



SDCA00876

Dan in Real Life

By
Pierce Gardner

Revisions by
Peter Hedges

Current Revisions by
January 14, 2005

This draft is for internal use only
For the eyes of
Jon Shestack
&
Brad Epstein only!

THE SOUND OF RAPID TYPING ON A COMPUTER KEYBOARD IS HEARD.

*

DAN (V.O.)

*Dear Dan. I don't know how to say this
nicely: My teenagers are a total pain.
Isn't there some easy way to raise these
monsters? Help! Signed Maxed-out Mom.*

*

*

*

EXT. ASHBURN HOUSE - DAY

A tidy three-bedroom home in the San Fernando valley basks in the December sunshine. Christmas decorations sparkle on the eaves. An aging station wagon sits in the driveway.

DAN (V.O.)

*Dear Maxed-out. Just give up and walk
away. MTV will be glad to raise your
kids.*

*

SPLAT! A modest local paper, the BURBANK SENTINEL, lands on the front porch.

DAN (V.O.)

*Sure, they may end up with shaved heads
and vicodin habits, but did you need all
that stress? No, you had patio furniture
to pick out.*

*

*

*

The impact SPLITS THE PAPER OPEN, revealing a column entitled DAN IN REAL LIFE. The author's photo is obscured.

DAN (V.O.)

*Truth is, bringing up teens is a humbling
experience.*

*

The house's living room becomes visible; a cheerful mess with a tilted Christmas tree. Then the kitchen: unwashed plates, empty diet soda cans.

DAN (V.O.)

*After all, you're dealing with people who
have conquered the immense challenges of
eighth grade and now have all the answers
in life.*

*

*

*

We move down the driveway, toward a garage-turned-office.

DAN (V.O.)

*There they go, doing everything -
walking, talking, driving, falling in
love -- all at 5,000 miles an hour.*

*

*

*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Through a window, the back of a man is visible, pounding away on his laptop.

INT. DAN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Finally, we see our narrator. DAN ASHBURN is a middle-aged guy. Still trim, good-humored, but stressed and typing at a furious pace. A stack of unpaid bills sits at his elbow.

A calender reveals the date: December 26th.

A KNOCK ON THE DOOR. Startled, he jumps. *

MIRANDA (O.S.)

Dad?

The door opens. There's Dan's eldest daughter, MIRANDA, a sweet, seventeen-year-old bundle of over-confidence. He smiles at her and Dan pushes *Document Send* on his computer. *

DAN

I'm ready, I'm ready.

Miranda holds up the car keys and shakes them. Dan's smile fades. *

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAN'S HOUSE *

Angle on a confident Miranda backing up the car with Dan in the passenger seat, completely tense. *

DAN

So when people ask, "Do kids really need rules?" I say, "Well -- do cars really need brakes?" *

When the car gets to the edge of driveway ... *

DAN

Stop. Not yet. Not yet. *

Dan is looking back over his shoulder. Miranda checks her rear view mirror. *

DAN

After the blue van... Not yet. Wait ... hold it. Go. Wait. Stop. *

The car reverses, then stops, then starts -- all because a flustered Miranda is following Dan's panicked instructions. *

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Angle on Street -- basically barren.

DAN
Wait. Now go. Go.

Oh. Is that a car approaching in the distance?

DAN
No, stop. Stop!

EXT. A SUBURBAN STREET

The Ashburn station wagon drives down a quiet suburban street. The only difference is that *Dan is now driving*. Miranda sits unhappily in the passenger seat.

DAN (V.O.)
*Can we be too careful when it comes to
our kids? It's not an easy question.
But the truth is it's a big, scary world
out there.*

POV from inside car: Not so scary today. They pass middle class homes with well-cared for lawns and yard toys.

DAN
You have many gifts. Driving just
doesn't happen to be among them.

MIRANDA
How do you know? If you don't let me,
I'll never learn ...

DAN
But if I let you, you may not live.

MIRANDA
Dad!

The Ashworth car is almost clipped by a passing truck. It's horn BLARES.

EXT. LIBRARY - DAY

The Ashburn station wagon glides up in front of a branch of the L.A. Public Library. LILLY ASHBURN, age 11, sits on an outdoor bench, reading Jane Austen's EMMA. She's small for her age and wears glasses.

Seeing the station wagon, she picks up her book and gets in the car. We see Lilly wears a locket around her neck.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAN
Peanut, you reading *Emma*, again?

LILLY
It was mom's favorite. Besides
I find comfort in knowing how things end.
(without missing a beat)
Wave 'hello' to Miss Walker.

Dan's POV: Miss Walker, an attractive librarian, waves to
the Ashburn car, but our sense is that she's doing this out
of her interest in Dan.

DAN
I'm waving 'goodbye' to Miss Walker.

LILLY
She's awfully nice. She says she likes
your writing.

MIRANDA
So she's not as bright as we'd hoped.

DAN
Funny.

LILLY
How far did you get this time?

MIRANDA
I almost made it out of the driveway.

LILLY
(making a joke)
That's progress.

EXT. ICE RINK - DUSK

The station wagon pulls up at a suburban rink as twilight
streaks the sky purple and pink.

DAN (V.O.)
*Dear Dan. What should I do when my
sixteen-year-old flips out? Signed,
Inept Dad.*

Dan and Lilly get out. Miranda sulks in the car.

INT. ICE RINK - DUSK

*

Music booms over the P.A. system as skaters glide around the ice. Dan and Lilly pass a styro-foam snowman and scan the rink.

*

*

DAN (V.O.)

*Dear Inept. This is crucial -- always
remember who's the parent -- and stay
calm.*

*

*

Out at center ice, a graceful duo spins in a slow spiral, then sensuously lock into an embrace...

*

DAN (V.O.)

*Because if you don't act like an adult,
they never will.*

*

*

The female skater is KELLY ASHBURN. She's 15, blonde, too-sexy-for-her-age. Her partner, MARTY, is also 15. He's tall and skinny, with a punk haircut and a small tattoo on his neck.

*

*

*

They lean into a passionate kiss - and hold it.

DAN (O.S.)

Whoa, whoa!!

*

INT. RINK - SECONDS LATER

*

Dan runs onto the ice, slipping and sliding, pushing past the other skaters.

*

*

DAN

KELLY DINGLE ASHBURN!!!

Kelly hears her father and breaks away from Marty. Kelly's coach stares at Dan. So do all the other skaters.

Realizing he's misjudged the situation, Dan offers a tentative smile. No one returns it.

MARTY

(to Kelly)

Dingle?

EXT. RINK - NIGHT

Still wearing her skates, Kelly stomps to the station wagon, with Dan beside her. An embarrassed Lilly is right behind them. *

KELLY

How could you do that! The kiss is part of the routine! *

DAN

It didn't look routine to me. *

Kelly gets in, slams the door - then sees Miranda.

MIRANDA

(to Kelly)

I am SO out of here in September. *

INT. DINING ROOM/ASHBURN HOUSE - NIGHT

Dan and Lilly bring in a salad and vegetables. They're followed by Miranda, who's carrying a casserole she just cooked.

MIRANDA

You are so going to miss me. Once Kelly takes over...

(beat)

Diet coke and gum, that's all you'll get for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

DAN

Hey -- I like gum.

Lilly smiles. An unsmiling Kelly joins them. She's showing cleavage and her bellybutton is visible. Dan frowns as they pray. *

TOGETHER

Before we eat, we bow our heads and thank thee Lord for our daily bread. Amen. *

LILLY

And God bless mom.

DAN

Miranda, please pass the butter. And, Kelly, you can cover that navel now. *

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KELLY
It's my body.

DAN
It's my dinner table.

Kelly pulls in closer, so the table blocks his view. Miranda and Lilly wait for Dan's verdict. He hesitates, then...

DAN
Okay, everyone packs tonight, we leave tomorrow after breakfast.

*

KELLY
Twenty seven people in a house with three bathrooms -- this is not my idea of a vacation.

DAN
Hey, you're lucky you get to see your cousins every year.

*

LILLY
And going there is a tradition.

MIRANDA
So was sacrificing virgins among the Aztecs.

KELLY
Why was it always female virgins?

MIRANDA
Excellent point.

KELLY
(to Dan)
Daddy, when did you lose your virginity?

Lilly is mortified; Miranda smiles.

DAN
That is none of your business and you know it.
(beat)
And who's that tattooed skater-guy?

LILLY
His name is Marty Barasco.

*

*

KELLY
And he's just a friend.

*

*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DAN
So nothing's happening? Nothing's going
on?

KELLY
Just a friend.
(chiding Dan)
Not that it's any of your business.

Another tense moment. The PHONE RINGS.

JORDY (FILTER)
Dan, this is Jordy. Pick up.

Dan goes for the phone but it's not in its cradle.

DAN
(to the girls)
Once again, where's the receiver?

Lilly leaps up to look for the phone.

Dan presses the speaker phone button.

DAN
Yeah, Jordy, not a good time.

