point eight meters per second.

CLAY

(writing on the board)

9.8 meters per second per second. Don't forget that. Every second Pablo plunges his rate of acceleration doubles until he reaches terminal velocity.

PABLO

What's that?

CLAY

Terminal velocity is when the wind and friction against your falling body prevents you from accelerating any faster.

INTERCUT: Lena's car comes to a steamy stop.

PABLO

So once this terminal velocity kicks in, how far can someone fall and, you know.... not die.

CLAY

(smiles)

Pablo! It's not the fall that kills you. It's that sudden stop.

CUT TO:

INT. GROUND FLOOR FOYER OF LOW RENT APARTMENT - LATER THAT DAY

Clay McCutcheon stands with mailbox key at ready. He is breaking a mild sweat. He stares intently at his mailbox.

CLAY

No whammies. Come on. Big bucks. Refund. No whammies. No whammies. Stop!

Clay opens mailbox quickly. Pulls out red bills.

CLAY

Dammit! Damn!

Apartment door next to mailbox opens

JACKIE

I've got another package for you in here.

Jackie hands Clay a 9 month-old baby and a diaper bag.

CLAY

Muh Man! Now that's the kind of package that I was looking forward to!

Clay scoops up baby and kisses on him.

JACKIE

Bill day, huh?

CLAY

Yeah. I'm so poor that the Democratic Party has sent me notice asking me not to mention my affiliation anymore.

JACKIE

Well, you know I have a few bills of my own to pay....

Clay scurries up the stairs.

You know, the kind of bills that require money!

CLAY

(over the railing)

Soon, Doll.

JACKIE

Hmph! Yeah, like a Screw-me-over Elmo.

INT. CLAY AND LENA'S APARTMENT -MOMENTS LATER.

Boxes draped with cloth serve as tables. The cat gnaws away at a foam exposure that used to be part of the couch. The door to the stairwell has been left open.

Clay paces with the child in his arms. O.S. the sound of a squeaky door opening and closing. Footsteps on the stairs. Clay moves to wait at the door.

Lena stumbles in, frazzled. She slumps against the doorway.

CLAY

Finally. Jesus Christ!

Clay pulls keys out of Lena's hand and replaces it with the baby.

CLAY

I'm outta here.

Clay thunders down stairs and the squeaky door crashes open. The apartment door is left open. Lena takes baby and slumps into the couch. Through the door we hear the foyer door screech open again, and Clay thunders back up the stairs and through the doorway.

CLAY

Where's the car?

LENA

In the highway.

CLAY

On which highway?

LENA

Not on. In. In highway 270.

CUT TO:

EXT. RUSH HOUR HIGHWAY - LATER THAT DAY

Clay has a white knuckle grip on the steering wheel of an economy car. Cars honking and drafting off the stalled car reveal that it is stuck in the middle of five busy lanes.

Sweat pours off Clay's face as he unsuccessfully tries to turn the car over, nervously glancing in the rearview mirror at the impending doom barreling down on him.

Clay shuffles out of car and carefully slinks to the front. He pops the hood and burns himself on the billowing steam. He flinches and loses a litany of profanity.

Clay dodges traffic to return to side of road where Lena and Vincent wait near VINCENT's car. Vincent is an impeccably dressed black man approximately the same age as Clay.

CLAY

Okay. I give. What happened Lena?

LENA

(scared)

I don't know, I was just driving and the little light came on and I was....

CLAY

Light? What Light?

LENA

The little red light.

CLAY

Which little red light? Engine? Did it say engine?

LENA

I think that it said "oil." Is there one that says "oil?"

CLAY

(incredulous)

Oil. When did the oil light come on?

LENA

(Sniffling)

I don't know. Right after I crossed the bridge, I guess.

CLAY

The Bridge? The Bridge? THE BRIDGE? The bridge is 30 miles from here! Why didn't you stop and pull over when the light came on?

LENA

Well, I don't know.... If it was really important it should have been blinking, right?

Clay throws his hands up in the air and storms back to Vincent's car.

LENA

What about the car?

CLAY

It's not a car anymore, Lena. It's sculpture. Maybe we can donate it to a museum and get a tax credit.

Lena stands beside the road, cradling the baby. Vincent leans into his car where Clay sits in a huff.

VINCENT

Dude. I know it's bad right now, but you gotta' ease up on her.

Clay doesn't respond. Vincent goes to collect and comfort Lena.

CUT TO:

INT. CLAY AND LENA'S APARTMENT - LATER THAT DAY

The apartment is empty. We hear them climbing the stairs. The door is still open, as it was left.

CLAY (O.S.)

Jesus, you stupid bitch! You left the door open.

Clay, Lena, and Vincent enter, shocked to find a POLICEMAN and a REPO MAN standing in their living room.

POLICEMAN

The door was open, I was free to enter the premises.

REPO MAN

I'm here for the Dealership. I've come for the car.

Clay tosses him the keys.

CLAY

Knock yourself out big guy.

REPO MAN

Where is the car now?

CLAY

Highway 270.

POLICEMAN

You are going to have to be a little more specific than that, sir.

Clay opens his mouth in sarcastic reprise.

CUT TO:

INT. OF LARGE CAR - LATER THAT NIGHT

The car is crowded with CLAY, Vincent, JOE, NED, and JACK, who is driving.

VINCENT

And then Clay looks this Cop right in the puss and says "Dead fucking Center, Officer."

CLAY

Ah. It's always a warm bonding moment amongst friends when they can make light of those little financial devastations between them.

JOEY

Aw, Dude, you know how it is. The nature of comedy is someone else's tragedy.

CLAY

No jury on earth would convict me if I had killed her right there on the roadside.

VINCENT

You gotta ease up on your woman, Clay.

JACK

And let's face it, hommes, you didn't marry her for her superior reasoning skills. This is the women that believed that the car was out of blinker fluid.

VINCENT

Sinceriously, man. You can't ride a woman so hard for so long without waking up one day to find out she cut off your dick, or something.

NED

Sisters don't play that Vincent?

VINCENT

Sisters don't play none of that!

CLAY

Don't give me that black man crap, Vincent. When was the last time you dated a black woman, anyway? Junior High?

(beat)

VINCENT

That is entirely beside the point.

NED

She loves you, man. For the life of me, I don't know what she sees in your sorry ass, but she sees somethin'. Come midnight tonight, four of us are going to be lying in bed, whippin' our wire, and you are gonna' be slippin' in between the sheets with a fine woman.

CLAY

You're not married. You don't understand. I go to bed with those big tits and I wake up with that little brain.

JACK

You're right. But I am a lawyer and I would propose that there are consequences....

CLAY

Enough. Enough! I finally get her out of my sight and you lamers won't talk about anything else. You ever going to make an honest woman out of that little paralegal of yours, Jack?

JACK

Caryn and I have an implicit understanding of the quantitative limitations of our relationship.

JOEY

And what the hell is that supposed to mean in layman's terms, counselor?

VINCENT

It means that they're fuck-friends.

CUT TO:

EXT. URBAN CLUB DISTRICT STREET - LATER THAT NIGHT

The group navigates crowded streets with a deliberate quick-step.

CLAY

Where are you guys headed? Mugsey's is the other direction.

NED

J.J.s.

CLAY

Aw, dammit. You guys know I can't afford that place. It's five dollars for a draft, for chrissakes.

VINCENT

I told you, we've got you covered.

CLAY

But Mugs has got pool tables!

JACK

Yeah. And Mugs has also got wall to wall bikers that stare at my candy ass every time I lean over to make a shot.

JOEY

Baxter is meeting us at J.J.s.

CLAY

Oh, shit. Jack, I know that he's your buddy from Law School, and everything, but the guy is ninety fucking years old! He'll keep chicks away like a shanker.

JOEY

As long as Baxter is buying, I don't care if he takes his teeth out and puts them in my glass.

CUT TO:

INT. UPSCALE BAR - LATER THAT NIGHT

The six men are crowded into a big booth.

BAXTER

So my client, who isn't my client yet, you see. He gets to his office, and he is distraught because his wife has forgotten his birthday. But his lovely young secretary has a nice little card waiting for him, and it really impresses my client.

NED

Who isn't your client at the time.

BAXTER

So noted. Well lunch time rolls around, and his secretary suggests that they go out to grab a little birthday lunch, one of these places where they clap or sing to you, or some such nonsense.

JOEY

Oh, I love that!

All look at Joey.

BAXTER

But once they are in his car, she suggests that perhaps they could just stop by her apartment and she could warm up some leftovers.

VINCENT

And he's game.

BAXTER

Most so. So my client....

Clay is visably annoyed at Baxter's command of the others.

CLAY

Who isn't your client yet.

BAXTER

...who isn't my client at this point.... He goes to her place. It's modest, but kind of tasteful. She sticks her head in the fridge and then closes it. She looks at him with a little twinkle in her eye and says, 'I'm just going to slip into something a little more comfortable.'

So the secretary slinks into the bedroom for a moment, and then BOOM! The door flies open and out runs his wife, his kids, and half the office. Their hands are full of booze and cake. And there, on the couch, sits my client wearing nothing but his socks.

NED

At which point he became your client.

Jack toasts Baxter.

JACK

(Toasts Baxter)

May the stupidity of our fellow men make us filthy rich.

BAXTER

Financial Darwinism. Long live the hearty asshole gene.

NED

People never change.

Two lovelies approach the table.

LOVELY #1

Hey, we wondered who we should thank for the drinks?

All the men are looking at Baxter. Ned jumps suddenly as he has been kicked under the table.

NED

Uh. No problem. Really.

A long, awkward pause ensues.

LOVELY #2

Well. Thanks!

Ned nods and waves. Lovelies move on.

BAXTER

Congratulations, Ned. That was the most pathetic display of closing that I have ever seen.

NED

There were only two of them.

VINCENT

So? Ned, I respect you. You know that. But consider yourself on notice: I would leave your ass stranded in a vat of flaming horseshit if there was pussy on the line. I expect no more from you. What, are we women now? Are we going to start going to take a piss together?

NED

Aw, they were just being polite.

BAXTER

Ned, you are a man. You are alpha wolf. And as a wolf, it is your job to weed the sick and weak away from the pack and satisfy your most primal urges as the alpha wolf sees fit. Now get your furry ass off that seat, and go ask one of those fine young things if you can get her anything else.... Another drink; a bite of dinner; real estate... Go.

Ned rises, confidence soaring.

NED

I am a wolf!

BAXTER

You are a wolf. Sic 'em boy.

Ned hustles off.

BAXTER

Joey, you might want keep an eye on White Fang and make sure that he doesn't tell that joke about the priest and the monkey.

JOEY

Roger that, captain. Backup is on the way.

Joey hustles off.

BAXTER

So how is Lena?

Vincent flinches.

CLAY

Dumber than a country stump.

BAXTER

I see. And how is that young man of yours?

CLAY

Drew is the all-around greatest kid in the world.

BAXTER

So Jack tells me. It would seem to my old lawyer's brain though, that the mother of the greatest kid in the world would thereby be worthy of a little respect of her own, if only for being the conduit for more savvy genes to populate. At least that is the way I understood it to work in the rest of the world.

JACK

As a matter of fact, there are entire religions based around that premise.

CLAY

Trapped between two drunken lawyers in search of a debate.

VINCENT

Not that I couldn't pontificate both you overpaid sumbitches under the table, but the Witt brothers seem to be making good time over there, and I had better start working the room before it gets any later.

Vincent walks up to some women and engages them in conversation.

CLAY

I need another beer.

Clay walks to the bar and turns to see Vincent being invited to sit with the group of women. He turns to John and Baxter where they sit at the table. They make eye contact. Clay hooks his finger in his mouth and pulls to the side, fish style. Baxter returns with a 'touch-down' raise of his arms. Clay turns to barkeep.

CLAY

Grandpa over there says he wants another Bud in a bottle on his tab.

The bartender pops it on the counter. Clay notices classy woman at bar. She notices him noticing and smiles. He smiles back uncomfortably, turns away and leaves. He starts back for Jack and Baxter's table, sipping at the beer, when Vincent returns to the table with three women in tow. Clay spins around and walks in the other direction.

EXT. OUTSIDE BAR - LATER THAT NIGHT.

Clay is sitting on curb alone, when Jack, Joey, Ned, Vincent, and Baxter pile out into the night.

CLAY

Jesus! Two hours and not one of you could close?

VINCENT

We were right there on the brink, laddie, but alas, the ladies were not biting tonight.

CLAY

What about you, alpha wolf?

NED

Nahn. Mine had big hands.

JACK

What does have to do with anything?

NED

They always make your dick look so small.

VINCENT

Speak for yourself, there, Kemosabe!

From behind them, five girls approach.

GIRL IN RED

Hey, Vincent.

VINCENT

Hello, yourself.

GIRL IN RED

Things are kind of breaking up in there, we were thinking about trying to find some early breakfast, and...

VINCENT

And you wanted some non-threatening escorts to worship your collective refinery while you suck down Belgian waffles?

GIRL IN RED

Well... yeah. And we want you to pick up the check.

VINCENT

But of course. That is my job.

GIRL IN GROUP

I don't eat with strange men.

ANOTHER GIRL

Yes. How 'bout some introductions?

VINCENT

Well, most of you have met Baxter and I, but you may not have met Joey, Automotive Engineer and one-time minor league prospect for the Baltimore Orioles.

JOEY

Hey.

VINCENT

Next we have Ned. Ned recently made the jump from secondary history teacher, and shaper of young minds, to parole officer, and kicker of felonious ass.

NED

Good evening.

VINCENT

And finally we have Counselor Jack Nester, legal advisor to the rich and famous, defender of the downtrodden, the last man on earth that you want your ex-spouse to sit down with, and baker of some of the finest lasagna to ever prove the existence of a benevolent god.

JACK

Pleased to meet you.

UNPAIRED GIRL

(to Clay, flirtatiously)

And what about you? What's your line of bull?

Clay opens his mouth to answer.

JOEY

Oh that's Clay. He's married.

Clay's jaw remains slack in disbelief. The girl turns to leave with departing flock, turns to give a disappointed smile to Clay.

UNPAIRED GIRL

It sucks to be you.

Baxter lights his pipe.

BAXTER

Looks like you are going to need a ride home.

CLAY

(in utter disbelief)

What the hell was that? 'That's Clay. He's married.' Baxter, am I missing something here, or are my friends complete assholes.

BAXTER

Well, Clay, the truth is an absolute defense.

The two walk down the street.

CLAY

Can I ask you a question, Baxter?

BAXTER

You can ask anything you want, but the answers are one hundred and seventy dollars per billable hour.

CLAY

You are always so smooth with the ladies, how is it that you never ended up married?

BAXTER

It would seem that in asking the question, you answered it for yourself.

CLAY

Do you think that Ned is queer? I think that Ned may be a tailgunner.

BAXTER

And what makes you say that?

CLAY

I don't know. Sometimes I can just tell when somebody is queer.

BAXTER

(Patronizing)

Oh, can you now?

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT KITCHEN - LATER THAT NIGHT

Lena is at the table paying bills. Clay walks in, digs a beer out of fridge.

CLAY

Last beer.

LENA

It may be the last one for awhile, Clay. We're going under.

CLAY

Under what? It's good you do the bills for a change. I earn the money, so it ain't gonna kill you to write a few checks every once in a while.

LENA

(quietly)

I work too, Clay.

CLAY

Right. You bring home beer money. So get some beer tomorrow, bitch.