JORDY (FILTER)
Well, it's about to get better. Andy
with the Answers got the axe.

DAN
You're joking.

JORDY (FILTER)
Seems he doesn't have the answers
anymore. And now the Lamson Family
Publishing Group is considering you,
among others, to be his replacement ...

MIRANDA
You'd be syndicated?

JORDY (FILTER)
18 markets, my friend. Now I need you to
put together a selection of your best
columns ASAP. Gotta run. I'll call you
when you get to Jersey.

Jordy hangs up as Dan shouts:

DAN
Thank you, Jordy. Thank you!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Dan pushes the speaker phone button off and then proceeds to do his own particular VICTORY DANCE. Half flail, half spasmodic, Dan is feeling GOOD!

Lilly can't help herself -- she joins in the celebration.

The other girls cringe as they watch their goofball father.

KELLY
(to Miranda)
He's so embarrassing.

INT. HALLWAY/ASHBURN HOUSE - NIGHT

It's late. Dan walks down the hall, checks Miranda's door -- it's locked. He sighs, then looks in on Kelly and Lilly. The moonlight floods their room. They're sprawled, asleep in their beds.

This sight makes him wistful.

DAN (V.O.)
*Parents, let me be blunt. There are no
easy answers, no simple solutions.*

INT. DAN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Dan finishes putting together a packet of previous columns. He slides the columns into a big envelope.

DAN (V.O.)
(beat)
So what can you count on?

He looks at a photo of a vibrant woman with curly hair. This is SUZANNE, his deceased wife. The resemblance to Lilly is unmistakable. He touches the frame fondly.

DAN
(out loud)
Just each other.

EXT. ASHBURN HOUSE - MORNING

Dan strains to put an immense suitcase in the car; Lilly helps him. Miranda comes out lugging her bag.

DAN
Is that everything?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MIRANDA
 Yep.

*
 *

DAN
 Then we're good to go.
 (looking at Miranda and Lilly)
 Where's little miss bellybutton?

*
 *
 *
 *

INT. KELLY'S CLOSET - CONTINUOUS

Kelly and Marty Barasco are seated in the floor of her closet, holding hands. There is an innocence to their relationship.

MARTY
 I'll miss you, Dingle-babe.

KELLY
 OK, that does it. Tell me your middle name.

*
 *

MARTY
 Jesus.

KELLY
 No way.

*

MARTY
 Martin Jesus Allah Barasco. My parents wanted to cover all the bases.

KELLY
 (kissing him)
 You're such a pathetic liar.

*

The door pops open. There's Dan. Marty looks at him and extends his hand for a shake.

MARTY
 Hi, Mr. Ashburn. I'm Martin Barasco.
 (politely)
 You have a very nice house.

DAN
 The view from the outside is even better.

EXT. ASHBURN HOUSE - MORNING

Marty waves and pulls his bike out of a bush. Dan takes Kelly aside as Miranda and Lilly watch.

*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAN

You said he was just a friend and now
he's in your bedroom closet? You lied to
me!

*

KELLY

Dad, it's not what think. Marty's
different.

*

DAN

No, I know what Marty is. He's outta
here!

*

*

Dan glares at Marty who takes off on his bike.

*

KELLY

He treats me like a real person.

(softly)

I love him, Dad. I really do.

DAN

How long have you known him?

*

KELLY

Three weeks. But I knew in three days.

DAN

Three days?! You can't know in three
days! Listen to me. Listen!

*

*

Infatuation is not love, physical
attraction is not love, and *what was*
going on in that closet is not --

*

*

*

KELLY

Wrong. It's the real thing, I know it.

*

DAN

Okay, when we get back, guess who's
grounded?

*

*

KELLY

For how long?

DAN

Forever.

*

LILLY

Dad!

*

*

DAN

A month!

*

*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

KELLY

A month!!

Kelly turns away, outraged. Miranda's upset.

MIRANDA

Dad, that's insane. Come on.

DAN

She can't sneak boys into her bedroom.
Who knows what might happen?

KELLY

(turning back)

News flash. When it comes to sex, he's
the one who wants to wait.

(beat)

Guess I'll have try a little harder now,
to change his mind.

*

She gets in the car and SLAMS the door. Miranda and Lilly
look at their father, disappointed.

EXT. SKY - DAY

A 747 jetliner cruises through the sky.

INT. THE BACK OF THE PLANE - DAY

Dan sits in an aisle seat next to Lilly, his laptop open.
Miranda and Kelly are across the aisle. He starts writing.

We see what he's typing:

*

*Column ideas: Who falls in love
more enthusiastically, desperately or
disastrously than teenagers?
No one.*

*

*

*

*

His gaze travels across the aisle. Kelly sees him -- and
turns frostily away.

*

Dan types it again. No one.

*

EXT. BEACH HAVEN - NIGHT

A rented mini-van with the Ashburns inside motors through
Beach Haven, New Jersey. It's a quaint little town.

EXT. BEACH HOUSE - NIGHT

Dan pulls up at a three-story house with a wide, wrap-around porch. There are three Ford Explorers and a Crown Victoria parked outside. He honks twice.

The doors fly open. Teenagers and kids descend on the mini-van, their breath creating "clouds" in the icy night air.

(NOTE: There will be a total of 27 people in this house; too many to track. We'll meet them as we go. Just know people are always coming and going -- often they're packs of children. Rarely is anyone ever alone in the house.)

Lilly sees her grandparents and runs into her grandmother NANA's arms as POPPY meets Dan.

DAN

Hi, Pops.

POPPY

How's my favorite middle son?

DAN

Two days after Christmas and mutiny is in the air. I must be doing something right.

Nana directs two teenage male cousins.

NANA

Boys, you take these bags, third floor, the blue bedroom. And these are second floor, the pink room.

Then she beams at her granddaughters.

NANA

You girls are all grown-up.

DAN

No, no! Not even close.

INT. SECOND FLOOR LANDING - NIGHT

Dan's brothers, WYATT and LOWELL, greet him. LOWELL, the younger brother, is handsome, tall, buff, in his mid 30's. WYATT is older, balding and holds a fussy, huge baby, AIDAN.

LOWELL

Here he is -- Dan the man.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAN
What's shaking, guys?

WYATT
Same old same old.

Aidan starts to shriek.

Dan is almost run over by ROB, age six, who is being pursued by Wyatt's wife, Aimee.

DAN
Hey, Aimee. Rob, whoa, you're gigantic.

AIMEE
He eats his vegetables.

DAN
Yeah, and then some ...

Dan starts up the stairs.

NANA
(from below)
Danny, you're not up there. Your brother Lowell ...

DAN
What about him?

NANA
Has a 'friend' coming to visit, so you get the special room.

LOWELL
Sorry, dude.

CUT TO:

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM - BASEMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Dan has yanked the dangling string to the naked light bulb. We're in the basement laundry room -- it is cramped and an inflatable mattress has been wedged in the corner next to the washing machine. It's been made up as a bed. There's a tiny night table beside it, complete with a lamp and clock radio. Cozy. Quiet. Cramped.

Dan sits, enjoying a rare, quiet moment alone, when ...

BAM - THE DOOR FLIES OPEN. In comes BUSTER, Lowell's golden retriever. He joyously nuzzles Dan's groin.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAN
No, Buster, NO! Where are your manners?

EXT. BEACH HOUSE - DAWN

A cold, gloomy day. Dan, emerges from the basement, to join the early-risers in the kitchen. Among those already up, Rob is chowing down on a bowl full of cereal. (NOTE: Morning, noon and night, Rob is always eating a bowl of cereal.) Dan notices Kelly in the corner talking to Nana. They're almost whispering.

DAN
Good morning.

Kelly won't even look at her dad.

DAN
Sleep well?

As Dan sits down next to her, Kelly immediately gets up and leaves.

DAN
Can I get you some cereal?

KELLY
(as she goes)
Get a life.

Dan winces.

NANA
So - things OK at home?

DAN
That question coming from you is never a question.

NANA
I'm hearing a few things.

DAN
(smiling)
I'm in trouble now.

Nana starts putting away dishes.

NANA
Just little things.
(sweetly)
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NANA (cont'd)

Like not letting Miranda drive for
reasons unknown. Grounding Kelly for a
month because she kissed her boyfriend
goodbye?

Dan's smile evaporates.

DAN

Look, I think Miranda is a fine driver.
It's the other two million maniacs I
don't trust.

(beat)

And that's roughly the number of guys who
want to date Kelly.

NANA

I'm just saying...

DAN

What?

Nana stops, smiles.

NANA

She needs space. You all do.

(hands him money)

Why don't you go get the papers, get some
orange juice. Mostly, though, go get
lost for a little while. Remember, it's
your vacation, too.

Dan smiles at his mother. She knows what he needs. He exits
out the kitchen door, spinning to avoid Buster's probing
muzzle.

EXT. STONE PIER - DAY

Dan stops his car and looks out at the stone pier which leads
to the ocean. From the way he looks at the pier and beyond,
we sense this a place where he's spent important time in the
past.

EXT. DANMEYER'S - MORNING

In downtown Beach Haven, Danmeyer's (one of those chain
bookstore/coffee shops) occupies a prized corner lot. There
are already some cars parked outside. Dan pulls in.

INT. DANMEYER'S - MORNING

Dan enters. A blast of warm air revives him. Grabbing two copies of the PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER, he heads for the "Parenting" section. Once there, he looks for any book that can help him.

Later --

With his winter coat tossed on a step stool, Dan sits among the many titles he's taken out: *The 10 Basic Principles to Good Parenting*, *The Parenting Handbook*, even *Parenting for Dummies*. He's about to crack open yet another parenting book when he hears ...

WOMAN CUSTOMER (O.S.)
(talking to the clerk at the
cash register)
I'm looking for ...

BOOK STORE EMPLOYEE (O.S.)
(talking to a customer)
Ma'am, please - can't you see I'm on the
phone?

Beat. The Woman turns the corner and sees Dan.

WOMAN CUSTOMER (O.S.)
Hi, excuse me, could you help?

Dan looks up, sees ...

The Woman Customer. She's striking -- big, warm eyes, thick, cascading hair. The sweet upturn of her near perfect nose. Even better, she speaks just the way she looks - quirky, sweet, impulsive.

WOMAN
I'm looking for something special ...

Dan stands and looks over at the cashier who is still busy on the phone. Good. He tries to listen like an employee.

WOMAN
A book that can help me deal with what
might be an awkward situation ... you
know, the kind of book that allows you
not only to escape from some place but
also to some place...

Dan begins to move down the aisle, and already he's pulled a book.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WOMAN

Then again something funny might be nice...

Dan quickly cuts to another aisle.

WOMAN

But not necessarily big ha ha laugh-out-loud funny ...

Dan does an about face and doubles back.

WOMAN

And certainly not make-fun-of-other-people funny ...

Dan slows. He's as confused as she is.

WOMAN

But rather something *human* funny --

Aha! Dan knows what to do now. He starts pulling various titles from different sections.

WOMAN

And if it could sneak up on you, surprise you, and at the same time make you think that what you thought was not only right in a wrong kind of way, but that when you're wrong, there's a certain rightness to your wrongness --

Dan is moving more quickly now, and the Woman has to move fast to keep up. He's pulling more and more books and stacking them on the ever-growing pile which she carries in her arms.

WOMAN

Maybe what I mean is, more importantly I'm looking to be swept up and, at the same time, *not*, meaning I want to feel a deep connection to, uhm, something, the ground, you know these books are...

DAN

Heavy. Oh, sorry. Here.

Dan takes the books out of her arms.

WOMAN

Maybe I don't know what I'm looking for.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DAN

In my experience, you rarely ever find it
all in just one book. Maybe that's why
there are so many. Books.

WOMAN

So what do we have?

DAN

Oh, just a smattering ... a potpouri of
...

WOMAN

Potpouri?

The Woman smiles. Words aren't coming easily for Dan. *Help.*

DAN

Uhm. So ...
(showing the books)
Pablo Neruda. You can't go ever go wrong
with poetry. This is my favorite Rilke.

WOMAN

Love and Other Difficulties?

DAN

A page turner, believe me. The biography
of Ghandi. Because never has anyone been
quite so ... cool. *Tender is the Night.*
A Good Man is Hard to Find.

WOMAN

The title alone.

DAN

Anna Karenina.

WOMAN

(making a joke)
Now that's funny.

DAN

No, funny's coming - this here is ...
well, we all need a good picture book ...

He opens a coffee-table sized book on contemporary
architecture.

DAN

It's also because to understand
architecture is to understand foundation
... how it holds everything ...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Angle on the Woman taking in Dan. This is some salesman. *

DAN *
(lost in the book) *
I love the weight of these pages. *

On to the next book ... *

DAN *
For funny? *

He holds up the children's book - *Everyone Poops*. *

DAN *
OK, maybe not funny. *

WOMAN *
No, actually, that's funny. *
(laughing) *
Very funny. *

DAN *
Good. There's more. *

WOMAN *
I hope. *

Dan just looks at her. He's lost in the moment. *

WOMAN *
If you could pick only one ... *

DAN *
(not taking his eyes off her) *
Well, no book in my mind rivals ... *

He holds up a trashy Harlequin Romance. *

Woman laughs. *

Dan realizes what he's holding. *

DAN *
The truth is I thought you were about to *
leave earlier so I grabbed whatever I *
could ... grab. *

WOMAN *
I'm Beth. *

DAN *
Dan. *

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

The CLERK, finally off the phone, appears, breaking the moment.

CLERK

So ...

BETH

Sold.

CLERK

I'm sorry?

BETH

I want them all.

The clerk is rattled by the tall stack of books.

DAN

These were just suggestions --

Beth extends her platinum card to the clerk.

BETH

(to Clerk)

And you'll make sure he gets the commission for this?

CLERK

(offended)

He doesn't work here.

Beat. Beth looks at Dan, who shrugs slightly.

BETH

(to Clerk)

He should.

(to Dan)

You're smooth.

DAN

I wanted to tell you ...

BETH

You can make it up to me.

INT. DANMEYER'S - THE COFFEE CORNER

Dan sets down the two lattes and a plate with a scone and a blueberry muffin.

DAN

Here we are ...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BETH
Shhh. Listen.

Dan sits and listens.

We see that Beth's new books are spread all over the table.
She's reading from a book of Mary Oliver poems which Dan had
chosen.

BETH
*When it's over, I want to say: All my
life I was a bride married to amazement.
I was the bridegroom, taking the world
into my arms ...*
(to Dan)
This is beautiful.

DAN
Then you'll love this. Eyes closed.

Beth closes her eyes.

Dan opens a book, clears his throat.

DAN
Dogs poop. Cats poop.

Beth is laughing now.

BETH
Stop, stop.
(still giggling)
So what's the catch with you? Because
you can't be real. Can you?

Dan takes a breath. He's about to speak ...

CUT TO:

Minutes later. Beth, in tears, using a cafe napkin to wipe
her eyes.

BETH
So you're telling me that you're one-of-
those-widowers-with-three-daughters-who-
preys-on-unsuspecting-women-in-book-
stores ...

DAN
That, it seems, would be me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BETH
 Been there!
 (beat)
 Seriously. That's very sad. What you've
 been through.

She looks at Dan. He smiles for her sake.

BETH
 You don't have to smile.

DAN
 It's better than the alternative.

EXT. DANMEYER'S BOOKSTORE - DAY

Appropriately, snow has started to fall.

Dan carries Beth's books out to her BMW. She presses the
 electronic -- *chirp chirp* -- key chain and the trunk pops
 open. Dan sets the books in the trunk.

DAN
 I understand you have to go, I'm late,
 too. It's just - I wish we could keep
 talking. Maybe I could call you
 sometime?

Beth closes the trunk and turns to him.

BETH
 Dan, here's my catch.

DAN
 You're married. You're engaged.

BETH
 No, but I'm in a relationship.
 And I should've told you.

Beat.

DAN
 (not defeated)
 But if we felt like talking again, as
friends, that wouldn't be a crime, would
 it?

Beat as Beth considers.

BETH
 No. Nothing wrong with that.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Beat as Dan tears a piece of the newspaper off and Beth finds a pen in her car. She writes down her number.

BETH
(handing him the number)
Call, or don't. But call.

She starts the car.

DAN
I will.

As she starts to drive off, Dan impulsively runs beside her, and shouts to be heard through the car window.

DAN
I would even call to say I'm not calling!

Beth drives off and Dan watches her go.

EXT. STREETS OF BEACH HAVEN - MORNING

Dan drives, his thoughts racing.

DAN
"I'd even call to say I'm not calling."
Wow, there's a brilliant response.

Absorbed in his thoughts, Dan sails through a stop sign. A HORN BLARES, a passing car swerves.

DAN
Sorry, sorry, sorry!

A cop siren SOUNDS.

INT. MINI-VAN - MORNING

Dan has his license handed back to him by a local POLICEMAN, a stern, grizzled man in his late fifties.

STERN POLICEMAN
You didn't even slow down.

DAN
I never do this kind of thing, Officer.
I'm usually an excellent driver ...

STERN POLICEMAN
Here in New Jersey, stop means stop.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAN
I'll keep that in mind.

The cop hands him the ticket.

INT. KITCHEN/BEACH HOUSE - MORNING

Dan hurries in with the newspapers.

NANA
What took you so long?

DAN
Nobody. I mean, nothing.

Nana snatches the newspapers and calls out:

NANA
It's time!

Dan checks his pockets for Beth's phone number, can't find it. He grows panicked, emptying out every pocket.

LOWELL
Dude, you all right?

DAN
I'm good, I'm good.

WYATT
You don't seem good.

DAN
How soon is too soon?

WYATT
What?

DAN
(still looking for the number)
I met someone. A woman. And she's something else.

LOWELL
This is big.