LENA

(Nervous)

I'll use my "beer money" for beer when you bring home enough "rent money" to cover the rent. And the utilities. And Jackie. Do you know how much we owe Jackie?

CLAY

Lena, I know that you are NOT disrespecting me like that.

LENA

Honey, I'm just saying that we've cut back as far as we can cut back.

CLAY

Well, thanks to you we won't have to worry about gasoline for a while. Thanks so much for that.

LENA

Clay, baby, I know I screwed up, okay? I just...

CLAY

You are just STUPID! All right? You are so stupid that I already know that I am going to have to recheck those bills, even though you used a calculator. THAT is how fucking STUPID you are!

FLASHBACK

LITTLE CLAY, six years old, stands on a chair at a sink of dirty dishes, while DONNA McCUTCHEON scolds him.

DONNA

Oh great. Now I'm going to have to rewash all those dishes. THAT is how fucking worthless you are!

PRESENT

LENA

Honey, I know that you are mad at me. I know that. You don't have to be mean. I'm just saying that one of us is going to have to get a second job.

CLAY

I think that is a fabulous idea! It's about time that you start pulling your weight around here.

LENA

You know that I can't be away from Drew that much, Clay.

CLAY

See, I knew that was what you were getting at. You have no respect for how hard I work for this family. I bring in three times what you do. Why should I take another job?

LENA

It doesn't have to be full time. I was thinking that you could even try writing again. Maybe freelance, or something. You haven't written for the two years that we have been married.

CLAY

Hell-O! What does that say about you? Huh? I mean, can you... with that impediment of having a small particle of brain lodged between your ears... can you put those two together and figure it OUT?

O.S. the baby cries.

CLAY

Shit.

LENA

He'll go back to sleep in a minute.

CLAY

No, that sounds like his wet cry. I'll check him.

LENA

I'll get him.

CLAY

No, I can change my son.

LENA

Let me. We're out of disposables.

CLAY

God damn it! Why didn't you get diapers?

LENA

Well, for one Clay, I was a little distracted on the way home from work today. And two, it has been a while since the A&P accepted beads for payment.

Lena pushes past Clay in the doorway. Clays beer bottle drops and breaks. Clay explodes. He pushes Lena against the wall and raises his hand to strike her. The moment teeters.

FLASHBACK

Little Clay accidentally knocks Donna's Beer of the kitchen table. Enraged, she coldcocks him to the floor.

PRESENT

LENA
(petrified and meek)

I'm sorry.

CLAY
(lowers hand)

Are you listening to me? Then listen carefully.
Get your ass in the bedroom. Get the room ready.
Slap some of that slutty eye makeup on. If you
aren't ready and waiting on the bed by the time I
get this cleaned up, there is going to be hell to pay.
Do you understand?

Lena nods. Clay releases her.

BEDROOM

Lena is applying a thick coat of lipstick and trying to dab at her eyes to keep her tears from cutting through her mascara.

A thump and door slam O.S. Lena startles. She runs and jumps on the bed.

Footsteps. Lena snaps to an all-fours position on the bed like a trained dog. The door opens sharply. Clay studies her carefully.

CLAY
No heels? Oh, this is going to go very bad on you.
Very bad on you indeed. You know the rules.

The sounds of rough sex gives way to the voyeuristic presence of the lens and blinking light of a cheap camcorder in the corner of the room.

APARTMENT KITCHEN - DARK

Light spills out of open refrigerator. Clay roots for something. Anything. He ends up pulling the top off a baby bottle and drinks. He closes the door.

BATHROOM - BLACK

Lena turns on light. Pulls up nightdress and sits on toilet. Camera discovers Clay sitting in empty bathtub, still nursing on his milk bottle.

Christ, Clay. LENA

Hey. CLAY

Can't sleep? LENA

Just thinking. CLAY

You want me to fix you something to eat? LENA

I, uh... Things got a little out of hand, tonight. CLAY

Lena looks at him blankly.

I didn't... I didn't meant to... You know I love you, right? CLAY

Lena looks at him blankly.

We have some corned beef. LENA

No. Thanks. CLAY
(defeated)

CUT TO:

EXT. APARTMENT PARKING LOT (4 YEARS LATER)

Clay is elbow deep in an old clunker car. Drew, now 5, is sitting on the chassy reading from a Haynes manual.

Seven. Remove the top two bolts of the comp... DREW
comp. Ress. Sor.

CLAY

Skip to next one.

DREW

Dad, you can't skip steps.

CLAY

The compressor drives the air conditioning. No air conditioning no compressor. Next.

VINCENT

(approaching)

Holding the book for your dad?

CLAY

Reading the book for his dad.

VINCENT

Man. When did you learn to read?

DREW

My mom teaches me to read her newspaper.

CLAY

Those tabloid rags that your mother reads aren't newspapers.

VINCENT

Working on the Bentley, I see.

DREW

Our ride is illin'.

VINCENT

Wheredya learn to talk that crap?

DREW

Cartoons.

VINCENT

We didn't have cartoons like that when I was a kid.

DREW

Then what did you watch in diversity class?

VINCENT

Diversity class?

DREW

At day care. Did they have day care when you were a kid?

VINCENT

Yeah. But they didn't call it day care back then. They called it "mom." Speaking of which, where is your mom?

CLAY

Working.

DREW

She's always working.

VINCENT

Still at that telephone boiler room? Think that you could get a baby-sitter tomorrow night? I have Cardinal tickets.

CLAY

Naw. Drew and I have our traditional end of summer water balloon fight.

VINCENT

While I am a great believer in family tradition, we are talking first row, right above the entrance to the visitors dugout. We can flick jalapenos at Dave Justice.

CLAY

Very tempting, Vincent, but I already promised Drew.

DREW

And a man is defined by the promises he keeps.

VINCENT

Diversity class?

DREW

No, my dad!

INT. APARTMENT

Clay goes to wash up in kitchen.

CLAY

Drew, come hit the answering machine. The light is flashing.

Drew does. There are four hangups.

VINCENT

Your machine broken again?

CLAY

No, some asshole just keeps hanging up. Started about the time that we put Drew in daycare. Lena thinks that it is one of Drew's little girlfriends.

VINCENT

I thought that Lena had a lot of time off during the days.

CLAY

Sometimes.

VINCENT

So why is Drew in daycare full-time?

CLAY

She says that she want's a little time to herself sometimes. As long as she pays the bill, I don't care. Drew finally gets to play with some other kids his own age.

Vincent looks suspicious.

INT./EXT. APARTMENT - LATER THAT NIGHT.

A car pulls into parking space. The door opens. Lena steps out and giggles. She looks up to see Clay silhouetted in the apartment window.

APARTMENT WINDOW.

Clay watches the car door conversation conclude. Lena struts toward the apartment.

She walks in. Clay is visibly agitated.

CLAY

Where have you been? For chrissake, you got off work two hours ago.

LENA

A group of us went out for drinks after work.

CLAY

And you felt no burning responsibility to call and tell me?

LENA

Jeez, Clay, it wasn't really planned, it just kind of happened.

CLAY

And you were so lost in the inertia of the moment that you lost conceptual understanding of payphone operation?

LENA

Clay, how many times have you gone out carousing with you friends without asking?

CLAY

Lena, in case you haven't noticed, I am the alpha wolf. I am a man!

LENA

(aside)

Oh, I notice that every time you stick your manhood in my face.

CLAY

And as a man, I am not required to file a flight plan with you or any other woman.

LENA

What are you going to do when you have to work for a woman?

CLAY

Re-evaluate my career choice.

LENA

Hmmph. So it's a career now?

CLAY

Bitch, you are not dissing me.

LENA

Clay, I'm sorry. I had fun. I regret that I didn't ask your almighty permission first, okay?

CLAY

You better watch your mouth.

LENA

No. You watch my mouth. Fuck you.

Clay
Clay flips out, grabs Lena by the hair and throws her across the room. She reaches for a dangerous looking knick-knack.

Clay pulls her away from it, and again, pins her and draws back his hand to hit her.

She flinches. Clay pauses. Lena turns to stare him down.

LENA

Just do it. Go ahead. You know you want to do it.

CLAY

I haven't hit you... yet.

LENA

You might as well have, Clay.

CLAY

Don't tempt me. Just because I never have doesn't mean that...

LENA

Doesn't mean that you don't want to. Doesn't mean that you haven't thought about pulling the trigger every day of the last five miserable years. Right?

CLAY

You had better reign that tongue in.

LENA

Or what?

CLAY

If you don't like it here, then get the hell out.
Find someone else to support your stupid ass.

LENA

(fiercely)

Maybe I'll just do that, Clay. Maybe I will do just
that. Maybe I'll find a real man out there.

Clay throws her to the ground.

CLAY

Keep it up, and you'll see more of a man than you
can handle.

LENA

Oh, you're no man, Clay. You're nothing but a
yippee little dog. You are all bark and nothing to
back it up. Yip! Yip! Yip!

CLAY

I'll show you who the doggie is, bitch! Get on the
bed!

Clay drags Lena to the bedroom and starts ripping her clothes off.

FADE OUT.

SCREEN TITLE: "Newton's first law: Every body continues in a
state of uniform motion until compelled to change by forces im-
pressed upon it."

FADE IN.

EXT. VINCENT'S CAR - NIGHT

Clay and Vincent are wearing their Cardinal ballcaps.

CLAY

It was really strange. I looked in her eyes and didn't recognize her. It was like she was baiting me.

VINCENT

Baiting you?

CLAY

Swear to god, man, I think she wanted me to slug her.

VINCENT

Are you listening to yourself? She wanted you to hit her? You know how chicks are. If you or I walk up to some big mutherfucker in a bar and throw a drink in his face, what's going to happen? He's going to beat us senseless, and when the cops get there what's going to happen?

CLAY

Nothin'.

VINCENT

Well yeah, nothing with you. With me the cops are going to take my black ass outside and beat me some more. But I digress. Take the exact same situation, only the thrower of the drink is a woman.

CLAY

She gets away with it.

VINCENT

Exactly. See, women are just so sure that you won't really make that leap. It's like they have, you know... titomatic immunity or something.

They pull into the parking lot of Clay's apartment. Clay sees his car.

CLAY

Lena's home early.

Clay gets out of car. A large man is unloading boxes out of his truck.

CLAY
Movin' in?

MIKE
Yeah.

CLAY
Need a hand.

MIKE
Sure.

Mike overloads Clay with boxes; takes small box for himself. Vincent watches this from car and senses something is wrong.

INT. APARTMENT STAIRWELL.

CLAY
Looks like we are going to be neighbors. Are you moving in with Mr. Maxwell? Dude, no man, that's my apartment. Hey. Hey!

Clay follows Mike into his apartment. Boxes are everywhere. Lena hands Stud a beer.

CLAY
Okay. I give. What the hell is going on?

LENA
Michael is moving in.

CLAY
That part I can see.

LENA
Then see your way to clearing off the couch, 'cause that's where you're sleeping.

CLAY
All right, asshole. Out. Joke's over.

MIKE
Know your limitations, Sport.

Vincent steps into open door.

VINCENT

Oh shit.

CLAY

I don't even have to get my hands dirty.

Clay walks toward kitchen phone. Lena picks it up first, dials it, and hands it to Clay.

CLAY

This is why I pay taxes. We'll see what the police have to... (startled, into phone) Police? Yeah, uh, it... uh... My... my wife is moving some strange guy into my apartment, and uh...I need an officer to help me... What? What do you mean? Lady, I'm going to need to speak to a superior.

LENA

It's called "invited guest of the spouse," Mr. Man. It's the law.

CLAY

No, she can not move her....(To Lena) You can not MOVE YOUR... BOYFRIEND INTO MY HOUSE!

MIKE

Okay with you if I grab a quick shower before bed?

Clay launches at Mike. Vincent catches Clay and wrestles him back.

VINCENT

Don't do it, man. It's a trap! That's what she wants! She's trying to get you to hang yourself.

Mike leaves for bathroom. Something dawns on Clay. He quick-steps toward bathroom. Vincent jumps in between Clay and bathroom door. Clay turns the other way and walks into Drew's bedroom.

Vincent and Lena stare at each other across the room.

DREW'S ROOM

Drew is sitting up, curled into a ball, wearing pajamas but not under the covers.

DREW
(Frightened and confused)
Dad? What did you do?

CLAY
Your mom is the one who has lost her mind, son.
Get your shoes on.

LIVING ROOM

LENA
Don't look at me like that, you hypocrite. How many times did you tell me that I should do it?

Vincent stares back at her.

Okay, so Mike was my idea. Nice touch, don't you think?

VINCENT
This is the kind of bullshit that gets people killed, Lena.

LENA
(sexy)
I expected more empathy out of you, Vincent.

Lena smiles wickedly. Vincent doesn't blink.

Clay leaves Drew's room with Drew in tow. Drew has a little kid's suitcase brimming with clothes.

LENA
No! Don't even think about it, Clay.

VINCENT
Clay...

LENA
Mike!

Mike walks in wearing towel.

VINCENT
Clay, be cool, man.

MIKE

Get your hands off the kid, asshole.

CLAY

Any time you get to feelin' froggy, motherfucker, you just jump.

VINCENT

Everybody, BE COOL! Clay, stand down. Lena! Have a seat.

Vincent puts an arm around Mike's neck, leading him to the living room..

VINCENT

Look, Michael, is it? Michael, what we have here is a situation where the walls are fixing to shake, neighbors are going to call the cops, and when all is said and done, it's my black ass that's going to jail, you see? And given that reality...

Vincent flips the knot of Michael's towel. The towel drops. Michael instinctively reaches down for it. Vincent clips Mike behind the knees. He forces Mike to his knees by the hair and uses Mike's long tresses to repeatedly smash Mike's face into a glass coffee table top. He holds Mike's limp head up.

VINCENT

If you ever fuck with the boy, I will personally forcefeed you your little white weightlifter's dick. Understand? (to Clay) Let's move.

Clay and Drew are out the door. Vincent turns to Lena on his way out.

VINCENT

This... *this* you brought on yourself.

INT. JOEY'S APARTMENT - LATER THAT NIGHT

Ned, and Vincent sit amongst heaps of dirty clothes. Joey passes out coffee. Jack finishes up a phone call and cradles the receiver.

JACK

Baxter said pretty much what I did. You are within legal rights to take the boy, but that will last as long as it takes for one of you to file. Then you're going to have to show that you're a reasonable parent.

JOEY

Until then, you and Andrew are more than welcome to stay here as long as you want to.

VINCENT

Or as long as you can stand to. Jesus, Joey.

JOEY

Hey, I wasn't expecting company.

From Joey's room, a nude woman leans drowsily against the door frame.

NUDE GIRL

Joey, do you need me to leave?

JOEY

No, baby. Are we too loud out here?

NUDE GIRL

No. I can sleep through anything.

NED

(aside)

But not in anything, apparently.

NUDE GIRL

Night, Guys.

ALL

Night.

NED

Excuse me... Did she even blush?

VINCENT

Not where I was looking.

JOEY

Naw. She's a regular exhibitionist.

NUDE GIRL (O.S.)

I am not an exhibitionist.

JOEY

Okay, so she's a closet exhibitionist.

CLAY

I'm sorry, Joey. We're cramping your style.

JOEY

No prob, dude.

CLAY

(to Jack)

So are you officially my lawyer?

JACK

No. I'm your friend. The two don't mix.
However, Baxter offered....

CLAY

I don't want any charity from that old bastard.

JACK

Well, I'm flattered that you would accept my
charity, but one: it'd get me fired once my general
partner found out, and two, I'm not going to do it.