DAN
And she gave me ...
(as he finds it)
her number. How soon ...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WYATT
Can you call?

LOWELL
What are you waiting for?

WYATT
Let's see what the girls say. Aimee, Dan
met someone!

DAN
Shhh!

Aimee enters, holding the big-headed baby Aidan.

AIMEE
You met someone?

DAN
Shhhh, please!

WYATT
How soon until he can call?

AIMEE
I haven't been single for ages.

Dan's sister, JENNY, has entered.

JENNY
Me neither. Ohmigod, who is she?

Kids appear in the background -- thankfully none of Dan's
daughters -- and one of them, the loudest of the loud, calls
out -- "Did Uncle Dan meet someone?!"

LOWELL
Yes, kids, he met a hottie.

Dan is flustered.

DAN
OK, enough, please ...

LOWELL
You know what? Let's ask Annie.

Angle on Dan. Annie? Who's Annie? He turns as Annie comes
down the stairs. Annie looks exactly like Beth from the
bookstore, because she *is* Beth from the bookstore.

Dan freezes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ANNIE
What's the ...
(sees Dan)
... problem?

LOWELL
Annie, my brother needs your expertise.

Dan freezes. It can't be her. This can't be happening.

DAN
(beat, then to Beth)
Annie?

Annie/Beth is equally stunned.

BETH
It's Elizabeth Anne. Lowell calls me
Annie; I'm Beth everywhere else.

LOWELL
(nuzzling her)
I already had two Beths and a Betty in my
exercise class; I didn't want people
getting confused.

DAN
(still confused)
No, that wouldn't be good.

BETH
I prefer Beth.

Nana appears in the hallway, holding identical sections of
the newspaper, one in each hand.

NANA
Let's go, let's go!

INT. THE DINING ROOM - MINUTES LATER

Nana, Jenny and Aimee have been joined by all the other
females over age ten. This includes Kelly, Miranda and
Lilly. And the distracted newcomer, Beth.

Jenny, bright and funny, is the grand-master of ceremonies.

JENNY
All that remains, seven letters, starts
with 'c.'

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Beth is still shaken from her reunion with Dan, but somehow she manages ...

BETH
Cadaver.

JENNY
Perfect. Briefest time units, four letters.

BETH
Nano.

Kelly sees ROGER, age 7, eavesdropping at the door.

KELLY
Hey -- no spying!

Squealing, Roger runs out of the room. We follow him down the hall ...

INT. DEN/BEACH HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The dads and boys over 10 are here. The scene is one of thinly-veiled desperation.

MITCH, Jenny's Husband, is doing his best to lead the troops.

ROGER
You're way behind!

NED
You're not helping.

MITCH
No, secretive doesn't fit. Uhm. Let's go on to 12 Across.

WYATT
(whispering)
It's taken you four years to be interested in anyone. She must be special.

DAN
I'm telling you -- it's not going to happen! She's already dating someone.

LOWELL
That's not your problem, bro.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAN
Actually, it kind of is.

MITCH
15 Down. 5 letter word for Pan-Fry.

LOWELL
Dude, is there a rock on her left hand?

DAN
Not yet.

LOWELL
Then all's fair.

MITCH
Focus, people! Pan-fry!

INT. THE DINING ROOM

Close on Beth:

BETH
Saute.

JENNY
Yes!

BETH
And the word before, did we try
Zeitgeist?

JENNY
Ohmigod.

BETH
Which I think then would make ozone work?

JENNY
It seems we've hit the mother lode!

Lilly giggles. Beth is her new hero.

Angle on Nana and many of the girls as they take in Beth.
This is some girl.

JENNY
10 Letters. Anything that can go wrong,
will.

INT. FAMILY ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The Men/Boys are struggling.

NED
Baked? Try baked.

MITCH
You gotta be kidding. Baked for Pan-Fry?

WYATT
Dan? Dan. Earth to Dan.

DAN
Huh?

MITCH
We're dying here, Dan. We're...

The Women let out a cheer from the other room.

MITCH
Done.

INT. KITCHEN/BEACH HOUSE - MORNING

Clad in aprons, Dan, Wyatt and Lowell scrub dishes and clean up. Amy hands Aidan to Wyatt as Kelly walks off with the kitchen phone.

AMY
All yours.

Ned and the teen boys follow Jenny in.

JENNY
Make the beds, bring down the dirty clothes. The women RULE!

WYATT
We were just being nice. Tomorrow, we will prevail.

The women mock him as they depart. Wyatt turns to Dan.

WYATT
What happened to you? You were useless.

DAN
Sorry, guys ...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LOWELL
He's preoccupied with bigger things. Lay
off him.

Nana passes through the kitchen.

LOWELL
Mom? Whaddya think of ... (Beth)?

NANA
(annoyed)
Please, Lowell. It's way too early to
tell.
(then quickly)
She's bright. Lovely. Adorable. And if
you mess this up, we'll keep her and get
rid of you.

Beat. Lowell smiles.

NANA
(as she goes)
Dan, you missed a spot.

Dan looks down at the dish in his hand.

INT. BASE OF THE STAIRS - MORNING

Dan is wandering about, aimless, lost. He's at the foot of
the stairs when Beth calls down ...

BETH
Oh, Dave...

Dave? Dan turns, sees that Beth is calling him. He steps
aside as a gloomy Kelly passes by, oblivious to their
exchange.

BETH
Could you help me, my bag won't open?

INT. BETH'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Finally, Dan and Beth are alone. Not completely, though.
The door remains open.

BETH
I don't know what to say. This is so
awkward. Say something.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAN	*
(beat)	*
Lowell's a great guy.	*
BETH	*
He is. He's fun. And funny.	*
Uncomplicated, in the good way.	*
DAN	*
He's a great guy.	*
BETH	*
See, I just ended this long, messy	*
relationship, and Lowell was there, and	*
he, uhm, helped me untangle my jump rope	*
at the gym.	*
DAN	*
Lowell's a great guy.	*
BETH	*
You keep saying that.	*
DAN	*
Well, there's nothing else to say.	*
Dan offers his hand to shake.	*
DAN	*
Good luck.	*
BETH	*
(whispered)	*
Were you really gonna call?	*
Beat as Dan looks at her.	*
DAN	*
We'll never know.	*
Lowell barges into the room.	*
LOWELL	*
(a little too loud)	*
Ah, my two favorite people.	*
BETH	*
Thanks for your help, Dave.	*
LOWELL	*
Honey, it's Dan. As in - The Man.	*
Lowell kisses Beth. Dan starts to go.	*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

LOWELL

Keep your chin up, bro. That loser girl
has no idea what she's missing.

Dan forces a smile as Lowell closes Beth's door, leaving Dan
alone. Beat. He looks down, realizing that ...

Buster the Dog is sniffing Dan's genital area.

DAN

No. Please. Stop.

Dan continues down the steps, the Dog in pursuit. Poor Dan.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

An empty, winter beach.

A cluster of the adults walk with Beth and Lowell. It's all
very polite, but Beth is in the middle of being grilled.

NANA

An only child. I'm surprised. You seem
so comfortable with such a big family ...

BETH

Well, you make me feel welcome.

They keep walking.

Dan trails behind, unconsciously stepping where Beth, moments
earlier, had stepped.

Poppy drops back to talk with Dan, who is straining to hear
Beth's answers.

POPPY

So a little bird told me you're going to
be syndicated ...

DAN

(to himself)

Lilly.

(to his dad)

No, Poppy, that's premature. They're
looking at a bunch of columnists. It's a
long shot.

Beat.

POPPY

Who wouldn't want you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Dan smiles and strains to hear what question Beth is answering now.

JENNY

(to Beth)

That's amazing. Tell us more about yourself ...

BETH

Well ...

Wide Shot: All 27 family members, wrapped in heavy jackets and scarves, are walking the beach. Some kids run ahead and start to climb on the empty life guard chair.

INT. DINING ROOM/ASHBURN HOUSE

The end of a big, hearty dinner. Lots of empty plates and full stomachs.

Beth is the only one with food left on her plate, but only because they've peppered her with questions. In fact, it's been an entire day of Beth, and she's still going strong.

Presently, everyone's laughing -- except Dan, who watches from the corner of the room -- as Beth finishes a story.

BETH

So I said, "Grandma, maybe you just don't like pancakes." Then I threw them out and made another batch.

(to the kids)

Keep in mind - my grandparents were nothing like yours. They always wanted to know -- "What are your plans, Beth? What do you plan to do with your life?" I was a teenager, the only plan I had was how to avoid this conversation about plans. So I decided to make pancakes. You see, I am an accomplished maker of pancakes. So, anyway, I got a nice stack, they looked good, buttered them up, they were steaming hot when I set them on the table.

LILLY

Yum.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BETH

"What are your plans? You've got to have a plan." And I poured on the syrup -- and she took a bite, made this awful face and said, "Agh! Something's not right." So I spread on more butter and practically drown her pancakes in syrup and that's when she said, "Oh my lord, that's not syrup. It's coffee!"