CLAY

I'll hit the phone book tomorrow.

JACK

If I were you, I'd reconsider.

CLAY

Thanks, but no thanks. Right now I need sleep.

VINCENT

Where are you sleeping?

CLAY

The couch.

VINCENT

Oh?

Drew is sound asleep on couch.

CLAY

Well, the floor should be soft enough.

Ned and Jack file out of apartment. Clay collars Vincent and hugs him. He does not see Vincent's guilty look.

CLAY

Thanks, man. For everything.
You're a loyal friend. But still... remind me never
to piss you off.

VINCENT

Hey, bro. I just wanted to do right by the boy, you
know...

CLAY

Yeah, I know. You did good.

VINCENT

No. I don't think you understand me, Clay. You
gotta' do right by him because he's your boy.
Nobody is disputing that. Just don't forget that
she is his mom, too. She has lost her freakin'
mind for the moment, but she's still his mom.

CLAY

And?

VINCENT

And doing right by him doesn't mean hiding him
from her. He's going to need to see her. A lot.
Soon. He doesn't care that she's a bitch. She is
his mom. He can hate her when he's older.

CUT TO:

INT. CHEAP LAWYER'S OFFICE - DAY

DAN

(looking over notepad)
She's a piece of work. Got a picture?

Clay pulls out his wallet and opens it.

DAN

Whoa. Let's hope the judge isn't male.

CLAY

So what are my chances of getting custody of Drew?

DAN

Has you wife ever been arrested for DWI?

CLAY

No.

DAN

Is she a chronic drug abuser?

CLAY

No.

DAN

Has she ever been certified as mentally insane?

Clay thinks.

DAN

The key word here is "certified."

CLAY

No.

DAN

Then your chance of getting custody is, statistically,.. zero. My friend, you are about to embark on your next life as a cash cow.

CLAY

Good luck. She can't take away anything that I don't already have.

DAN

Do you have any friends that have been through a divorce? Guys?

CLAY

No.

DAN

I didn't think so. Mr. McCutcheon, you and I both understand the physical improbability of squeezing blood from a turnip. The well meaning legislature of our fair state, however, does not. There is a worksheet, that based on the information you have given me, is going to cost you about... Thirty percent of your take-home.

CLAY

That can't be right. She makes almost what I do.

DAN

As soon as she sits down with a lawyer, she is going to immediately quit at least one of her jobs; maybe both.

CLAY

To tilt the scale? She can't do that.

DAN

She would if she was my client. Why should she work two jobs?

CLAY

Why? Why? Because she couldn't keep her fucking KNEES TOGETHER! Why should she work two jobs? WHY SHOULD I HAVE TO WORK TWO JOBS?

DAN

Easy! Easy! Calm down. I didn't say it was fair. It's just the law. It's the screwing you get for the screwing you got.

Clay sits, stunned.

DAN

Look. If you want to fight, we'll fight. She's actually handed us a few cards to play. But your choices are few.

CLAY

I want my son. I'll fight a circle saw if I have to.

DAN

The best you're going to do is get him more than every other weekend. And to get that, you're going to have to pony up some support above and beyond the worksheet.

CLAY

I'll take my chances.

DAN

(exasperated)

Fine. You really want to do this? Stupid question. I'll rephrase. Are you really ready to do anything for the fight?

CLAY

Anything.

DAN

Then don't move out yet.

CLAY

What?

DAN

If you move out without her being able to support herself, that's abandonment. Can you afford to pay rent and utilities on two places?

CLAY

I can barely afford to pay it on one apartment. No judge on earth is going to expect me to live with my wife and her boyfriend. That isn't the society that we live in.

DAN

In that wallet of yours, you gotta Video Club card?

CLAY

Sure.

DAN

Tell you what, my friend. You go to that video club tonight. Somewhere there you'll find a movie about a divorced man who has to dress up like an old woman just to see his kids.

DAN (cont.)

Any idea which section of the video store you're likely to find this movie? Comedy. That's what society thinks of your plot. If you want your kid to know his father, you can put up with anything that she can dish out, right? Right?

CUT TO:

INT. CLAY AND LENA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT.

Clay is trying to sleep on the couch. The sound of over-dramatic lovemaking assaults him. He pulls the pillow over his head, but it doesn't work.

He rises and walks into Drew's room. He kisses Drew on the head. Drew wakes. They listen to the screams for a moment.

DREW

You must have really made her mad. What does it mean that a leopard can't change its spots?

CLAY

Is that what she told you? I never hit her and I never kissed another woman for as long as we've been married.

DREW

Is that what it means to be married?

Clay thinks.

CLAY

Well, that's a big part of it.

DREW

You're leaving again, aren't you? You're not coming back this time are you?

CLAY

I'll be back for you.

DREW

Soon?

CLAY

As soon as I can set up shop somewhere else.

DREW

Where?

CLAY

I don't know. I'll know when I get there. I'm going to talk with your grandma.

DREW

Nana Rose?

CLAY

Nonononononono. That stupid witch is the last person on earth I want to talk to.

DREW

But that's the only grandma that I have.

CLAY

Well, not exactly.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAR CRASH SCENE - NIGHT

Two charred corpses sit in the front seats of a burned out auto. Amongst the black soot bright, shiny gold chains around the necks of the respective corpses gleam surrealistically. Steam wisps about them like ether of another world.

A flash of light.

A police photographer repositions and takes another flash shot.

An Ambulance waits, streaking color into the chaos of policemen milling about. News Vans wait beyond the perimeter of yellow caution tape. DONNA McCUTCHEON, a detective in her late 40s, finishes her note-taking while holding the uneaten part of her sandwich in her mouth. She pockets the pen and bites off the excess sandwich.

DONNA

Hey Goldberg, can you get me a set of those prints for my collection?

GOLDBERG

Sure. You're a hard woman, Mac.

A PATROLMAN holds a handkerchief over his nose and mouth.

PATROLMAN

Jesus Christ, Mac, how can you eat a sandwich with that smell everywhere.

DONNA

I know, Chip, but I didn't think to pack barbeque.

OTHER DETECTIVE

You want me to break you off a piece, Mac? I think I see some that's well done.

DONNA

Well I love it crispy, but I never went in for dark meat.

FIREFIGHTER

You have everything you need, Detective?

DONNA

Yeah, cut them out and bag 'em. Or use a Handivac for all I care.

PATROLMAN #2

Mac, you want to talk to the cameras?

DONNA

No, but ticket the vans for illegal parking.

OTHER DETECTIVE

Mac, you want I should go to the parents?

DONNA

I got it, Griest. The expression on their face should make my night. You got those numbers?

GRIEST

Left 'em on your cruiser seat.

PATROLMAN #2

One more thing, Mac.

DONNA

Speak quick.

PATROLMAN #2

There is some kid at the line. He wants to talk to you.

DONNA

Take him in for curfew.

PATROLMAN #2

He's too old. Says that he's your son.

She stops in her tracks.

THE BARRICADE LINE.

Donna approaches Clay carefully.

DONNA

C'mere.

Donna escorts Clay into her unmarked cruiser as news teams and reporters crash in on her. She is unfazed. Clay is distracted by all of the commotion outside the car windows.

DONNA

Okay, kid. Who died?

CLAY

Nobody died.

DONNA

Don't bullshit a bullshitter, Kid. Is it your dad?

CLAY

Nobody died Mom.

DONNA

Damn, kid, when was the last time you ate? You look like Karen fucking Carpenter. You need to eat something? C'mon.

Donna starts car and drives away.

CUT TO:

INT. PANCAKE HOUSE - LATER THAT NIGHT

Donna is slumped back in a booth smoking. Clay picks at his food.

DONNA

So, you think that it is just this Mike guy? That won't last long.

CLAY

I don't know. I'm starting to put some stuff together. The paychecks of hers that were smaller than they were supposed to be. She had asked about taking a vacation by herself. I mean, I can put together all of the little pieces now, but I didn't see it coming.

DONNA

At the risk of saying I told you so....

CLAY

Mom! You keep forgetting, it's think first, then talk.

DONNA

So you need a few dollars for the lawyer?

CLAY

No thanks.

Donna reaches in her pocket for a wad of bills.

DONNA

Well, you're going to need hotel money for the next couple of days.

Donna holds the money in front of his face.

CLAY

I didn't come for your money, Mom.

DONNA

What do you want from me, Clay?

CLAY

(sighs. Drops fork)

Hell, I don't know, Mom. I haven't seen you in six years, I thought maybe that was enough time for you to think up one compassionate fucking sentence for the only flesh and blood that you have left on the planet. I'm obviously the world's most pathetic judge of character.

Clay starts to rise.

DONNA

Hold on. Hold on. Look.... I.... Do you have any pictures of the boy. Please, Clay.

Clay removes wallet and removes a tattered picture from inside.

DONNA

(Laughs involuntarily)

Jesus Christ, what a little doll! Oh my god he looks just like you at that age. He's four?

CLAY

Five. He's reading.

DONNA

Oh my God! He's so sweet. Is that his Halloween costume? Oh my.

CLAY

Go ahead and keep it. I can see him any time I want.

DONNA

You are a mean sumbitch, aren't you son? You're no different. Where's your kind words after all this time? Huh? You're no different.

CLAY

You want a kind word? How about over. I don't know why your old man was the way he was. I don't know why you're the way you are or why I am the way I am. But the family history of grinch-sized hearts dies with me.

FADE OUT.

SCREEN TITLE: "The average speed of change can be calculated by factoring Displacement over Time."

$$V = \frac{\Delta d}{\Delta t} = \frac{\text{displacement}}{\text{time}}$$

FADE IN.

INT. LENA'S DINER - MORNING.

Lena enters the staging area of a diner gearing up for breakfast. She ties on her apron.

OLDER WAITRESS

You're late, hon. Table six looks like he could use some more coffee.

LENA

Thanks for covering for me, Gina.

Lena approaches table to find a bedraggled Clay sitting in corner of booth.

LENA

What?

CLAY

Got a minute?

LENA

I've got nine hours here, Clay. You, however, have exactly five minutes before I call the cops.

CLAY

Have a sit.

LENA

I'm working.

CLAY

I'm asking nicely.

Lena sits.

LENA

Spill it.

CLAY

Look. I'm not sure what's going on with you and this guy, but I'd like you to knock it off.

LENA

(laughs)

I'm sure you would. Tell Becky Neidemeier that. I'm sure that she'll be most sympathetic.

CLAY

Becky Neidemeier? From work? Lena, what the hell are you talking about?

LENA

Clay, you took her to a hotel after work.

CLAY

Nononono. The whole Science department went to happy hour at a hotel bar. This isn't about Becky Neidermeir, Lena. And I suspect that it's not really about this Mike guy either. Does Mike know about the other two?

Clay produces a bundle of letters held together by a colorful ribbon.

LENA

You were going through my drawers!

CLAY

Something like that.

LENA

And you wonder why I can't trust you?

CLAY
Why *you* can't trust *me*?

EXT. DINER

Through the diner window we see the conversation quickly deteriorate into a shouting frenzy. Lena rises abruptly and throws a glass of water at Clay's face. Clay looks homicidal, but stays seated in his rage.

CUT TO:

SERIES OF SHOTS:

INT. GAS STATION RESTROOM - DAY

Clay splashes water on his face. He turns to pick a soaking shirt out of a sudsy sink filled with a few articles of clothing, including his pants. In his underwear he wrings the shirt dry and begins blowing it dry with the bathroom hand drier.

EXT. ZOO - DAY

Clay sits alone in thought, watching a leopard pace about his cage. A family with a cute young child walks by. The child smiles at Clay. Clay smiles back and then saddens.

INT. SCHOOL OFFICE - DAY

Clay is approached by a man in a suit. The man shakes his hand. When he releases, there is a paper in it. Clay has been served.

INT. /EXT. CLAY'S CAR - NIGHT

Clay beds down for the night in the back of his car.

A police cruiser rolls up in time to see Clay fold into the back seat.

Cop runs the car's plates. We see "CLAY MCCUTCHEON" come up on the display. Cop thinks. Cop Radios.

EXT. DONNA MCCUTCHEON'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Donna answers phone. She pauses. She sets Vodka bottle aside.

INT. POLICE CAR - NIGHT

Cop acknowledges. He turns the car off. He lights a cigarette and slumps into his seat for a long night of watching at a distance.

EXT. ZOO - DAY

Clay watches Leopard. Leopard watches Clay.

INT. CLAY'S NEW APARTMENT - DAY

Clay keys into his new apartment, empty. He has a table lamp under one arm and a small package containing an inflatable mattress under the other arm.

JUMP TO:

Clay plugs in lamp.

JUMP TO:

Clay sits in floor and puffs into air mattress.

JUMP TO:

Clay flops on air mattress and bounces around.

JUMP TO:

Clay lays on air mattress and stares off at the ceiling.

DREAM SEQUENCE:

Clay dreams of the leopard in his cage at the zoo. Suddenly the leopard is sitting on the bench where Clay normally sits. Clay is in the leopard's cage. The leopard pads off. A man and Lena walk by in surrealism. Lena holds Drew's hand, but Drew is the only one to see Clay in the cage. Drew tries to linger and wave sadly to his father, but Lena's inertia whisks him away.

VINCE

You gotta get back in the hunt, man.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Clay and Vince are strolling through the aisles. Drew struggles to push a sparsely loaded cart behind them.

CLAY

I wouldn't know what to do if I caught somethin'. It doesn't seem right. It would still feel like I was cheating on her.

VINCE

Now there is some seriously misplaced loyalty.

Clay and Vince look down aisle to see a checker without a line, but the checker is elderly. They move on.

VINCE

The only way that you get over any woman is by finding another woman that makes you even more amazed.

CLAY

That shouldn't be too hard, depending on what you mean by amazed.

Clay and Vince look down aisle to see a checker without a line, but the checker is a heavy set man. They move on.

VINCE

Don't give me that shy act. When we were in college you saw more ass than a Shriner with a shovel.

CLAY

That was five years ago. These days I'd be a player if I could get one of Joey's drunken leftovers.

Clay and Vince look down aisle to see CAITLAND checking out customers. There are a few ahead of them, but they settle into this line.

DREW

Dad, there's lines with no people.

CLAY

Son, we're bachelors now. We don't go to the shortest line, we go to the line with the best looking checker.

DREW

I'm never going to like girls.

CLAY

That's fine. Just marry a nice Jewish doctor and I'll be proud.

DREW

Dad just likes the psychic lady.

VINCENT

Psychic?

DREW

Like Jean Dixon.

CLAY

Psychic. She can look at your cart and tell you how much it is going to cost within five dollars.

Vince looks at meager contents of Clay's cart.

VINCENT

Yeah, well, I would imagine that it doesn't take Kreskin to figure out how much four dollar boxes of macaroni are going to ring. You gotta thing for her?

CLAY

She's sweet. No ring. Something about her makes me goofy.

VINCE

Yeah, she's cute, I guess. But she's no Lena.

CLAY

Maybe that's a good thing.

VINCE

Maybe. Maybe it's easy to forget that there was something about Lena that attracted you in the first place.

CLAY

At this point in my life, I'm hard pressed to remember what that was.

Vincent begins to unload the cart. He holds two cantaloupes to his chest for a moment before he puts them on the belt.

VINCENT

Oh, I think you remember.

CAITLAND

(To Drew)

Hi there, sweetie. How are you today?

DREW

Hello, Ms. Cait Land. I'm fine, and yourself?

CAIT

You remembered my name!

DREW

Actually, I just had to read your nametag.