There's much laughter and a smattering of applause. The kids especially love this story.

LOWELL

(proudly, to anyone who will listen)
What did I tell you? Didn't I tell you?
She's funny, too.

There's barely a beat before Kelly, Wyatt and Poppy all start to ask Beth a question at the same time. As they try to sort out who should go first, Beth notices that 5 year old Cassie (with the anachronistic curls in her hair) has raised her hand.

BETH

Yes, Cassie?

CASSIE WITH THE CURLS

Uhm. Uhm.
(barely audible)
Were you always pretty?

Lowell goes "Awww."

BETH

(to Cassie)
Actually I looked a lot like you.
So, yes, I was pretty.

THE ROOM SANS DAN

Awww.

WYATT

So when you go out for sushi in New York, do you have a favorite --

DAN

OK, everybody, that's it! Enough with the third degree.

POPPY

Daniel.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DAN

This isn't a cabinet level position she's
applying for. You've grilled her all
day.

NANA

Have we?

BETH

No, not at all.

DAN

She's just being nice.

BETH

No, I find the questions refreshing...

DAN

Puh-lease. I apologize on behalf of my
family. Let's be honest, everybody.
None of Lowell's previous girlfriends
have been subjected to such in-depth
questioning - none of those flight
attendants, not the body double, or the
twins -- wait, actually we did grill that
Knicks' City Dancer, but it was all about
basketball. None of Lowell's other many,
many countless (girlfriends)...

WYATT

Dan does have a point --

Aimee's foot finds Wyatt's knee cap under the table. Ow!

A tense silence. Then ...

LOWELL

Wow. I want to thank you, Dan, for
pointing that out.

(sincere)

You're the smartest guy I know.

Beat. 'Ouch' for Dan.

LOWELL

And you're right. It's Annie's turn to
ask me whatever -

DAN

(under his breath, can't help
himself)

She prefers Beth.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Beat. All eyes turn to Beth. *

LOWELL
Ask me whatever you want, Beth. *

BETH
I don't have any questions. *

DAN
Oh, come on. *

MIRANDA
Dad. *

BETH
I told Lowell early on that I'd forgive
him his past, if he'd forgive me mine. *

Beat. Wow. *

DAN
Well, that's a stupid thing to do. *

Nana, horrified by Dan's behavior, stands suddenly and says: *

NANA
(with a false cheeriness)
OK, everyone into the family room for
dessert.
(under her breath to Dan)
Not you. You'll be doing the dishes.
Alone. *

INT. KITCHEN - MINUTES LATER *

Dan is stuck with the dishes and they are stacked mile high.
In the other room, the rest of the family plays charades.
There's laughter, cheering and the calling out of clues. *

Dan takes a plate off the stack only to find Lowell standing
before him, ready to help. *

DAN
I'm sorry. I was way out of line. *

LOWELL
No, you're never out of line. You are my
brother ... *

DAN
Yes, but I think you'll understand when I
tell you ... *

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LOWELL	*
Listen, bro: There's nothing you could do	*
or say that would upset me.	*
DAN	*
But the girl I met ...	*
LOWELL	*
(Over Dan)	*
Wait, dude, can I just say one thing?	*
(Beat)	*
When you were talking about all my other	*
girls, I realized something. What I feel	*
for Beth is ... different.	*
Lowell looks toward the family room. Dan looks, too. All we	*
can see through the doorway is Beth acting out a charade.	*
LOWELL	*
You know that feeling when your ...	*
Lowell unconsciously touches his chest.	*
DAN	*
Heart ...	*
LOWELL	*
When your heart is ...	*
DAN	*
Pounding ...	*
LOWELL	*
Yes ...	*
DAN	*
... like it's actually outside your	*
ribs ...	*
LOWELL	*
Yep.	*
DAN	*
Exposed - vulnerable - no protection ...	*
LOWELL	*
Yes ...	*
DAN	*
And you feel wonderful and awful and	*
heartsick and alive all at the same time.	*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

LOWELL

Yes! What do we call that?

DAN

Oh - love.

LOWELL

You always did have the words.

A cheer comes from the other room as Beth's charade has been guessed. Lowell goes to her. Dan watches and then resumes doing the dishes.

INT. BASEMENT - LAUNDRY ROOM - NIGHT

Close on Dan leaning over the basement desk. He's banging his head on the desk. Bang, bang, bang then ...

Buster's big nose pokes into the frame and licks Dan's face.

DAN

Uck.

Dan leans back to get away from Buster, but in the process, smashes into shelf containing the family's sea shell collection. Oops.

INT. KITCHEN - THE NEXT MORNING

Angle on Nana and Poppy in the kitchen, look up and smile ...

NANA

Sleep well?

Angle on Dan, who has emerged from the basement. Clearly he didn't sleep well.

INT. KITCHEN - MINUTES LATER

Dan finishes his breakfast.

NANA

Drink all your juice.

DAN

Mom.

NANA

You need your juice.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAN
What's that noise?

As we follow Dan through the house, the Music gets louder.

INT. FAMILY/REC ROOM - DAY

Dan enters the large family/rec room at the far end of the house.

The final moments of an impromptu group aerobics class led by the now sweaty, and rather ripped brother Lowell. Beth is among the group. She's wearing a simple sweat suit and her hair is pulled back in a pony tail.

LOWELL
That was good. Tomorrow. Same time.
I'll be taking attendance.

PARTICIPATING FAMILY MEMBERS
Thanks, Uncle Lowell. That was great.

Lowell removes his sweaty shirt, approaches Beth who is now on the floor doing a post-workout stretch.

BETH
(indicating her thighs)
I'm a little stiff.

Lowell joins her on the floor. They face each other with their legs spread, holding each other's elbows, Lowell leans back, which pulls Beth forward.

MIRANDA
(sweaty, and passing by)
You missed it, Dad.

KELLY
And you're the one person who really needs it.

From Dan's POV - it appears - what with the bouncing and the proximity of Beth's head to Lowell's crotch - to be something more than just stretching.

Dan does an about face and addresses his nearest daughter, Lilly.

DAN
Get your sisters. Get 'em. Now. Now!

QUICK CUT:

INT. ASHBURN HOUSE - COAT ROOM/HALLWAY

Dan is throwing out coats from the coat room. The three daughters watch, perplexed.

DAN
Girls - girls - let's go.

KELLY
This isn't my coat.

DAN
It'll do. We're going.

MIRANDA
Where?

DAN
Shopping.

DANIELLE
(appearing from around the corner)
You're going shopping?

DAN
It's a father-daughter thing.

KELLY
Since when?

DAN
Since now. It's a tradition.

DANIELLE
Mom, they're going shopping!

Others chime in - "We want to go."

DAN
Sorry, there isn't room for you all.

LOWELL (O.S.)
We can drive.

Dan turns. Lowell is in the doorway, standing behind Beth, kneading her shoulders.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAN
(horrificed)
No, no!

*
*
*

HARD CUT TO:

*

INT. SHOPPING CENTER PARKING LOT - LATER THAT DAY

*

Two Minivans pull into side-by-side spots. The kids pile out of both vans.

*
*

INT. CLOTHING STORE - AFTERNOON

The teens and little kids swarm everywhere. Dan delivers spending guidelines to his trio.

DAN
Twenty-five dollar limit, nothing trappy,
no spaghetti straps. If some pseudo-rock
star wears it on MTV, you can't.

*
*

MIRANDA
Dad, I love you, but twenty five - that's
totally lame.

*

KELLY
Danielle gets sixty.

Angle on Beth with Lowell trailing behind, puppy-like.

*

DAN
Life is unfair, what can I say?

*

A MONTAGE BEGINS:

Miranda, Kelly and Lilly try on clothes. Miranda and Lilly's are classic in design. Dan approves.

He tries to ignore Beth who is being encouraged by Lowell, who keeps trying to sneak into her dressing room. Beth pushes him out. Dan turns his attention to ...

*
*
*

Kelly. Her choices are as skimpy and trashy as possible. Dan vetoes each one. They argue.

*

END MONTAGE:

Drifting over to a corner, Dan notices Beth coming out of the dressing room to an approving Lowell. Beth looks very sexy. Dan stares a little too long.

*
*
*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Beth notices him noticing her. Caught, Dan pivots and bumps into a teenage sales clerk, who's gazing lustfully off to the right. *

Dan follows the clerk's eye line and sees that the boy is ogling Kelly. She's clowning around, modeling a scarf very provocatively in front of a poster. *

The poster depicts a teenage male model (who looks 17) shot nude from the waist up; he's just wearing jeans. He's embracing a teenage girl (who looks 16, maybe), also shot nude from the waist up. She's covering her breasts with the same scarf Kelly's playing with.

DAN

What's this! *

EMPLOYEE

It's the new jeans poster.

DAN

What jeans -- they're no jeans here.
They're naked!

The embarrassed employee points to the bottom rim of the poster, where the very top of the jeans are visible.

EMPLOYEE

See. There, and there.

Dan goes straight to the register. A friendly FEMALE EMPLOYEE, 22, is working there.

DAN

May I see the manager please?

She nods and walks away. By now Beth, Lowell and most of the Ashburns are watching, much to Kelly and Miranda's chagrin.

KELLY

Dad, don't do this.

MIRANDA

Really, none of us are planning to adopt the topless look, okay?

DAN

I just want to ask this person if they'd like their teenage daughter prancing around like that.

A short Asian teen walks to the front.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ASIAN MAN

Hi. I'm Derrick Lu, the manager.

DAN

You can't be the manager, you're 12.

*

DERRICK LU

Sir, I'm 19.

DAN

Maybe in dog years. Look ...

*

DERRICK LU

I assure you, I'm capable of discharging my responsibilities.

*

DAN

Good. Then take that down.

DERRICK LU

Sir, headquarters sends us the artwork. We don't have the latitude to decide what to display.

DAN

Come on, Derrick, change your attitude about the latitude. All you have to do is take it down.

DERRICK LU

Personally, I think it's an attractive image.

DAN

It's incredibly attractive, that's the problem! It sends the wrong message! It tells teenagers, "Strip, have sex -- and you'll instantly be beautiful."

*

KELLY

Oh my God, Dad.

He walks over to a female mannequin clad in a sweater.

DAN

You know what? Forget it. Let's just use this sweater while my kids are here. I'll drape it over the top.

*

DERRICK LU

Customers are not permitted to handle the mannequins.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

DAN

It's okay; they have a very high pain threshold.

Dan tries to remove the sweater. The sweater -- and head -- pop off. Now the mannequin's breasts are showing.

DAN

Why isn't she wearing a bra?

In all the commotion, the Mannequin topples over on top of Dan.

EXT. STORE - MOMENTS LATER

Dan is escorted to the door by a large security guard.

Angle on Miranda, Kelly and Lilly:

MIRANDA

Something's very wrong with our father.

INT. BEACH HOSE/HALLWAY - DAY

Dan walks down the second floor hall, passing Lilly showing off her new clothes to Nana. Then he passes Poppy.

POPPY

I found this roll of film; 24 exposures, already shot. Is it yours?

DAN

Dad, not now.

Buster runs by; Dan deftly drops one hand to protect his crotch.

Dan sees Beth dart out of her room and head into a bathroom.

Beat. He gets an idea.

INT. NANA AND POPPY'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Dan hurries into his parent's bedroom. He sees Kelly sitting on her grandparent's bed, talking presumably to Marty on her cell phone.

Dan drops to the floor and tries to sneak past, but ...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KELLY
 (jumping up)
 Oh my God, Dad, you are such a freak!

She rushes out, hurrying past Dan.

KELLY
 (into her phone)
 It's my loser of a father, he gives me
 ZERO privacy.

Kelly is gone.

Dan barges into his parent's bathroom, using the second
 entrance.

INT. NANA AND POPPY'S BATHROOM

Dan enters, shuts the door. Beth is leaning over the sink.
 Her face is covered with soap and she's about to rinse off.

DAN
 We gotta talk.

BETH
 (unable to open her eyes)
 Can it ...

DAN
 No. Now. Is this working for you? I
 mean, really working?

Beth starts to rinse her face.

DAN
 Because it can't just be me. I mean,
 this is hell -

BETH
 I'm having a fine time.

DAN
 A fine time. Really? You're enjoying
 yourself?

BETH
 I am, yes.

DAN
 Because I'm not. I'm not ... I think we
 need some ground rules. Don't you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BETH
Rules, OK, sure.

She reaches for the towel rack which is next to Dan.

DAN
Like that! Perfect example. We need to
keep our distance. Right now, you're too
close. Back up. Back up!

BETH
Towel, please.

DAN
Oh, right.

He hands her a towel.

BETH
Thank you.

He waits as she towel dries her face.

DAN
Also, you do this thing with your lips
when you're thinking ...

BETH
What are you talking about?

DAN
You kind of go like ...

Dan tries his best to demonstrate the way Beth bites her
bottom when she's thinking.

DAN
And if you could not do that - as a rule -
that would be helpful. And also please
keep the majority of your skin covered at
all times.

BETH
I'm sorry?

DAN
For my part, here's what I'll do. I will
stop thinking about you. And if I do
find myself thinking about you (which
from time to time, in a moment of
weakness, may happen) I will focus all my
thoughts on your uhm flaws.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BETH
My flaws.

DAN
Your flaws.

BETH
And they are ...?

Beat.

DAN
I was hoping you might help me locate
them.

BETH
Well ...

Bathroom door swings open, Beth turns in the direction of the
door as Dan dives into the bathtub/shower. Kelly enters.

KELLY
Are you taking a shower?

BETH
No.

KELLY
Do you mind if I ...?

BETH
No. Yes. I mean, yes - I'm taking a
shower.

KELLY
Well, then, a little advice? Old house,
old pipes.

BETH
Yes.

KELLY
It takes forever for the water to heat
up...

Miranda reaches in the tub, almost touching Dan's leg. She
turns on the faucet.

KELLY
We don't know each other all that well...

BETH
True ...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

KELLY

But you seem pretty cool for an old
person ...

BETH

Thanks?

KELLY

There's no one I can talk to. I mean,
really talk.

BETH

OK ...

KELLY

You see, I'm ready to go to the next step
with Marty ...

Dan looks alarmed.

Beth reaches in and pulls up the shower stop. Water sprays
out the shower head, not only drenching Dan but drowning out
Beth's conversation with Kelly, which was Beth's purpose.

Dan's POV: Through the wavy glass, Beth and Kelly are two
blurs talking. Dan strains to hear and at the same time does
everything to not be seen.

Kelly notices the steam pouring out over the shower.

KELLY

I think it's ready.

Angle on Dan, moaning as quietly as possible - the water is
exceedingly hot and all of Dan's exposed skin is turning
bright red.

Beth is about to get in the shower fully clothed.

KELLY

You're still dressed.

BETH

Oh, right.

KELLY

(turning away)
Don't worry. I won't look.

Beth starts to undress.

Angle on Dan in the shower. The water is scalding hot.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

Dan's POV: Through the wavy glass of the shower, the blurry image of Beth undressing. Nice. The scalding hot water. Not so nice.

Then the shower door slides open.

Close on Dan closing his eyes.

Beth adjusts the water temperature and, naked, steps in the shower.

On the other side of the glass, Kelly keeps talking.

Dan can't help himself - just as he starts to squint out of one eye, a wet washcloth lands on his face ...

EXT. ASHBURN HOUSE - FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER

No, it can't be. Yes, it is. A man, mid-forties, in dripping wet clothes, climbs out an upstairs bathroom window and inches along the roof.

INT. DINING ROOM - DINNER

Beth joins the family. All of them -- except for Dan -- are seated around the two tables. The adults at the adults table, and the kids at their table.

Through the window, we see Dan drop into a snow bank.

Only Beth and Cassie with the Curls notice.

BETH

(whispering to the girl)
You didn't see that.

POPPY

Would one of you kids like to say grace?

Roger volunteers. He rises from the kids table, stands solemnly as everyone else bows their head. Beat. Then Roger lets out a rather impressive BURP. The kids cover their mouths, trying not to laugh.

INT. DINING ROOM - MINUTES LATER

Food is being passed. Pasta being served.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAN
 (entering late)
 Here I come.

Dan has changed clothes, but his teeth are chattering.

He stops when he sees that the only empty seat is next to Beth.

DAN
 I'm gonna mix it up and sit with the kids tonight.

NANA
 Nonsense. Sit down.

Dan sits reluctantly and even appears to inch his chair away from Beth, which she notices.

JENNY
 Besides we need your parenting expertise.

WYATT
 Honey, he's on vacation.

DAN
 Use me, abuse me. Fire away.

JENNY
 How do we stop Roger from belching at inappropriate times?

DAN
 Easy. Roger, come over here.

LOWELL
 (to Beth)
 You're about to watch a master at work.

JENNY
 (whispers to Dan)
 Thank you.

Other kids watch from the perimeter.

Dan looks sternly at Roger, who stands before him, nervous and fidgeting.

DAN
 I need you to pay attention. Otherwise I won't be able to help you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Dan clearly has Roger's attention. The entire room, for that matter.

DAN
(serious)
Your burps. Are they like this?

He lets out a high pitched yelp of a burp.

DAN
Or more like this?

He follows with more of a belch, low and guttural.

DAN
Or more like my personal favorite:

Dan gives over to a long, opera-like belch-burp combo that continues longer than most lifetimes.

Roger is giggling. The other kids are in stitches.

Angle on the Adults and Young Adults watching -- a mixture of horrified, stunned, and in Beth's case, no idea what to think.

MIRANDA
That is so foul.

Beat. Dan unfolds his napkin and spreads it across his lap.

DAN
(pleased with himself)
I'm famished.

CUT TO:

Later in the meal. Nana is in mid-story.