CAIT

Wow, you look too little to read. How old are you?

DREW

I'm five, but I'm not too little to read, just too little to buy Cosmo.

CAIT

(Laughs)

Why would you want to read Cosmo?

DREW

Oh I don't want to read it. I just want to take the relationship quiz in the back.

VINCE

If you're gonna make any time with this Betty, you better hurry up. Your son is already half way to a blow job.

CLAY

Hey Caitland. What says the psychic checker today?

CAIT

Not even sporting today. \$8.25.

CLAY

Naw, twelve bucks easy. Drew, what's your guess?

DREW

Eleventy-seven hundred.

CLAY

Eleventy-seven bills for the Drew man. Vince?

Vincent rolls his eyes.

CLAY

Vincent is out. I'm feelin' it, Drew. This is the day we take her down. This is the day that we're gonna win. I can feel it in my bones.

CAIT

(totaling)

Seven eighty-one.

CLAY

Okay, so we all missed.

CAIT

And with tax that comes to \$8.23.

Clay shrugs. Vincent nudges Clay.

CLAY

Say Caitland, did I ever mention how much that you look like my second wife?

CAIT
Your second wife? How many times have you
been married?

CLAY
Just once, why?

Cait realizes that she has been taken. She shakes her head.

CAIT
(to Drew)
Is this what your Daddy teaches you about
respecting women?

DREW
You mean besides the part about the female being
the most deadly of the species?

Cait hands change to Clay.

CAIT
(playful disdain)
Your change, gentlemen.

VINCENT
Oh, that was smooth.

CUT TO:

INT. LENA'S APARTMENT FOYER - DAY

Clay walks past mailboxes on his way up the stairs to get Drew. Something about the mailboxes catches his eye, and he backtracks. Upon closer examination, we see a strange man's name on the mailbox. Clay turns to see JACKIE leaning against her door frame, shaking her head sympathetically.

TOP OF THE STAIRS

Clay stands in front of the door, feinting as if he is ready to knock on the door, but never quite connecting. The door opens anyway, a burly construction worker greets Clay with an overbearing handshake.

Drew steps out into hallway, jacket on, backpack over his shoulder.

Drew tiptoes to kiss Lena. Drew bolts into hall, but Lena calls him back, gesturing for him to kiss the new guy. Drew looks at her as if she has lobsters crawling out of her ears. Lena gives an "or else" stare-of-death. Drew rushes to give the man a token peck and then rushes back down the stairs.

EXT. OUTSIDE APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER.

CLAY

What was that guy's name?

DREW

Dave.

CLAY

How long has he been there? When did Michael leave?

DREW

Did you play with the laser at work today?

CLAY

Is he sleeping in bed with your mom?

DREW

Lasers can be very dangerous. You should never point them at someone's eyes.

CLAY

You know, Drew, suddenly I realize how much I admire loyalty, even when I'm not involved.

INT. SINGLES BAR- NIGHT

CLAY

(To prospect)

Excuse me, would you happen to have a stamp?

PROSPECT

Sorry.

CLAY

What about a bad habit? Do you have any bad habits?

PROSPECT

No?

CLAY

Well, don't you have anything that needs to be licked?

INT. LENA'S APARTMENT FOYER - DAY

Clay walks by mailboxes, and this time he notices two names under Lena's on the mailbox.

Clay knocks on door. Lena is wearing a bathrobe marginally tied. TWIN #1 shakes his hand. TWIN #2 comes out of nowhere to shake his hand. Clay whisks Drew to the steps, confused. Something makes Clay's nostrils flare. He inquisitively sniffs at his handshake hand. He looks back to Lena's door and rolls his eyes in disgust.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

CLAY

(to Prospect #2)

A veterinarian's assistant? That's great. I love animals. As a matter of fact, bird watching is a hobby of mine.

PROSPECT #2

That's... unusual for a guy. What's the rarest bird that you have ever seen?

CLAY

That would be the Big Breasted Bed Thrasher. But I am always looking to find another.

INT. LENA'S APARTMENT FOYER - DAY

Clay walks, runs, and trots by the mailboxes in a series of jump cuts that indicate the passage of time and establishes the routine. This is followed or intermixed with jump cuts of the names on the mailbox changing every time Clay walks through the foyer.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

CLAY

(To Prospect #3; a little tipsy)
Can I buy you a drink?Or did you just want
the money?

JUMP TO:

CLAY

(To Prospect #4; tipsier)
Well I may not be your type, but I'm the only one
talkin' to you, aren't I?

INT. OUTSIDE LENA'S APARTMENT DOOR - DAY.

Clay knocks on Lena's door. Before the door even opens he has his hand out in shaking position and a ridiculously pleasant smile plastered on his face. The door opens and he overwhelms the new guy with a pleasant meet-and-greet. Before Drew can escape down the stairs, Clay calls him back to kiss the new guy good-bye. Drew is confused. The new guy is more confused. The new guy just shakes Drew's hand instead.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

In the distance, we see Clay working some young thing at the bar. Closer to camera we have Vincent, Joey, Baxter, Ned, and Jack are crowded in a booth, tipping beers and shooting the bull.

NED

Okay, so if you had your own band, what would
you call it?

BAXTER

Will Travel and the Have Guns.

VINCENT

Pass.

JOEY

Hot Peppa Cheese, with two "e"s.

JACK

Prophets Without Honor.

BAXTER

You wouldn't sell any records domestically...

JACK

...but we'd kill overseas! That's the beauty of it!

Clay returns to table, limping from rejection.

BAXTER

Any news from the Front, soldier?

CLAY

Cold front, more like it.

JACK

You know, Clay, you just might be trying a little too hard.

CLAY

Somethin'. Somethin'.

NED

Naw, he's just in a slump. Clay is the master of the cold pickup, remember?

JACK

That was five years ago. I'm sure that in his day, Baxter was the master of the white glove cotillion dance pick up.

BAXTER

Jack is right. Jack is an asshole, but Jack is right. Times have changed. Women aren't the same creatures they were in your college days, Clay.

JACK

You can't be a player.

CLAY

You should talk.

VINCENT

You have to recognize them as something other than sex objects.

CLAY

You should talk.

NED

You have to be non-threatening.

CLAY

You... okay. I'll buy that.

NED

What's that supposed to mean?

STUNNING WAITRESS

Last call, gentlemen.

CLAY

How long have we been coming here?

WAITRESS

As long as I've been working here.

CLAY

And what have we always ordered at last call.

WAITRESS

Seven shots of Scotch... for six people. You know, I've always wanted to ask...

CLAY

And after all this time, I have no idea what your name is.

WAITRESS

Blythe.

CLAY

Is that really it? That's not your fake name for working hours.

BLYTHE

Yes, that's my real name.

CLAY

Well, Blythe, I have never tried to pick up a complete stranger in my entire life, but if you are half as beautiful on the inside as you are outside, then I would be a complete coward not to pass along my number and an invitation to meet me somewhere for dinner sometime.

Blythe takes business card. She's a little stunned.

BLYTHE

Uh, I... I don't know... I...

CLAY

It's just dinner. It in no way obligates you to exchange bodily fluids, or anything.

BLYTHE

Okay. I'll call you. Look, I'm off as soon as I get you guys out the door and get my stations cleaned up. Maybe we could get some coffee?

CLAY

Coffee is good.

BLYTHE

Well, I better get your drinks.

Blythe skitters away.

VINCENT

Well. That worked much better than the one about 'having the lips of a suck-artist in a Tijuana pony show.'

CLAY

This is a good chance for a celebratory drink.

BAXTER

As much as this would be a good time to christen the goodship USS Claygetsome, perhaps we should toast Jack's news instead.

JACK

I'm... erm... I'm getting married.

ALL SAVE JACK AND BAXTER
Blythe! Doubles! Make those doubles!

CUT TO:

INT. CLAY'S NEW APARTMENT - MORNING

Clay awakens to the sound of loud lovemaking. He lies in bed for a few moments, blinking. He snaps awake. He turns to check the bed beside him. It is rumpled but empty.

Feet briskly walking....

Clay walks into the living room. The bed is not the only new addition to the apartment. Drew sits on a modest couch, oblivious to the sex on the television. Drew reads a supermarket tabloid and snacks on cold pizza from a box he has dragged to the couch.

Clay sits on the couch. He watches the TV for a moment. He pulls a piece of pizza from the box and takes a bite.

CLAY

I see you figured out how to work the VCR.

DREW

Sure. It's easy.

CLAY

Pizza's cold. Don't you know how to work the microwave? Uh... Not that 'Gang Bang Girl' isn't quality cinema, or anything... But I was wonderin' if you would mind if I watched some... Cartoons or something?

DREW

Sure.

Slow zoom to Clay's face as he channel surfs through the following audio montage:

BARNEY VOICE

Well, Shaniqua, not every family has a daddy, but you and your mommy are still a family.

(static)

FOGHORN LEGHORN VOICE

I say... I say there Widda', what the boy needs is a man to show him how. Why he'll have that old merit badge in no time. Say... I believe I smell something burnin'... YEE-OWW!

(static)

READING TIME WOMAN

...And then the Poppa Bear said, (gruffly) 'This bed is toooo full! You cubs get back to your own bed!' So Mama bear walked them back to their bed, tucked them in, and kissed them each on the nose.

(static)

FLINTSTONE BARNEY VOICE

I don't know, Fred, we're supposed to stay here and watch the kids.

FLINTSTONE FRED VOICE

I've got a plan! We can leave the kids locked in the oven, and then we can sneak to the lodge and...

(static)

BASSO PROFUNDO

Thank you, Cyberwoman! You saved my life again!

CYBERWOMAN

No problem, Cyberman. Just remember to use your head next time before you...

TV is turned off.

CLAY

On second thought, why don't we walk to the grocery store and get some donuts.

DREW

Can I get a newspaper?

CLAY

The Globe is not a newspaper.

INT. GROCERY STORE - LATER THAT DAY.

Clay has a bag of donuts under one arm and a jug of orange juice in the other. He unloads in front of Caitland's register.

CLAY

Hey. How are ya' today?

CAIT

Hmm.

CLAY

Man, you work a lot of hours, don't you? You're here almost every time I come.

CAIT

Yeah. Gotta pay for college. \$5.25.

CLAY

Look. I'm sorry if I was a little pushy last time. I'm getting divorced and I am a little rusty with the tact thing. The truth is that I've never tried to pick up a complete stranger in my entire life, and I was just thinking that if you were half as beautiful on the inside as you are on the outside, then I would be a complete...

CAIT

Jesus! Why is this so hard to understand? I am one of the few things in this store that isn't for sale! Okay? Do you understand? To make sure that I am being perfectly clear, I will speak slowly and I'll use small words... No!

Clay is mortified at the stares from other patrons.

CAIT

Seventy-five cents is your change.

CLAY

Keep it. Buy yourself some Ex-lax. Maybe you can dislodge that big old bug you have stuck up your ass.

INT. JACK'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

A crowded party is underway. Clay and several others are piled in a small kitchen.

CLAY

I can't talk you out of this?

JACK

No way. I am tired of the bar scene. I just tired of the game. She's going to make a great lawyer's wife. And what about that waitress of yours?

CLAY

Blythe.

NED

Yeah. I saw her walking around here. Is that dress legal?

CLAY

She's not all that she seems.

NED

Well, she seems to be all that I could ask for.

CLAY

Yeah. Well. She does have a body like Disneyland, no doubt. But she's got an attitude that would sour Jell-o sometimes.

JACK

Has Lena seen her?

CLAY

Made sure of that!

BAXTER

Well, she's served her purpose then, hasn't she?

BLYTHE

I'm ready to go.

CLAY

Blythe, we just got here.

BLYTHE

This isn't my idea of how I was going to spend my night off. No offense.

JACK

None taken.

BLYTHE

C'mon.

CLAY

Honey, I came to spend some time with my friends.

BLYTHE

Well, unless you are planning on sleeping with one of *them* tonight, get your coat and meet me at the car.

NED

Wow. Could you just hold my beer for a moment? It's a little warm.

Blythe walks off. Clay chases after her and words are exchanged by the door.

JACK

What do you make of that, Bax?

NED

Clay sure can pick 'em.

BAXTER

Let that be a lesson to you boys. It's the Whitey Herzog syndrome.

Joey arrives to conversation.

JOEY

What about Whitey Herzog?

BAXTER

You remember him?

JACK

Yeah. Manager for the Cardinals in the '80s. Three pennants and a World Series.

BAXTER

But when he was a player, a lot of people don't know that he was the backup centerfielder for the Yankees behind a man you might have heard of named Mickey Mantle. Not having the raw talent that Mantle did, Herzog had to put a lot of thinking power into the mechanics of everything he did... just to compete. That's what made him such a great manager. He understood the game on a higher level.

JOEY

Baxter, I have no idea where you are going with this one.

BAXTER

Really good looking women are like Mickey Mantle. They don't have to think about how to make things work, because there is always a line of guys that want them just to be seen with a ten. It's your sevens and eights that know how to make a relationship work. They have to think about what it takes to compete with the Blythes of the world.

We see Blythe storm out. Clay rejoins his friends.

CLAY

Don't ask.

JACK

Look at it this way: your rebound woman is always doomed to failure. Now, with that out of the way, you can look forward to better times.

NED

Uh... Does she need a ride home? What? I was just going to call her a cab! That's all! I love Whitey Herzog!

CLAY

Ned, you are scaring me.

TIME LAPSE:

The party is slowing down. A few couples slow dance. Ned leans on Joey in drunken stupor.

NED

You and me....

JOEY

Me and you.

NED

You and me.... Us....

CLAY

(to Baxter)

Well, that's my cue to get these boys home. Once they lose the ability to conjugate verbs, Mr. Sawdust bucket can't be far behind.

BAXTER

I really wish you'd reconsider, Clay. It isn't too late for me to step in as your attorney.

CLAY

There's three days before court day. And I'm already in debt to my lawyer up to my eyeballs.

BAXTER

We'd work something out, you know that.

CLAY

(irritated)

I am no charity case, Baxter. Unlike these two.

JOEY

Together....

NED

All the way....

JOEY

Forever and ever...

NED

Till death do us part...

JOEY

Fuck that. I'm not that committed to *anything*.

CLAY

C'mon guys. Time to go home.

JOEY

What if I don't want to go home?

NED

Yeah, what if we want to go out for a beer or two?

CLAY

What if pigs flew out my ass?

NED

Well that'd be enough to make *me* convert to Muslim. H'bout you Joey?

EXT. PARK - DAY

Drew and Clay nosh on tacos.

CLAY

You know, kiddo, whatever happens... I am doing all I can to stay with you. If the judge doesn't let me see you, it isn't because I didn't try.

DREW

I know. I wish I could stay with you.

CLAY

Don't pretend you don't love your mom. I don't lie to you and I don't want you lying to me.

DREW

Mom has been acting weird. I never knew I had so many uncles. Are you going to get divorced again?

CLAY

You mean 'am I going to get married again'?

DREW

No. I mean divorced. Like Liz Taylor. She's been divorced nine times. Roseanne has only been divorced three, but she's not as old as Liz.

CLAY

Well, Liz also survived brain cancer. She obviously has a super-human tragedy threshold.

DREW

Why do people get divorced over and over and over. It's bad right?

CLAY

Buddy, it is just about the worst thing that can happen to someone.

DREW

So why does anybody do it nine times?

CLAY

People just don't learn from their mistakes, I guess.

DREW

Why not?

CLAY

Because deep down people are too lazy and stupid to change the parts inside them that need changing.