NANA
And then he comes up to me on a crowded train and says, "Is that seat taken?" My mother was in the rest room, but I said, "No."

POPPY
Her face when her mother saw me ...

Nana and Poppy share a smile.

POPPY
So that's how we met.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

BETH
I love that story.

Suddenly there's a strange sound and attention goes to Dan who is slurping up one noodle at a time.

Dan looks up at and sees everyone is watching him, but he keeps slowly slurping up that longest of noodles.

INT. DINING ROOM/ASHBURN HOUSE

The table is being cleared.

Beth and Dan help clear the table. They pause when necessary to avoid being overheard by the others who are also helping.

BETH
I'm onto you.

DAN
Oh?

BETH
You want to make sure I don't like you.

DAN
How am I doing?

BETH
It's working.

Beth goes on, leaving Dan with a wet sponge. He starts to wipe up.

INT. THE GIRL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Dan has come up to say good-night to Lilly. He's surprised to find Lilly and Beth gabbing away like old friends. A laptop is up on the table.

DAN
I came up to say good-night.

LILLY
(way into Beth)
Good-night.

DAN
(beat, lingers)
What are you two up to?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LILLY
 Beth's been teaching me power-point on
 Miranda's laptop.
 (happily)
 It's no fun at all.

DAN
 I can tell.
 (to Beth)
 How's she doing?

Beth looks at Lilly proudly.

BETH
 She's a natural.

Dan leaves ...

INT. STAIRCASE - CONTINUOUS

Lots of people on the stairs, kids in line for the bathrooms,
 etc. Dan makes his way down ...

LOWELL (O.S.)
 Hey, bro.

Startled, Dan sees Lowell climbing the stairs,

LOWELL
 Going up for the good-night kiss.

DAN
 Right.

LOWELL
 It feels so 8th grade, but you know Mom
 and Pop. Separate bedrooms for the
 unmarrieds.

DAN
 I approve of that rule.
 (sees that Lowell is carrying
 two books)
 What is that?

LOWELL
Losers, Weepers or Walk with Me.

Lowell holds up the books. Two hardcover novels by Dan
 Ashburn.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAN
(annoyed)
Why?

LOWELL
She's reading some biography of that guy
Ghandi and so I said she should read a
real book by a real man.

NANA
(from below)
Be careful, they're first editions.

DAN
They're the only editions, Mom ...

NANA
But if something were to happen to
them...

DAN
Then we'd replace them. Of the 5,000
copies we have 4,952. In boxes. In the
garage! Good-night.

Dan passes Nana ...

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

It's 2:45 AM. Dan lies in bed, sleeping.

His door OPENS. Beth, clad in a bathrobe, slips in and
closes the door.

Moving to his bed, she sheds her bathrobe. We don't see, but
sense her nakedness. Kneeling, she leans toward Dan --
closer, closer. Her breath comes faster.

Now she's panting, LOUDER AND LOUDER. SHE LICKS HIS EAR.

DAN AWAKES WITH A START -- to find himself nose-to-nose with
Buster, not Beth. He groans and drops back down.

INT. DEN - MORNING

Bleary-eyed, Dan huddles with the men and boys, straining to
do the crossword puzzle.

WYATT
5 Across -- Another word for 'Lost.'

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAN
 Curst, helpless, abject, finished,
 irretrievable, done for ...

WYATT
 Five letters.

DAN
 Kaput.

The guys are impressed.

WYATT
 Awesome -- now we got a chance.

A triumphant cry comes up from the other room.

INT. THE FAMILY REC ROOM

Lowell's Morning Work-out.

It's his own system of Power-Cardio-Pilates. Loud music which he shouts over. From time to time, Lowell - while barking out instructions - jumps rope at impressive clip, crossing his arms, double jumping - he can do it all.

As he takes the family through his course - grandparents, parents, kids of all ages are spread out through the living room, the family room -

LOWELL
 This is the stretch where I first noticed Beth.

Lowell demonstrates a rather compromising stretch having to do with an arched back and his rear in the air.

LOWELL
 Remember that Beth?

BETH (O.S.)
 TMI!

Dan, bent over, straining to stretch - looks around for Beth...

Dan's upside down POV: Beth, in the far corner, not exercising, but rather curled up in a big, cushy chair reading Dan's first novel, *Losers Weepers*.

LOWELL
 Everyone take a look at Dan -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Angle on Dan, hanging over - the blood has rushed to his face *

DAN *

In every way, he's an example of what not
to do. *

Through spread legs, Dan sees Beth laugh at something she
reads, then she catches herself. *

Not sure if he's seeing what he thinks he's seeing, Dan comes
to a standing position and glances back at Beth ... *

Who, notices him, yawns as she flips a page. *

On Dan. *Oh great.* *

Lowell, passing, snaps Dan in the ass with his jump rope. *

LOWELL *

It may be too late for you, bro, but keep
trying. *

INT. THE FAMILY ROOM/STUDY - MORNING *

Close on the fire in the fire place. *

Dan tosses on a log and pokes it into place with a poker. *

He turns to find Nana and Poppy waiting to have a word. *

NANA *

I'll just speak my peace: After your
behavior last night and other incidents
too numerous to mention, your father and
I are officially worried. *

POPPY *

We are quite, quite worried. *

NANA *

We are worried with a capital W. *

DAN *

I'm touched. *

Wyatt and Jenny enter the room, see the meeting in progress
and turn to leave. *

WYATT *

Whoa, sorry. *

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NANA	*
This is a private ...	*
DAN	*
No, no. Come in, come in.	*
WYATT	*
Are you sure?	*
DAN	*
We're all family here. Sit down.	*
(to Nana)	*
Go on, Mom. You were saying?	*
NANA	*
(hesitates, then:)	*
So we asked ourselves, "What could it be?	*
What's gotten into Danny?" Something	*
seems to be bothering you. We thought	*
maybe you were lonely.	*
Aimee, Mitch and Baby Aidan with the big head pass by, peek	*
in. They're about to go, when ...	*
DAN	*
Oh, good. Come on in. The more, the	*
merrier.	*
POPPY	*
(to Nana)	*
I don't think we should have this talk in	*
front of everyone.	*
DAN	*
Absolutely. It makes me less lonely.	*
Besides, my life's an open book. No	*
secrets.	*
KELLY	*
(entering, then leaving fast)	*
Ohmigod.	*
Kelly bumps into Lowell who enters with Beth.	*
DAN	*
Now the party is complete. Go on.	*
Nana looks at Poppy.	*
POPPY	*
So we were just at the Farmer's Market,	*
and you'll never believe who we ran into.	*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

NANA

An old admirer of yours. She's back for
the holidays. Maybe a little lonely,
too.

Dan starts laughing. All this attention. Beth in the room.
He keeps laughing. Can't stop. Someone is lonely, but
someone isn't going to say it.

Shots of the faces. Everyone is very worried. It appears
Dan is almost certifiable. Lowell can't leave, and for Beth,
it's like a train wreck in slow-motion.

POPPY

We just thought after all these years you
and Ruthie might hit it off.

Dan stops laughing.

DAN

Ruthie?
(horrified)
Ruthie Draper?

NANA

What?

Standing behind Dan, Lowell makes the 'cut' gesture across
his neck and shakes his head, "No, no!"

NANA

(losing her patience)
What is it, Lowell? Just say it!

LOWELL

We're in mixed company, so I want to say
this nice. But, Mom? Ruthie 'Pig Face'
Draper? What are you thinking?

POPPY

That's enough, Lowell.

WYATT

No, Pops, I agree, that's downright
cruel.

POPPY

Oh, really.

NANA

Well, unfortunately we've already taken
the liberty --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

DING-DONG.

Angle on Dan as Nana crosses to the door. *Oh fuck.*

Beth watches what is going on, and finds it amusing.

NANA (O.S.)
Come in, come in!

RUTHIE DRAPER (O.S.)
Your house, it's just the way I remember
it!

Nana leads Ruthie into the room.

Guess who is a hottie? Guess who enters the house and heads
turn? Tall, sculpted. Flame red hair. The ugly duckling is
all grown up.

RUTHIE
Hello, Dan. I'd know you anywhere.
You look just the same.

DAN
So do you?

Wyatt is STUNNED and stares at her chest.

Aimee kicks Wyatt under the table.

WYATT
Ow. Ow!

POPPY
Dan, get your guest a chair.

DAN
Oh, right. Of course.

NANA
So, Ruthie, tell us what you've been up
to ...

CUT TO:

Later. We're still sitting around the fire, but now every
man and boy in this house seems to be in attendance. Aimee
has disappeared. Beth is toughing it out, trapped amidst all
the testosterone. She's uncomfortable, and maybe - dare we
say - threatened.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

NANA

So, in short, after Harvard Medical
School and your residency at John
Hopkins...

POPPY

That's when she did her two years with
the Peace Corps.

RUTHIE

Actually it was Doctors Without
Borders...

NANA

Well, well. You've certainly done well
for yourself.