DREW

But you said that people *could* change, remember.

CLAY

I.... Well, what I was... Drew, just eat your taco.

CUT TO:

INT. COURTHOUSE - "D" DAY.

Clay walks down the courthouse hallway, dressed in the best suit he owns, looking for the right courtroom. He stumbles on Lena, dressed to the nines, catching the eye of every man that walks by. One of these men sits down beside her and opens his briefcase. We realize that this man is her lawyer about the same time Lena reaches up and obviously strokes his shoulder flirtatiously.

Dan walks in, a little disheveled and vary harried.

DAN

There you are! I just had a couple of questions before we go in.

Dan opens briefcase, shuffles through a wad of papers.

CLAY

You smell like a barroom urinal. What the hell is wrong with you?

DAN

You didn't pay for me to smell good. You paid for my brain. Speaking of which, I'm going to need some more money. You bring your checkbook?

CLAY

Do I get a reduced rate if that brain I am paying for is pickled?

DAN

Very funny. Here it is. What is Laura's Middle Name?

CLAY

Lena.

DAN

Laura Lena?

CLAY

No. Her first name is Lena. Her middle name is Michelle.

DAN

Then who is Laura?

CLAY

I don't know. Maybe she's the one you're seeing in your double vision.

DAN

No. Laura is your daughter. Right?

CLAY

Daughter? I have a son. And his name isn't Laura either. What the hell is wrong with you?

DAN

Don't go getting jumpy on me. This is the moment of truth here. Are you going to help me out here? Help *us* out here? This isn't the time for bullshit, Clay. Just give me what I am asking for.

CLAY

Am I going to help *you*? Help *you*? Dan, what am I supposed to say to that? The only thing that I have that is worth fighting for is on the line, and you can't even remember that he is a boy, much less his name? What.... what am I supposed to say to that?

Baxter appears behind Clay

BAXTER

Tell him he's fired.

DAN

Baxter! Mrs. McCutcheon hired you?

BAXTER

No, Dan. I am not opposing you.

DAN

Thank God.

BAXTER

I am replacing you.

DAN

What?

CLAY

What?

BAXTER

You're fired.

DAN

You can't fire me.

BAXTER

No. But he can. Clay, fire him.

CLAY

Uhh... I... er.. I.... You're fired.

DAN

Uh-huh. That's fine. That's just dandy. You're still getting billed for my time. So much for professional courtesy.....

Baxter walks Clay aside.

CLAY

Uh... Baxter, I can't afford you, man. You know that.

BAXTER

Consider it a rare pro-bono from this old mercenary.

CLAY

It still means that I'm going to owe you and I don't....

BAXTER

Son, time is short. Shut up. We've but minutes before we're called to get our ducks in a row.

CLAY

But you don't have any of the paperwork. The disclosures....

BAXTER

I don't need 'em. We're not going in the courtroom.

CLAY

Huh?

BAXTER

What does the magic worksheet put your child support at?

CLAY

About \$580. But there is no way that I can afford...

BAXTER

You are going to offer her \$800 a month. She's going to give you joint custody and 50% visitation.

CLAY

No, that's why I'm here, I...

BAXTER

I'll get as much of that as I can moved into day care, so when Drew turns nine or ten and becomes a latchkey kid, you can put that money back in your pocket.

CLAY

You aren't listening. I can't afford \$600. I sure as hell can't afford \$800. That is half of my take home.

BAXTER

No, you aren't listening. You've already lost, Clay. You lost when she filed. It is over. You are already out the \$600. Get over it. When two people divorce, there are suddenly two mortgages, two car payments, two sets of utilities, and the same amount of money to go between them. Somebody is going to be poor. A bunch of white guys in expensive suits have already decided that it's going to be you. I am telling you that for an extra \$200 a month, \$2,400 a year, you are going to get the chance to shape the person that your son becomes. Chump change, Clay. I don't care if it's 100% of your take home. It's chump change. He's a great kid, we know that. A big part of the reason that he is a great kid is because you spend so much time with him. If you go from spending every waking moment with him to four days a month, what kind of man is he going to be?

CLAY

What makes you so sure she'll go for it?

BAXTER

Oh trust me. She'll bite. The last thing a newly single mom needs is a kid tied around her neck. A whore isn't a whore because she likes the sex, Clay. A whore is a whore because she likes the money.

CLAY

I came here to fight, Baxter.

BAXTER

No. You came here to get crucified. And when we get in there and they start pounding the nails in your wrist, your fight is going to suddenly seem less and less romantic with every blow. I need to talk with her lawyer now. Once they call us, it's too late. Is that her? Is that her lawyer? Holy shit, is she doinking him too?

CLAY

Probably.

BAXTER

Man. That is going to make paying her legal fees that much more unbearable. The next time I get indignant about a lawyer joke, remind me of this, okay?

CLAY

I am thinking more about hurling than telling jokes right now.

BAXTER

Well indulge me one quicky: These three explorers get lost in the African jungle, and before they can find their way out, they are captured by Cannibal tribesman. So they are all three tied to a tree, and the Chieftain comes to them and says.... "You have a choice.... RuRu.... or death!" Well the chief points at the first guy, and even though he has no idea what RuRu is, he knows it's better than death, right? So he says "I'll take RuRu." And the chief shouts "RuRu!" and all of the tribesmen shout "RuRu!" . The take the guy to the middle of the village, strip his clothes off, tie him over a rock, and every one of 'em takes a turn sodomizing him. Well, when they're finished they tie him back to the tree with the others, and the Chief points at the second guy. Well, now they know what RuRu is, but the second guy knows that it's better than death, so he picks RuRu. Chief shouts "RuRu!" The tribesmen all shout "RuRu!". They take him out to the rock. Same thing. Every man takes a turn sodomizing him. So then they come to the third guy. And this guy is a proud man. He looks the chieftain straight in the eye and says "I'll take death!" The chief is a little surprised. He looks around at all of his tribesmen.... And then he shouts...

CLAY

"Death by RuRu."

BAXTER

Yep. Death by RuRu. What's it going to be, Clay? RuRu? Or death by RuRu? This is your chance to control the fall.

CLAY

I have to fight, Baxter. I have to. I have the letters. I have what she did to me with that Mike guy. No judge is going to let her get away with that.

Baxter sighs and shakes his head. The clerk calls a list of names that includes McCutcheon. Baxter stands.

BAXTER

Nobody cares, Clay. It's a no-fault divorce state. It isn't going to be what you think it's going to be. You never were much of a gambler. It surprises the hell out of me that you would put your kid's future on the line on such long odds. Showtime, friend.

Clay grabs Baxter's arm.

CLAY

(falling apart)

Wait! Do it. Do what you have to do. Give her anything. Give her everything I have, but don't let them take my son away from me. (panicked)
Baxter! Don't let her take Drew away from me.
Oh god, Anything.....

EXT. COURTHOUSE - LATER THAT DAY.

Baxter and Clay step outside the court house. Clay is destroyed.

BAXTER

Well, that could have been a hell of a lot worse. You are going to be poor as hell, Clay, I don't envy you. But you are going to have your kid enough to play a meaningful part in the person he'll become. Look, Jesus. You got that look of betrayal all over your face.

BAXTER (cont.)

Knowin' what I know about human nature, I know some of that betrayal belongs to Lena, some of it belongs to the system that just sold you out, and I know some of it is pointed at me because I couldn't single-handedly make a bad system right for you. So why am I wasting my breath trying to make you understand? Because the day *will* come when you understand. One day you will understand the value of what we did today. *All* time that you have to spend with your kid is finite. The number of kisses are finite. The number of sticky pictures that he'll draw for you are countable. The number of times he'll make you smile with that goofy little way he giggles... that's numbered. The number of times he'll crawl into bed with you after a bad dream are... what is he, five? Hell, at this point you can count those on one hand. Every day that we will spend with any one person that matters is counted. Write the checks and then go in the other room and blow on his little belly until he squeals like a sissy. The day *will* come when you understand why I did it this way, Clay.

Baxter brightens.

I have no intention of letting that day pass without tweaking your nose and telling you 'I told you so', either. Look, I've got something for you.

Baxter holds up a tightly sealed baggy containing two cigars.

Cubitos! Don't ask me how I got 'em. You ever smoke a Cuban before? No? Well let me tell you brother, it is as good as it gets. Like a chocolate blow-job. Smooth and sweet. Now I'm going to give them both to you, but the deal is that we are both going to smoke one when the clouds have cleared.

The day will come when you are so ready to smoke yours, that you will be forced to come and convince me that you understand that we did the right thing today. Promise me? Promise me that we will smoke these together?

Clay nods, sobs. Baxter moves to embrace him, soft

BAXTER (cont.)

You are in for a lot of dime-store advice, kid. And here is mine: It does get better. It *does* get better.

FADE OUT.

SCREEN TITLE: "As friction increases, the coefficient of a bounce decreases, reducing the length of the rebound."

$$V_2 = E * V_1$$

FADE IN.

INT. GROCERY STORE — NIGHT

Drew watches Clay load a hand basket up with several tubs of ice cream. They walk.

DREW

Is that all you are going to get, Dad?

CLAY

Of course not. Man does not live by Hagandaaz alone.

Clay picks up a bottle of Scotch from an endcap and drops it in the basket.

CLAY

There. That should do it!

Clay and Drew walk past several checkout lines that are densely populated. They stop just short of the express line that is empty. Cait waits behind the register. They make eye contact.

Clay steps instead into a long line next to the express aisle.

DREW

Dad. That line is empty.

CLAY

Not now, Drew.

DREW

But dad...

CLAY

Enough!

DREW

That one has the best looking checker, remember?

Clay cringes. From her position, Cait hears this and softens a little. She pulls the microphone to her face.

CAIT OVER PA

No waiting on twelve for customers with ten items or less.

Clay pretends to ignore her.

CAIT OVER PA

There is absolutely no waiting... no waiting whatsoever... on aisle twelve for *any* customer with ten items or less.

Clay shifts nervously. Drew looks from Clay to Cait.

CAIT OVER PA AGAIN

Look, Hormone boy! If that ice cream melts on my floor, I'm going to stick a pole up your blow hole and use you for a mop.

Clay embarrassedly hurries to Cait's line to shut her up.

CAIT

(smiling)

Did you find everything you were looking for today?

CLAY

Everything except my dignity.

Cait looks at the contents of the basket and laughs.

CAIT

Are you sure? I think Midol is on sale. Look. I'm sorry I came down a little hard on you last time. This is one of those jobs that really makes you hate humanity, you know?

CLAY

'Sokay. I shouldn't have.... I was an asshole. I don't have an excuse.

CAIT

Neither do I.

CLAY

You don't have to be sorry about...

CAIT

Oh yes I do. In the last two months I must have had a hundred male customers flirt with me. And I go and snap on the one that most intrigued me.

Clay opens his mouth. Nothing comes out.

CLAY

I have a feeling that I am supposed to respond to that, but at this point, I'd rather not walk that plank.

Drew rounds corner holding up a tabloid.

DREW

Dad! Look! Oprah's skinny again!

CAIT

He's a doll.

CLAY

Yeah. He's really good company.

CAIT

Tell you what, can you bear chamber music?

CLAY

Sure. I'm a glutton for punishment.

CAIT

Tomorrow night at the university courtyard I am having a kind of a recital. I could use a couple pairs of hands clapping for me.

CLAY

I don't have Drew tomorrow. What time does it start?

EXT. OPEN AIR COURTYARD AT UNIVERSITY - DUSK

Music is playing. Clay is late. He weaves his way through couples on blankets strewn across the grassy courtyard. He works his way close to the risers that compose the stage. He takes a position standing by a column close to the stage. Song ends. All clap. Cait, playing cello, begins her solo; slow and moving. The other three instruments chirp in the background. Cait is magical in her musical rapture. The moment and the music envelope a wide-eyed Clay, who is rapidly entranced at the beauty of Cait and the concerto.

Cait sees him out of the corner of his eye and smiles.

She plays.

Clay swoons.

She plays.

Clay swoons.

The Cello is between her knees. One hand sweeps the bow across the strings while the other playfully tickles at the neck. Her head rocks between drooped concentration and arched ecstasy.

XFADE to bird's eye view of Cait's bed.—Moonlit. Music continuing.

Clay's hips are between her knees. One hand sweeps the low across Clay's nude, rocking backside while the other playfully tickles at the back of Clay's neck. Her head rocks between drooped concentration and arched ecstasy.

Tender sex unfolds to end of music.

Cait rolls off Clay. Splays herself across her side of the bed.

CAIT

Oh god, I shouldn't have done that.

CLAY

Wait a minute or two before you start having regrets, okay? You'll give a guy a complex.

CAIT

I'm going to hate myself in the morning.

CLAY

So, in that case we'll sleep to noon. What's life without risk, anyway?

(beat)

CAIT

Nerf?

INT. CAIT'S MODEST KITCHEN— THE NEXT MORNING.

Clay has rummaged some breakfast cereal fixings together. Cait walks in, grabs a banana and starts unwrapping it.

CLAY

Oh god. Don't you ever get enough?

CAIT

You can take the boy out of sixth grade....

CLAY

Everything okay this morning?

CAIT

Yeah. Fine.

CLAY

Fine?

CAIT

Yeah. What?

CLAY

Fine?

CAIT
Everything is... What's with you?

CLAY
Nothing. I just thought last night was pretty
incredible.

CAIT
Yeah. It was good.

CLAY
Good?

CAIT
Clay!

CLAY
Good. It was *swell*. How about nifty? Could you
spot me a nifty maybe.

CAIT
(laughs)
Clay, it was wonderful. *You* were wonderful,
okay? Just...

CLAY
What?

CAIT
Nothing.

CLAY
What?

CAIT
Just... Just that I guess I read you wrong, that's
all.

CLAY
Don't stop now.

CAIT

I just thought that you were more of a badboy, that's all. I'm usually never wrong about these kinds of things. I thought you would be more the animal lay and.... and I was wrong. You were really sweet. And gentle. And tender.

CLAY

But just *good* tender? Just *fine* gentle?

Cait laughs and moves into Clay's lap. She kisses his nose.

CAIT

Look. All I am saying is that I'm not glass. You can't break me.

Clay is absolutely stunned and confused.

CLAY

Soco... what you're saying is that I was too gentle? Jesus. I am never going to understand women!

CAIT

What did I stumble into here? Did your wife complain that you were too rough, or something?

CLAY

Uh.... no. Not exactly.

CAIT

Not exactly?

CLAY

She never said anything.

CAIT

Did she get off?

CLAY

Like a roman candle.

CAIT

Then what's the problem?

CLAY

I... I.... I don't know.

CAIT

She make you feel guilty about animal sex?

CLAY

I guess.

CAIT

Well, some women feel guilty about liking it. You left it in the bedroom didn't you?

CLAY

What?

CAIT

You didn't go around mistreating her the rest of the day just because you were wild in the sack?

CLAY

Oh, oh no. No. Uh-huhn. No, I left it in the bedroom.

CAIT

Well you are who you are. Nothing wrong with that as long as everyone is consenting. Just don't forget to bring bad boy Clay over to play every once in a while.

They kiss. Clay stands up, Cait still attached. He begins clearing off the table with her as he kisses her.

CLAY

Anything that strikes your fancy.

CAIT

(naughty, between kisses)

Ohh! And lord knows that I'm a girl that likes her fancy struck every once in a while.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Clay and Cait sit on a Park bench watching Drew play on a jungle gym.

CLAY

So what is your number one "tee"?

CAIT

Tea? You mean... like Chamomile?

CLAY

No. You know.... relationship "te"s..... Honesty,
Fidelity.....

CAIT

Oh. I don't know. Fidelity is up there. But we'll
just take that one as read, won't we?

Cait pinches his leg to make her point

CLAY

(in pain)

Yes! Absolutely!

CAIT

Well then, as a woman, I would have to lean
toward spontaneity. If you stay spontaneous
enough, you never have to worry about a woman's
fidelity.

Clay looks at her with disdain.

CAIT

Okay, so I'll just speak for myself. And what
about you? I am guessing that you are a fidelity
man, at this point in your life.

CLAY

Actually no. I have made peace with the fact that
I'm never going to really have any meaningful say
over what someone else does with their engorged
genitalia. No, I guess my number one thing would
have to be loyalty.

CAIT

Interesting. Especially coming from a cat guy.
Your freinds are pretty loyal. You told me what
Vince did.

CLAY

Yeah. Well as it turns out, Vince was doing her too.

CAIT

Ouch. Does he know you know?

CLAY

No. I figure she's replaceable. He isn't.

CAIT

What about your parents? Your mom?

Clay laughs.

CAIT

I forgot. Your Dad is still alive, isn't he?

CLAY

Now that is the really funny part. I called my dad. I actually called the man that left my mother for a flight attendant for advice about loyalty and fidelity. Can you believe that?

CAIT

And?

CLAY

And he says to me: 'Oh, like you never cheated on her before.'

CAIT

And did you ever?

CLAY

I did not. Although to be perfectly honest, I guess I thought about it every day we were together.

CAIT

Yes. You are a guy, aren't you?

CLAY

No, it wasn't sex. Well, okay, it wasn't *just* sex. I was wanting for something.

CAIT

And that would be....

CLAY

You, apparently. It's like I was homesick for a place I'd never been. It was you. You feel like home.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

The gang is seated around their usual table.

CLAY

Gentlemen, I'd like you to meet a friend of mine. Caitland, the guys. Guys, Caitland.

BAXTER

And how do you do?

CAIT

Hello.

All stare for a minute.

CLAY

What?

VINCENT

Nothin'.

NED

No one has ever brought a girl to guy's night. That's all.

JOEY

Ned! You asshole.

NED

Hey, I'm not complaining. I am just stating a fact.

CAIT

Maybe I should go....

BLYTHE

Are you ready to order now?

ALL

(evil smiles)

No! No! Stay!

BAXTER

Drafts all the way around. (To Cait) Or did you want something fru-fru?

CAIT

No! Beer sounds great!

BLYTHE

Did you want all those in mugs, or did you need a bowl?

NED

Five bucks says she spits in our beer.

VINCENT

Hey. I have no problem with that whatsoever!

JOEY

Hell, I'd drink her bathwater!

Laughter bursts out and then stops abruptly at the realization that Cait is at the table.

CAIT

Hey, if I had a rack like that, you can bet it'd never get dusty.

BAXTER

Uh, Before you arrived, Caitland, Ned was just boring us with his Republican dogma.

CAIT

Oh yeah?

NED

It's not about politics. It's about accountability. Prisoners today are treated like vacationers. More prisons, less parole. Drop 'em on an island and let 'em kill each other for all I care. You can't let 'em back out when you know they're going to commit even more heinous crimes than ones they were sent away for.

JACK

Now there's an interesting idea. We could reduce the cost of a prison by not buying locks or hinges for the doors. We'll just weld 'em in there!

NED

Fine by me.

BAXTER

And what is justice without mercy?

NED

Mercy schmercy. Screw mercy!

VINCENT

Mercy me!

NED

Hard Labor! That's what prison should be about. Chain gangs should be mandatory. Some kind of labor. Sewing clothes, fixing cars. Busting rocks, hell I don't care.

BAXTER

Cait?

CAIT

What?

BAXTER

I thought I saw your eye twinkling. What do you think?

CAIT

Well, first of all, you can't have forced prison labor.

NED

Another bleeding heart.

CAIT

No. I'm not talking about the prisoners. I am talking about the small business men that the prison labor puts out of business.

JACK

Go on.

CAIT

When you only have to pay slave wages to your labor force, you cripple the legitimate construction contractor that can't competitively bid on roadwork anymore. You put all those little old toothless ladies that used to be sewing uniforms out on the street.

Regardless of what kind of law and order hard-on you sport, the last thing you want to do is help a criminal make more victims.

VINCENT

She has a point, Ned.

NED

Okay, I don't hear you offering a solution to crime.

CLAY

That may be because you haven't asked her yet. Darlin'?

BAXTER

By all means.

CAIT

Well, the first question you have to ask is 'What is the purpose of prison; to punish or to reform?'

NED

To punish!

VINCENT

To reform.

JACK and JOEY

Both.

CAIT

Yes. Ideally it is both. But... well... You ever see those washer and driers that are combined into one unit?

VINCENT

Sure.

CAIT

Well, my mom always wanted one of those. Our house was really small... *is* really small. Anyway. My dad always said (gruffly) 'Any machine that does two jobs does neither one of them well.'

NED

I'm sorry. I was talking about crime, honey. We were talking about social issues. We can talk about laundry when we're sitting with your friends okay? What are you staring at?

CAIT

Just wondering how many angels could dance on that pin-head of yours.

All laugh and hoot.

BAXTER

So you think that the prison system is trying to do two jobs and doing them both poorly.

BAXTER

I'm sorry. I was talking about crime, honey. We were talking about social issues. We can talk about laundry when we're sitting with your friends okay? What are you staring at?

CAIT

Right. That's why we should have a two tier system. Punishment prisons and reform prisons. P and R prisons. When the judge hands you your sentence, he gives you so much P prison, and so much R prison. You get caught doing drugs, you do your entire time in a reform prison, getting help. You're a serial killer, you do your entire time in a P prison. And to appease the Carl's of this world, we make the Punishment prisons a bad place to be. Let your bleeding heart liberals try out their psychology du jour in the reform prisons. Armed robbery?

Twelve years in P prison, eight in R prison, learning to do something other than rob people.

All look at Cait in reverence.

Of course, that's just my girlie opinion. Ask me how to make the wash smell lemon-fresh, and I can speak with a little more authority.

CUT TO:

EXT. OUTSIDE BAR - LATER THAT NIGHT

BAXTER

Where'd she go?

CLAY

Bathroom.

BAXTER

Ah. She really *is* a woman, then.

CLAY

She's something else, isn't she? Curls my toes in the bedroom and keeps me on 'em the rest of the time. I never thought I'd find the woman that took me to school like she does.

BAXTER

Hmmm. Yes. I am impressed, Clay. She's quite a catch. I can almost taste those Cubans now! What say, Clay? You have half of your kid's heart. You have a fine, intelligent mate. How about we have that smokage now?

CLAY

Baxter, I have a kid that doesn't know where his home is, who lives out of a suitcase. And that intelligent woman works two jobs to support herself, and still has to pick up the tab tonight, and feed me when I'm penniless, and feed Drew when I have him and I am penniless.

I should be able to spoil her, and still, she is the one carrying me so that fucking blood-sucking tick cancer of an ex-wife of mine can buy a big-screen TV one month, and a stereo the next, and a Soloflex the next, do I need to go on? Because it is starting to look like the showroom floor at SEARS over there and I don't have enough money to FUCKING FEED MYSELF okay?

Joey and Vincent stumble out onto the street.

JOEY

Yeah, why didn't we never have girls at guy's night out, anyway.

VINCENT

Because then we can't make titty jokes.

JOEY

Yeah, but *she* started with the titty jokes.

CLAY

Where is Ned?

JOEY

Puking his guts up.

CLAY

Oh shit. I told him not to try and match her drink for drink.

Cait bounces out, smiling, bright-eyed, and completely sober.

CAIT

Hey! Where to next?

INT. CLAY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Clay and Cait tuck Drew into bed and then quick-foot down the hall into Clay's room. Clay launches himself into bed. Cait hovers playfully near the door.

CAIT

I have a question. Why did you order that one extra shot before we left? The one you guys just left there on the table?

CLAY

(buzzer sound)

Arrrrrrrk! Sorry, times up, but thank you for playing. B'tch! Get yo' ass in the bed.

CAIT

(sternly)

Hey! Don't you call me bitch... ever!

CLAY

I didn't call you bitch. I called you b'tch. There is a world of difference between the two, lemme tell ya'.

CAIT

Clay, do you know what a misogynist is?

CLAY

Sho', baby! I'll rub your shoulders. Now get yo' ass on the bed.

CAIT

(180 degrees)

Well, allrighty then!

Cait launches herself onto the bed.

CAIT

So, Mr. B'tch Master, talk dirty to me.

Clay kisses on her and whispers naughties in her ear.

CAIT

No. Not porno dirty. But forceful...

CLAY

Forceful.....

CAIT

Forceful, but enlightened.

CLAY
(Stops cold)

Enlightened?

CAIT
You know, romantic. Like one of those bodice-ripper romance novels.

CLAY
Since when are trashy romance novels enlightened? You want Shakespeare, or do you want Porn.

CAIT
Both! C'mon. You're breaking the mood.

Clay grab's the back of Cait's hair.

CLAY
"I have begun, And now I give my sensual race the reign: Fit thy consent to my sharp appetite; Lay by all nicety and prolixious blushes that banish what they sue for. Redeem thyself by yielding up thy body to my will." Does that work?

CAIT
(impressed)
Oh that works just fine.

Cait attacks.

CUT TO:

INT. JOEY'S APARTMENT - DAY

All the friends and collective girlfriends are crowded around a television set. A football game is on, and much ruckus ensues in the living room.

Joey's girlfriend (wearing clothes) rises from Joey's lap.

JOEY'S GIRL
Who needs another beer?

Several hands go up about the room. Clay springs up.

CLAY

Lemme give you a hand with that, Shell.

KITCHEN.

Clay helps Michelle uncap beers, place them on a tray, and fills a chip bowl.

CLAY

You've really done a great job cleaning this place up, Shell.

JOEY'S GIRL

Thanks, Clay.

Michelle starts to run water to wash the dishes.

CLAY

Hang on a sec. I'll get those dishes for you in just a sec.

Clay leaves to distribute beer. Cait pops into kitchen for a glass of water.

JOEY'S GIRL

Good lord, girl. What did you do to him?
Electroshock?

CAIT

I don't understand?

JOEY'S GIRL

Clay was always the type that thought of women often, but rarely thought much of them. "Dishes is woman's work." And now I hardly recognize him. You must have really rocked his world.

CAIT

Well, the whole caveman attitude has cost him pretty dearly. Maybe it was electroshock, but it wasn't at my hand.

Cheering breaks out in the living room; Much hooting and whistling.

LIVING ROOM.

CAIT
What are you dogs barkin' at?

VINCENT
The all redheaded bikini pom pom squad is on!

CAIT
Oh. Of course!

She notices Clay's attention is a little too enwrapped in the television.

CAIT
What are you looking at?

CLAY
(dopey look)
Nuthin'.

CAIT
Are you scammin' on those cheerleaders?

CLAY
Huh?

Cait grabs his ear and twists, playfully, but not completely playful.

CAIT
Are you scammin' right here in front of me?

CLAY
OW! What? No.

CAIT
You're scammin! Aren't you?

CLAY
No! Aieee! I mean, yes...

CAIT
You're scammin' on those bimbos.

CLAY
Ow. Yes.

Say it. CAIT

I'm scammin... Arrgh! CLAY

"on bimbos" CAIT

But honey, they're redheads.... AIIIIIIII! I'm scamming' on bimbos. CLAY

And what are you? CAIT

What? OW! CLAY

You're a scammer, aren't you? Say it! CAIT

I'm a scammer! CLAY

And I suppose you'd leave me to have one of those bimbos as a trophy girlfriend, huh? CAIT

But honey, *you are* my trophy girlfriend! CLAY

Cait thinks about this for a second. Then she plants a kiss on Clay that knocks him to the floor and out of frame, revealing Vincent and Ned on the couch who have been watching this scene without expression.

Vincent looks down at the couple rolling on the floor.

VINCENT
(to Ned)
Sort of makes you re-think that whole "pussy-whipped" thing, didn't it?

CUT TO:

BLACKNESS

CLAY

You know. You've inspired me.

CAIT

(sleepy)

Of course.

CLAY

No. I mean it. I am so tired of counting my pennies just to feed Drew and I. Not to mention that I would like to have a little money to spend on you.

CAIT

Oh god. Not the thing about selling your kidney again?

CLAY

No. I am going to get a second job and try and go back to school and get my Masters.

CAIT

Like we had too much time together as it was.

CLAY

I know. But I want to make a better life for Drew and me and you. You are supposed to be proud of me.

CAIT

I am proud of you.

CLAY

You are really, really amazing. You... You inspire me to be better than I thought I could be.

CAIT

Honey?

CLAY

Yes?

CAIT

Shut up and go to sleep.

CLAY

Of course, the fact that you can tie a shoelace with that box of yours doesn't hurt either.

CAIT

Every artist needs a grateful patron, honey.

INT. SHOE STORE - DAY

CLAY

I thought Baxter would be his best man.

JOEY

He was supposed to be, but Baxter has to go to the hospital for some kind of tests.

CLAY

Whatsupwidat?

JOEY

I don't know. Must be just routine maintenance, or somebody would have said something.

Joey picks up a woman's shoe with a huge Cuban heel.

JOEY

What's with these horrid women's shoes with the big, man's, shitkicking heel on them?

CLAY

That's the style man.

JOEY

Remember when women didn't dress like men?
Remember when most women had long hair?
Remember when women wore skirts?

CLAY

No.

JOEY

They don't even sell regular old-fashioned black patent fuck-me pumps here.

CLAY

Cait says women don't care what men find attractive any more. They're just dressing up for other women.

Joey looks at an egregious pair of Platforms.

JOEY

Somewhere in Greenwich Village right now, the queer who thought these up is laughing his ass off. So how's Caitland?

CLAY

She wants me to go to Chicago to meet her parents.

JOEY

Whoa! The 'rents, huh? Maybe I should get some kind of package deal on my tux?

CLAY

Fat chance. I just got divorced. There's no way I'm headed back down the aisle any time soon.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The friends and girlfriends are seated together. Organ music plays.

All turn to the outside aisle. The priest slowly bounces his way toward the front of the church, bible in hand, head high.

Jack trods two paces behind him, hands clasped in front of him, head down and a somewhat forlorn expression

CAIT

(just a bit too loud)

Dead man walkin'!

Friends titter and giggle. Shushess. Clay leans in to whisper to her.

CLAY

(smiling)

You know, I really *really* love you.

INT. RECEPTION HALL - DAY

People dance. Friends drink.

Cait excuses herself from dancing with Clay and Vincent to go to the bathroom.

BATHROOM.

Cait touches up her make-up in mirror. Joey's Girl comes up behind her.

JOEY'S GIRL

Some shindig, huh?

CAIT

It's wonderful.

JOEY'S GIRL

A girl could get used to this. I wonder if Joey could make it through law school. I'll be lucky if his grease-monkey goombah friends wear shirts to our wedding. So you and Clay are still an item, huh?

CAIT

So far, so good.

JOEY'S GIRL

I tell you, when he was married to Lena, he was the biggest sumbitch...

CAIT

Yes, Clay mentioned that there were some rough times and some things happened that he's not very proud of. Look, I know that the guy I'm dating isn't the guy you remember, but there's no real need for me to remember him that way if I wasn't there.

JOEY'S GIRL

Okay. Okay. I understand. It's just that.... Look. I only mention it because you seem like a nice girl, and I *do* remember the old Clay. But I don't want you to get your hopes up and get crushed.

CAIT

What are you talking about?

JOEY'S GIRL

Clay told Joey that there was no way that he was ever going to marry you. I just thought you should know that.

RECEPTION

Clay wisks Cait to dance floor for slow song. Cait manages a smile at Clay's broad, beaming smile to her. As she rests her head against his shoulder we see that she is troubled.

CUT TO:

INT. CAIT'S CAR - DAY

Music plays on the radio: Joan Osborne's "What if God Were One of us."

CAIT AND CLAY

(singing along)

Yeah. Yeah. God is great. Yeah. Yeah. God is good.

CLAY.

Le-et us tha-ank him for this food...

CAIT

Oh don't do that! It's a beautiful song.

CLAY

It's a pseudo-intellectual piece of crap. Any song that uses more than 50 "yeah"s should come with an epilepsy warning. I feel like Rainman. (imitating) Yeah. G-O-D. God is good., yeah.

CAIT

So what would you ask God if you had just one question?

CLAY

(thinks)

"What did I ever do to you?"

CAIT

No, really.

CLAY

I don't know. I never thought about it. What would you ask him? Her?

CAIT

I would ask him how to make love stay.

CLAY

Get outta here!

CAIT

What?

CLAY

That is such a chick thing to ask. Here you have the chance to unlock the secret of world peace, or a cure for cancer, or something *big*... and instead you ask something out of the advice column in Young Miss magazine.

CAIT

And that is such a guy reaction. Sooner or later, we are going to discover the cure for cancer on our own. And think of how laid back world leaders would be if finding the one you love was the end of your worries, and not just the beginning of them.

Clay thinks about this.

CLAY

You know... You're right. Saddam, Kim Young Sun, Pinochet... All they need is (fake sniff) the love of a good woman. (fake wailing sobs)

CAIT

Clay, were you born an asshole, or is this just something you've worked very hard at?

CLAY

Okay. I have my question.

CAIT

What?

CLAY

Can people really change?

CAIT

I don't understand.

CLAY

At our core... Can we really, fundamentally
change?

CAIT

Of course. Everybody grows. Everybody matures.
Well, almost everybody.

CLAY

No, see, you are talking about growth. Sure, as
we get older we grow more control, but that's just
another way of masking the face we present to the
world. I'm talking real change. I'm talking about
the person that we are to ourselves. After the age
of six, is our inner-voice fixed, or can it change?

CAIT

Hmmmmmm.

CLAY

Like, take someone really evil. Let's say that in
1945 the Russians had captured Hitler before he
offed himself. In 1990 he turns 90 in prison. In
prison, he finds God, or Allah, or Buddha, or
maybe he just mellows the fuck out. He is sitting
there in an interview with Barbara Walters...

CAIT

Crying?

CLAY

No. Not crying yet. But he looks in the camera
and says that he's sorry. He says that he's
changed. He is not up for parole or anything, and
he's sincere as hell. Has he changed? Do you
believe him?

CAIT

Not unless he cries.

CLAY

Okay, dammit, he starts bawling like a little girl. Could Hitler change? I am not asking if you forgive him, just your ability to accept that at 90 he might not be the person he was.

CAIT

Hmmmm. You picked an extreme example.

CLAY

I picked a pure example. If you could accept that Hitler had changed, you would have to accept that anyone could change, right?

CAIT

I don't know, Clay.

CLAY

I thought you knew everything?

CAIT

Is there no limit to how wrong you can be? (smiles) I'll think about it, though.

CLAY

Promise?

CAIT

Promise.

CLAY

So what did your folks say when you told them I was coming?

CAIT

Uhhmmmm..... I have been meaning to talk to you about that.

CLAY

Oh shit. I'm staying at a hotel.

CAIT

Now... Don't be so negative. This is going to work out.

CLAY

Why didn't you tell them I was coming?

CAIT

I didn't want to give my dad time to prepare.

CLAY

Prepare what?

CAIT

The dungeon. Okay, bad joke. He can just be a little overbearing sometimes. Okay, so he's an asshole. But he's my dad, and I want you to make this work. For me.

CLAY

Divorce lesson number twenty-two: One person can not, by sheer force of will, make a relationship work.

CAIT

Clay, I don't know much about your past. But I know that the man I am looking at is strong. Inside. And if that is a mask, you are damn good at mask making. And if you have to fake civility to my dad, I want you to fake it for all your worth. Promise me. Clay. Promise.

CLAY

Okay. Okay. I promise. How bad could it be?

EXT. OUTSIDE THE HOME OF CAIT'S PARENTS - DAY

Clay and Cait wait on the doorstep with a few pieces of luggage. Cait knocks. The window curtain on the door pulls back and a dour old man looks out; first at Cait, and then to Clay. The curtain falls slack. The moment drags on just a little too long.

The door opens. Cait steps up to hug the old man. He tepidly returns the gesture. Cait and her father step into the house. Clay bends over to pick up the suitcases and the door slams shut in front of him.

LAPSE CUT:

The door opens. Cait steps out. Clay is pacing restlessly by the car.

CAIT

I think things have settled down a little. Come on in.

CLAY

Gee Clay. Sorry about my dad slamming the door in your face. Gee, Clay. Sorry about leaving you outside in a strange neighborhood 300 miles from home. Hey sure, no problem.

CAIT

Clay, I am sorry, okay. But don't start. I can't handle two of you right now, and. You. Promised. Me.

CLAY

Yeah. Yeah. Let's go. Just don't leave me alone behind enemy lines, okay? Stick close.

INT. LIVING ROOM

CAIT

Mom, Pop. This is Clay. Clay and I....

DAD

Well, is he Catholic, or isn't he?

CAIT

Dad, I...

DAD

What the hell am I asking you for? Boy, are you Catholic or not?

Clay smiles and attempts a Scottish accent.

CLAY

Nay, sirrah. With a name lok McCutcheon? No-ah. Uhm a' Protestant, uv co-arse!

The attempt at humor thuds. Mom looks nervously at Dad.

MOM

Cait, honey, why don't you come help me get dinner ready.

CAIT

I'll be in in just a few, Mom.

DAD

Get your ass in the kitchen and help yer mother.

Cait does so immediately. Clay wanders a little way around the living room in the silence. He finds some sports memorabilia?

CLAY

Ah. A sports fan. Must be nice to live in a town with a respectable football team.

DAD

And what do you know about football?

CLAY

Nothing really. I was always more of a baseball guy.

DAD

Typical St. Louisian. Cardinals win one World Series over 15 years ago, and you all think you are the center of the baseball universe.

CLAY

(matter of factly)

Well, you're right about that. There has been quite a drought there for a while. But actually the Yankees are one game ahead of the Cardinals for the most World Series wins overall.

DAD

Is she tight?

CLAY

Excuse me, sir?

DAD

You heard me. Her mom was like a vice. Still is. What kind of lay is my daughter?

Clay laughs nervously

DAD

You know, one of the privileges of home ownership is the mortgage tax-deduction. And the other is that when you ask a question in your home, you are entitled to an answer.

INTERCUT - FLASHBACK: A drunken Donna McCutcheon smacks a LITTLE CLAY to the floor.

DONNA

It's my house and when I ask you a question, you'll answer me, dammit!

PRESENT

CLAY

You daughter is an amazing, enlightened mind. Sir. And I am not, if you will pardon the colloquialism, *blowing smoke up your ass* when I tell you that I have never met another woman as gifted, brilliant, and well-rounded as your daughter. You must be very proud.

DAD

Well, it was a little easier when she was closer to home. I offered to pay for her college if she would stay in Chicago and live at home. But, she just *had* to pick that stupid Jew doctor college.

FLASHBACK: Four year-old Clay runs into his house from playing in the yard with a little black child. His grandfather comes out of nowhere to grab Clay up roughly by the arm.

GRANDPA

What the hell are you doin', boy? Who's that out in the yard?

LITTLE CLAY

(scared)

Willie....

GRANDPA

And what kind of boy is Willie, huh?

LITTLE CLAY

He's colored

GRANDPA

Colored? What color is he?

LITTLE CLAY

He's black.

GRANDPA

Oh! So you mean he's a nigger?

Donna walks into the room.

DONNA

Your grandpa is right, Clay. Tell Willie to go play with his own kind.

PRESENT

CLAY

Washington University is one of the top ten colleges in the country, sir. She's a lot closer and a lot safer than if she had gone to New York or Boston or Virginia.

DAD

No. If she went to a *real* ivy league school, she'd have to actually *work* at it.

CLAY

I think if you could see how hard she works just to be *in* that University, you'd think differently. Sir. She has really been an inspiration to me. I am trying to scrape together enough to go back for my Masters.

DAD

(Smiles)

You don't really like me. Do you son?

CLAY

Sir?

DAD

You heard me.

CLAY

I regret that my visit surprised you. I think we may have got off on the wrong foot.

DAD

(Mocking)

You regret that your visit surprised me. I'm a college boy, too. Did you know that?

CLAY

As a matter of fact, Cait did mention that.

DAD

I doubt that. While I will lie about such things, I doubt she would. She's no liar.

Dad and Clay look at each other for a moment.

DAD

So, we've established that I am a liar without an education. I guess that would make you better than me, then, wouldn't it.

CLAY

On the contrary sir. The more you talk about yourself, the more that I realize how much we have in common.

KITCHEN TABLE — DUSK.

Silence. Forks clink. Eyes droop.

CAIT

I wished you two could have came to my recital. It went really well.

CLAY

She was flawless.

Silence

MOM

Clay, Cait's father and I are early-to-bed people. After Dinner I'll fix you a palate in the living room.

CAIT

Palate? On the floor?

DAD

Well, he ain't sleeping with you. Don't ask. If you want to be a whore in Saint Louis, that's your business, but under my roof....

CAIT

I was talking about the couch, Dad.

MOM

That's your father's brand new couch, honey. It hasn't even been Scotchguarded yet.

CLAY

The floor is fine.

CAIT

You're not going to sleep on the floor.

CLAY

No really. Your hospitality is already... beyond words. The floor is fine.

Silence.

DAD

So why did you get divorced?

Clay is shocked. Cait mouths, "You promised".

CLAY

Uh... some of my ex-wife's boyfriends thought that her marriage was interfering with her social life. So she decided to explore other options.

DAD

And you have a child with this woman?

CLAY

Yes sir! I have the greatest five-year old boy on the planet!

DAD

How do you know that he's yours?

Clay is visibly angry.

CLAY

Well, even if that were the case, Sir, it wouldn't change the way that I feel about him.

DAD

Sure it would. If he came out of some sailor's balls, suddenly all of those cute little kid things he does would become annoying as all hell.

FLASHBACK: Little Clay sits at the kitchen table working on some homework. His mom looks over his shoulder.

DONNA

"What I am going to be when I grow up...."

LITTLE CLAY

I'm going to be a pilot like my dad.

Grandpa laughs from the other end of the table.

GRANDPA

Hell, your dad wasn't no pilot. Your pa was a milkman! (Laughs)

PRESENT

CLAY

It's a shame that you couldn't meet him, Sir. I think that you would find his manners most impeccable.

CAIT

I can't believe my room is exactly the way I left it. It is going to be weird to sleep there after all this time.

CLAY

Is there a lock on the door?

DAD

(laughs)

Oh, don't worry. I'm a light sleeper. You aren't sneaking in there tonight. No way!

Clay stares into the eyes of Cait's father.

CLAY

It wasn't me that I was worried about.

DAD

You little son of whore...

Before Dad can rise, Clay stands up, grabs the table and pushes it, pinning her father against the kitchen wall.

CLAY

Do it. Do IT! Flinch, you sour old bastard, and you'll wake up in traction. I'm not your kid. I am a twenty-five year old man with a child of my own, and no amount of equity in this house buys you license to talk to me like that.

CAIT

Clay. My God.

CLAY

I don't want to hear it from you. If you wanted your father for a mate, you should have just screwed the real thing and cut out the middleman. Give me your keys. Give ME YOUR KEYS!

Cait digs car keys out of her pocket.

CLAY

I'll leave the car at your apartment and the keys in your mailbox.

INT. CAR - NIGHT.

Clay is exhausted and is nodding off behind the wheel. Red lights flash in the rear view mirror.

CLAY

Shit.

Clay and Officer meet between cars. Clay hands him license.

HIGHWAY PATROL

Evening.

CLAY

Yes. It's lovely.

HIGHWAY PATROL

Have you had any thing to drink tonight?

CLAY

No. Why?

HIGHWAY PATROL

You were weaving.

CLAY

Oh no. I'm just exhausted. That's all.

HIGHWAY PATROL

Follow the light with your eyes, please.

CLAY

I haven't had a drop. I told you....

HIGHWAY PATROL

Look at the light.

CLAY

I told you that I'm just tired.

HIGHWAY PATROL

Can you say your alphabet, please.

CLAY

Oh come on!

HIGHWAY PATROL

Sir, you are driving a vehicle that is registered to someone else. Right now you need to start cooperating.

CLAY

It's my girlfrei... It's my ex-girlfriend's car.

HIGHWAY PATROL

We'll get to that in a minute. Right now I need you to cooperate and recite your alphabet.

CLAY

(angry and loud)

A-B-A-D,
C-O-P,
F-A-C-I-A-S-T,
Y-O-U-R-P-A-P,
E-R-S-P-L-E-Z....

Oh, I'm sorry.... Did you want those in any particular order?

HIGHWAY PATROL

Son, do you know who you are talking to?

CLAY

Yeah, you're one of the Village People, right?

Officer immobilizes Clay to ground with a hard punch to his middle.

HIGHWAY PATROL

Mr. McCutcheon, it looks like you have a problem with authority. (He draws nightstick, puts it under Clay's chin) And *this* would be "Authority."

INT. CLAY'S APARTMENT - THE NEXT MORNING

Clay is tending to several bandages patching together facial cuts.

Keys in the door. Cait bursts in. She stares at Clay.

CLAY

Yeah, well. You shoulda seen the other guy's billyclub.

CAIT

How could you?

CLAY

How could I not? He insulted my son.

CLAY

He was yanking your chain, Clay, and you played right into it. You aren't my first boyfriend, Clay. You are just the first one that I have brought home in four years because I thought you were stronger than that.

CLAY

And I thought YOU were stronger than that, too. You are the most capable, resolved woman that I ever met. And you fold like a card table the first time he barks at you.

CAIT

He is my father, Clay. He is my *family*, such as he is. For someone that has such Irish about having your family insulted, you sure didn't mind dishing it out.

CLAY

Well, he's not my family.

CAIT

No. You had to sabotage any chance of that.

CLAY

So marry someone who thinks your father is some sweet old eccentric.

CAIT

What are you saying?

CLAY

I am saying that if you think that it is okay to sit there while your rabid father chews on my leg.... if that's your idea of loyalty... if you are both some kind of package deal, then you *both* can take a flying leap.

They stare at each other.

CAIT
(quietly)

Think about what you're saying, Clay.

CLAY

Whatever.

CAIT

I mean it. You better think. If you want me to go, I'll go.

CLAY

Are you still here?

CAIT

Listen to me. If I walk out that door... Clay, stop and listen to me. If I walk out this door, that's it. No games. If you let me walk out this door, I will never speak to you again. I mean it. It's over. Is that what you want?

Clay ignores her. Cait quietly turns, walks out, and pulls the door shut behind her.

Clay sighs, and then bangs his head against the wall in self-anger.

FADE OUT.

SCREEN TITLE: "Once a wave has reached the end of its medium, part of the energy dissipates, and part of the force is reflected backward."

FADE IN.

INT. CLAY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

PHONE.

Ring. Ring. Ring. Ring. A hand lifts receiver.

CLAY
(disinterested)

Yellow.

Clay instantly falls apart, almost hysterical.

No. Jack. I gotta. I gotta get off the phone. No.
No. I need... I need to keep the line clear. Ok...
Okay I will. Jack I gotta. I gotta go. She might
be trying to call. I... Bye. Yes. Bye. Jack, I...
I'm hanging up. Bye.

BEDROOM

Clay is lying on his bed. He has a ruled notepad with notes penciled all over it.

He dials phone, looking closely at notes.

CLAY

Hey, It's me. I just wanted to appolo...hello?

Dials.

CLAY

Honey, I'm sorr.... Damn it.

Clay dials. Busy signal.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Clay peeks his head around the corner, looks at the checkout lines. Cait is not there.

He steps out and we see that he has flowers and a shirt that says:
"LOOK, I'M SORRY ALREADY!"

He looks to one of the checkers. Checker looks at him.

CHECKER

She gave her notice. I don't think that she is coming back, unless it's to get her paycheck.

EXT. MAILBOX - DAY

Clay kisses his letter for luck and then drops it.

EXT. OUTSIDE CAIT'S APARTMENT. STREET - DAY

Clay looks up at Cait's window. He has flowers in hand. He is debating.

He chickens out and sticks one flower under the windshield wiper of Cait's car and throws the rest down a sewer.

INT. MAILBOX FOYER OF CLAY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Clay hurriedly opens his mailbox. He rifles through the mail. He is disappointed.

INT. CLAY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Clay checks answering machine. Big red zero. He shakes the machine slightly. Picks up receiver and checks for dial tone.

INT. COLLEGE REGISTRATION LINE - DAY

Clay gets his registration stamped.

INT. CLAY'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Clay, sandwich hanging out of his mouth, sits at desk and feverishly writes a letter. He is obviously very emotional.

INT. CLAY'S APARTMENT FOYER - DAY

Clay sticks letter in Outgoing clip, and opens mailbox to find no letter from Cait.

INT. SAWMILL - NIGHT

Clay is filthy. Noisy machines grind all around him and he feeds a table saw. The horn blows. Workers scramble for their lunch pails. Clay pulls out a brown bag and a copy of a textbook entitled ADOLESCENT BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Clay is sleepwalking. Kinetic children bounce and buzz past him.

INT. COLLEGE REGISTRAR'S - DAY

Clay eagerly picks up his grades. All 'A's. He is happy. He is walking by a copy machine when he gets an idea. He Xeroxes a copy of his grade card, folds the copy into thirds, staples it, and addresses it.

He pulls a stamp from his coat, places it. And drops it in the mail drop.

INT. CLAY'S APARTMENT MAILBOX FOYER - DAY

CLAY

(Staring at mailbox)

Oh please. Come on. Please, baby. Enough is enough. No whammies. Come on come on come on.....

He whips mailbox open.

CLAY

(determined)

All right. That's enough of that.

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. CAIT'S APARTMENT - DAY

From her apartment window, Cait sees Clay marching toward the building. She picks up a phone and dials it.

OUTSIDE CAIT'S DOOR.

Clay is banging hard on the door.

CLAY

Cait! Caitland open the door! I just want to talk to you for a minute! Cait, you don't have to take me back. But can I just say that I'm sorry? Can I look you in the eye and admit what a complete jerk I was? Cait. Caity? Cait, I'm so sorry. I shouldn't have lost my cool like that. Maybe I'm not as strong as you thought. But I'm hell of a lot stronger since I met you.

INTERCUT: Cait sits and listens emotionally with the phone on her lap.

CLAY

Everything about me that is worthwhile has come from you. I've never respected anyone but myself before. You changed that. I never saw women as anything but toys before. You changed that. You taught me so much about who I am. For God's sake, you're the one who showed me how to stop taking my life so damn seriously. Cait? Come on, baby. You and Drew are the only things in my life that are worth a damn, and he's only half mine. I can't just walk away. I can't just let you walk away from me. I'll never find another you. I know that now. I'll never be what I could have been if you're not here with me.

Cops clear landing and step toward Clay.

CLAY

Cait, no. Stop this. This isn't funny. Cait, I am not laughing.

Cops grab Clay. Clay resists.

CLAY

Caitland, I'm not giving up on you. I'll never give up on you!

INT. LOBBY OF POLICE STATION - THE NEXT DAY

Desk cop turns Clay over to Jack and Baxter.

CLAY

Thanks guys.

JACK

Well, that was pretty embarrassing.

CLAY

Will you go talk to her for me, Jack.

JACK
Forget it, Clay. Forget her.

CLAY
It's not that easy. I can't just give up.

JACK
You can and you will.

CLAY
I'm not going to let her get away.

JACK
(turning sharply)
One: I don't have that many favors to trade to bail you out again. Two: I called your mom. She's doing what she can to shred the paperwork trail you've left.

CLAY
Oh, tell me that you didn't call her?

BAXTER
Clay, if Lena finds out about this, do you know what will happen to your custody of Drew?

CLAY
(rationalizing)
Well she's my family too, I can't give up.

JACK
Are you going to tell him number three, or am I?

CLAY
What?

JACK
She fucking filed a restraining order against you, Clay. Are you listening? You can't get within' 500 feet of her or her apartment.

CLAY
No...

JACK
Serious as a heart-attack. Get your mind right, Clay. It's over.

CLAY

No...

BAXTER

(Gentle)

Clay, I know what your feeling. There isn't one of us alive that hasn't, at some point or another, gone on a campaign to make someone love us. Movies are filled with that crap. But in real life we don't always get the girl. Love campaigns are just another form of seduction, Clay.

CLAY

So I'll seduce her.

BAXTER

You can't seduce someone smarter than you are. I don't say that to be cruel. It is just the brutal truth.

INT. CLAY'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Clay sits moping at his desk. The bell rings. All the kids pile out of the classroom except for DANIELLE, who plops into the seat beside Clay's desk.

DANIELLE

Mr. McCutcheon, wassupwitchyou?

CLAY

What do you mean?

DANIELLE

These last few months all you been doing is teachin'.

CLAY

Yes, and?

DANIELLE

You stopped talkin'. I learned more from your talkin' than I ever did from any teachin', yours or anybody else's.

CLAY

Thanks, Danielle. I needed that.

DANIELLE

So why are you so sad? You and your girl on the outs?

CLAY

Something like that. I'm just trying to work through some questions.

DANIELLE

You always taught us that the answer to every question is somewhere in science, remember?

CLAY

Yeah, well....

DANIELLE

No. Really. At first I thought that you was full of it, you know. But then I got to thinking. I put everything you taught me into proving the existence of God.

CLAY

I can't wait to hear this one.

DANIELLE

Well back when we was talkin' about statistical probabilities, you said that if you take all the parts of a watch apart and then put it in a clothes drier and let it run long enough, there is a chance that the watch will reassemble itself. Right? Then when we was talkin about the second law of thermodynamics...

CLAY

Entropy.

DANIELLE

Whatever... We was talkin' about how everything is always movin' around, trying to get someplace else. Well, being as this entropy is like that drier, and all the parts of livin' stuff is made up of non-livin' stuff anyway... A couple of million years of everything tumbling against each other was all it took to assemble it all into just one of little sea things...

CLAY

Amoeba.

DANIELLE

Yeah!

CLAY

So how does that prove the existence of god?

DANIELLE

Hey. Somebody gots to have pressed the button on the drier to start it.

Clay thinks about this for a moment and smiles. Danielle stand to leave.

CLAY

Then I have another question for you: How do you make love stay?

DANIELLE

That's easy. You just don't piss it off, that's all. Women ain't some theorem that can be solved, Mr. Mac.

FADE OUT.

SCREEN TITLE: "Coulomb's Law: The magnitude of force that a body exerts on another body is directly proportional to their charges, and inversely proportional to the square of the distance between them."

$$F = \frac{K * q_1 * q_2}{d^2}$$

FADE IN.

INT. CLAY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Clay has a phone to his ear and sits cross legged in front of TV. Videocassettes are strewn everywhere. He pulls a tape out of VCR and puts it in one stack.

CLAY

(to phone)

No. I can't. Joey lent me a second VCR so I could copy all of my old tapes of Drew as a baby. Yeah. Lena lent them to me and she wants the originals back. So I have to do it tonight. Okay, Vincent. Okay. Yeah. Another time.

Another tape comes out of a cardboard box and goes in the VCR. We hear Drew giggling and coo-ing. Clay laughs and smiles wistfully. He pops the tape out and puts another in.

The sound of loud, orgasmic sex.

Clay is stunned. He reaches for the VCR button, but stops as the sex crescendos.

We hear the old, meek Lena:

LENA

Are you okay?

CLAY

(gruff)

I'm fine. Don't be stupid.

LENA

Where are you going? Are you mad? Did I do something wrong?

CLAY

Bitch, just BACK OFF! OKAY!

LENA

(Starting to cry)

I'm sorry. I'm sorry, babe.

Through this, Clay's expression turns to abject horror. When Lena says she apologizes, Clay begins to retch violently. He cups his hand over his mouth and stumbles toward the bathroom.

INT. LENA'S APARTMENT - LATER THAT NIGHT

Lena opens the door. Clay leans against the wall, drained.

LENA

(brisk and gruff)

Forget something?

CLAY

Can we talk for a sec?

LENA

Talk.

CLAY

Inside?

Lena lets Clay in and drops down on the couch. The apartment is completely decked out.

CLAY

Where is... uh... whatsisface?

LENA

It didn't work out. Shit happens. There. Now I've talked. Your turn, what do you want? I'm missing Animal Planet.

CLAY

You know, I have been sorry for a long time. A long time. But it occurred to me that I never actually told you that I was sorry.

LENA

Sorry for what? Sorry for yourself?

CLAY

Lena. Lena, I treated you like dogshit. I did. And I can't say that I was just a kid, and I can't say that I didn't know what I was doing, because I guess I did. I thought that being a good husband meant keeping my zipper up and my fists in check.... I wouldn't have stayed. I wouldn't have put up with me half as long as you did.

CLAY (cont.)

I would have dissappeared after the first year, just like my old man did. Do you know how long it took me to learn to iron a shirt? Years. Two years. And the whole time that I was cursing that iron and trying to overpower those wrinkles with steel and steam....

I kept thinking over and over: 'Why did she stay so long? Why did she stay so long?' And the thing that I am most sorry about is that I killed you that sweet girl that was standing next to me at the justice of the peace. You were so... fragile. Somewhere along the line I... As rare as people... as *human beings* like that *are*.....

Lena softens. She touches Clay's knee.

LENA

Clay, sometimes babies just die. It wasn't your fault... and it wasn't my fault. It wasn't the type of mattress, or the way I laid him that night, or the draft in our old apartment. It wasn't God punishing you. Sometimes babies just - die. And there isn't a god damn thing any of us can do about that.

Clay nods quietly.

LENA

And we died, too. We're never going to be who we were all those years ago.

CLAY

I know.

LENA

And where you're concerned, that is a good thing. (smiles) We have to look forward.

CLAY

Yes.

LENA

And it's time for you to think about how your story is going to end.

CLAY

The same way they all end, I guess. Either with a wedding or a funeral.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Clay, nervous.

Organ Music.

We can see he's in the front of a church.

PEW- Vincent and mate. Joey and mate. Jack and wife. Ned.
Empty seat.

Front of church. A casket behind the podium.

Organ music stops.

An effeminate man steps up to the podium.

EULOGIST

After Raymond Baxter learned of his illness, he did not lay down to die. He did not march in rallies. He did not lobby his congressman. He did not engage in bizarre alternative medicine and practices. In fact... He didn't say anything. To anybody.

Except, I suppose, me. And in Ray's understated style he told me what the doctors had told him, and the only other thing he said was: "And for God's sake, don't let anyone at my funeral refer to me as 'A life-long Bachelor'."

Laughter.

Ray, friend, I couldn't do that anyway. For you were married to your profession, you were engaged to your friends and family, and you were never too busy to court a good bottle of Scotch. Say what you want about Ray, he lived well and left no regrets... Except those of us that knew him best know how deeply he burned to have a child of his own. But that was not to be. And the only other thing he mentioned specifically was that Mr. Clay McCutcheon speak.

CLAY

I guess this would be Baxter's final act of retribution for all the legal fees I still owe him. I broke out my quotation dictionary to find some poignant words to describe Baxter's life.... But it occurred to me that all of the most salient wisdom I could think of came from Baxter himself.

He once warned me of how downright dangerous human conceit can be, and how few of us realize that all of the time we spend with someone we love is finite. The hours are countable. That every moment spent in anger or grudge is a moment that will never be renewed.

INTERCUT: Clay and Drew stand holding hands outside a strange door. It opens. Donna McCutcheon stands there stunned. She steps toward Drew, stoops, and hugs him. She hugs Clay.

CLAY

Every smile is finite. Every hug is finite. And every opportunity to manufacture a good moment that is wasted... is truly a waste. And... every sacrifice that we make for someone we love... well that is just chump change in the grand scheme of things.

In the shock after hearing of Baxter's passing... and it was a shock, let me tell you... I referred to Baxter as "a judger of horses." Now, the person I was talking to kind of bristled at this, because, I suppose, they thought that I meant that Baxter was judgmental. Far from it. There is an ancient Buddhist allegory about the "judger of horses." This was the man who could see the spirit of the dappled stallion in the dun mare, just by the way the horse could gallop and kick no dust. We all fancy ourselves "judgers of horses", but the fact is that these people are rare indeed. And we revere them.

INTERCUT: Caitland finger thumps on her cello to unheard music while Drew dances around like a maniac. Clay laughs and laughs.

CLAY

They are the people we gravitate towards because they teach us about ourselves, and we see our real selves in them. Though, trust me, that can be a brutal experience. These are the people that we respect above all others. These are the people that know the cost of things. And when one of these people leave us, the void they leave behind is never, ever, completely filled, and the rend never convincingly mended.

Baxter, when we gather, there will always be a place at the table for you and a drink in your name.

At casket.

CLAY

So long, you old bastard. I understand.

Clay pulls out cigar and puts it in Baxter's pocket.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARKING LOT - LATER THAT DAY

Clay approaches his car. There is a note taped to the window. He curiously removes it.

INTERCUT: Mortuary Personnel close the lid on Baxter's coffin and lock the screws.

Clay eases into the car, still turning the note over suspiciously.

INTERCUT: Mortuary Personnel wheel Baxter's casket down a deserted corridor.

Clay pulls out of the parking lot and onto the road.

INTERCUT: Baxter's body is wheeled into the crematorium.

Clay pulls the note out of the passenger seat, opens it, and reads it while he drives.

CAIT'S VOICE

I'm so sorry for your loss. I have been thinking about your question, though, and the answer is 'no.' People can't change. But they *can* evolve. Good luck, and remember that if you ever realize that you have actually reached the point of evolution that you were aiming for, you have done something terribly wrong.

INTERCUT: Baxter's body goes into the furnace.

Clay lights the note aflame with the cigarette lighter.

INTERCUT: The cigar in Baxter's pocket bursts into flame.

Clay raises the flaming note to light the other cigar in his lips.

ROAD

Clay's car whizzes past. A flaming note drops to the pavement and is quickly reduced to ash.

FADE OUT

THE END