POPPY

(quick to agree)
Yes. It's impressive.

NANA

I can't imagine you had much time for a
social life.

RUTHIE

That couldn't be more true. Although
there was someone ... someone very
special in my life ...but he was ...
(suddenly emotional)
lost in a freak jet ski accident ...
(tearing up)
I'm sorry.

Lowell offers a Kleenex.

RUTHIE

What's weird is that we'd only gone on
two dates. But you know how sometimes
you just know.

Lowell, while staring at Ruthie, takes one of Beth's hands
and gives it a squeeze.

LOWELL

Absolutely, yes.

DAN

(gathering up the dishes)
Well, thanks for stopping by.

Ruthie is taken aback. Over already?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

NANA

Danny, we'll do the dishes. We'll watch
the kids. You all go out and don't a
think a thing.

LOWELL

A double date.

DAN

I don't ...

LOWELL

Beth, what do you say?

BETH

(trying to game)
It could be fun.

CUT TO:

INT. THE CHUCK WAGON - BEACH HAVEN'S MOST HOPPING BAR

The Double Date. Every night is Country Western Night at the
Chuck Wagon. Red Checkered Table Cloths. And, yes, even a
mechanical bull, which is currently being expertly ridden by
the new and improved Ruthie Draper.

LOWELL

I'm sorry, dude, but the way she's riding
that can only make a guy wonder.

Dan indicates Beth.

LOWELL

No, Beth's cool. You're cool, right?

Beth is at a loss.

BETH

Sure, I'm cool. But I don't think Dan
likes her.

DAN

I don't?

BETH

You don't. You really don't.

LOWELL

Am I missing something? What's not to
like?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ruthie squeals and waves from the mechanical bull. *

BETH
She's not your type. *

DAN
What's my type? *

BETH
I don't know, Dan. You tell me. What's
your type? *

Dan just stares at Beth. He's speechless. *

BETH
(referring to her drink)
I need something with a little more ... *

LOWELL
I'll get it. *

BETH
No. No! Dan, do you want anything? *

DAN
Yes. No! No, I'm good. *

Beth goes to order. *

LOWELL
Dude, I don't know what Beth was talking
about, but can I ask you something?
Look, it's not my business, I know, but
you gotta be backed up. For me, if I go
like even a few days ... I'm sure you -
from time to time - are "good to
yourself." This is just me talking, but
there may be no better chance for you to
uncork that drain. Unclog that bottle.
Am I mixing metaphors? *

DAN
Yes. *

LOWELL
But do you know what I'm saying? *

Music changes and Dan suddenly stands. He strides to the
center of the dance floor, points to Ruthie as the mechanical
bull slows to a stop. With one finger, he gestures for her
to come in his direction. She does as he says, joining in
the middle of the club, and they dance, oh do they ever. *

(CONTINUED)

Beth sits down with Lowell. They watch Dan and Ruthie tear up the dance floor.

LOWELL

I know, I was a little crass before, but I can't figure out my brother. I don't know what it is, but something's holding him back.

BETH

Not anymore.

Angle on Dan who is a wild man on the dance floor. Ruthie is doing her best to keep up.

LOWELL

And that's a beautiful thing.

For Lowell, maybe. But not for Beth.

EXT. BEACH HOUSE - INSIDE RUTHIE'S CAR

Ruthie's sports car skids to a stop. Dan is in the passenger seat.

Beth and Lowell are squeezed in the back. As they climb out:

LOWELL

I really love your car.

BETH

OK, nice meeting you, Ruth! Come on, guys!

RUTHIE

Actually ...

Beth turns.

RUTHIE

Dan and I are going for a drive.

Beth looks at Dan. Is that true?

DAN

(beat)

And don't wait up.

Ruthie gets back in the car.

Lowell does a "Someone's about to get laid" dance.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RUTHIE
Get in, beautiful.

Dan gets in and gives Beth a subtle but cruel wave as he and Ruthie drive off.

CUT TO:

INT. ASHBURN HOUSE - KITCHEN

Next morning. The breakfast table. Attendance is at capacity. Why? Beth is making her famous pancakes.

Lilly notices as Dan takes his place at the table.

LILLY
Oh, Dad, they're scrumptious.

POPPY
Mouth watering!

LOWELL
Who knew she could cook, too?

SOMEONE
I'm on my third stack.

Dan looks around. Big, fluffy, menu-worthy pancakes have been served piping hot to the others. Everyone is eating -- it's a kind of breakfast heaven.

Dan's POV: It's almost eerie, and certainly impressive -- the way everyone is eating, making soft groans of approval as they chew -- never have pancakes made such an impact.

WYATT
So how's Mr. Lucky this morning?

Bang as Beth slams the skillet down.

LOWELL
I bet you worked up an appetite last night.

Dan sits there and is passed over while Beth serves everyone around him second and third helpings.

DAN
I actually am kind of ... hungry ...

But Beth is back at the stove.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LILLY

(to Dan)

It's a secret recipe, but she let me
crack the eggs.

LOWELL

(leaning in, but still a little
too loud)

The boys expect a full report later.

DAN

A gentleman doesn't speak of such things.

Was that a 'ha!' coming from Beth in the kitchen? Dan's not
sure.

We start to notice a pattern. Every time Dan speaks in
reference to last night, Beth seems to bang or slam or scrape
a pot or pan or drawer. Only Nana notices Beth's erratic
behavior. And Dan, of course. But unlike Nana, Dan's
enjoying the show. At least until ...

Beth serves Dan his much-anticipated stack of pancakes. Dan
looks down. *What?* They're burnt black.

Dan looks up just as Wyatt enters the room, holding a
football.

WYATT

Who wants to mess it up?

A couple of the kids shout, "I do, I do!"

The football is tossed from Lowell to Wyatt and ends up with
Kelly.

NANA

Not at the table. Take it outside!

EXT. THE FROZEN YARD - DAY

It is spirited game of touch football and most everyone is
playing. Most notably, though, Dan and Beth are on opposing
teams.

Mitch heaves the football ...

Dan prepares to catch the pass ...

The football in mid-flight ...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Dan stretches out his arms -- as the ball touches his hands,
then ...

Wham. His legs are knocked out from under him. Sprawled on
the ground, he looks back and sees Beth was the cause. She
brushes off her gloves and hurries back to the huddle.

Beth's team is on offense. Dan lines up to block her. They
keep pushing against each other long after the play is over.

A later play -- Beth has the ball. She's fast. She pivots,
she spins, she dodges opponents ...

Dan comes up from the secondary -- and instead of tagging, he
leaps on top of her. At the last moment, Beth laterals the
ball to Kelly who catches it and with Wyatt blocking, runs
for a touchdown.

Few notice that Dan has ended up on top of Beth.

DAN

Nothing happened. I wanted to make you
jealous.

Beat. Beth rolls him over and pins him down.

BETH

Well, it worked.

She gets up and runs back to the huddle.

Dan props up on his elbows, watches her go, fighting a smile,
thinking *It worked!*

LOWELL

Look out for the --!

Then *SMACK!* The football cracks Dan in the face. More to
the point, the nose. Dan covers his face in pain!

HARD CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN/BEACH HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Dan sits, his head tilted back, a cotton ball up one nostril.
Nana bustles about, enjoying her role as nurse. Shouts and
laughter from the game float in the window.

NANA

Why you persist in acting like a fifteen-
year-old is beyond me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAN
(joking, but not)
I'm filled with reckless desire.

NANA
You need to be filled with greater
restraint.

Beat. Dan and his bloody nose turn and look at Nana.

DAN
What does that mean?

The phone rings. Poppy answers.

NANA
I think you know what that means.

POPPY
(handing Dan the phone)
Someone named Jordy. For you.

DAN
Jordy, this isn't a good time. Uh-huh.
That's great, but I can't go to San
Francisco right now. You're kidding.
(cups the phone, to Nana and
Poppy)
You're never going to believe this.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN/BEACH HOUSE

All the 'football players' are back in the house, getting
warm. Most importantly, Nana and Poppy are more excited than
we've ever seen them be. They both speak at the same time,
trying to explain Dan's good news.

NANA
The call came from out of the blue --

POPPY
Syndication is everything when you're a
columnist --

DAN
Mom, Dad, please -- I can explain it.
There are 3 finalists for the job. The
other 2 are going tomorrow to San
Francisco to meet with the upper
management of Evans Publishing Group.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NANA
But because Dan won't go ...

POPPY
He gets to drive 10 minutes down the
road...

NANA
This Thursday at 2 PM ...

DAN
To meet the actual owners, the Evans
family who have a house --

NANA
This is great news.

DAN
Great news is getting the job. But it's
good to get the chance. So you can cheer
now.
(beat)
Now.

Those in the room are still confused, but they celebrate all
the same.

LOWELL
(holding Beth's hand)
Bro, this may be your year after all.

Out on Dan, half smiling.

INT. PORCH - NIGHT

Dan steps out onto the wrap-around porch. It's quiet and
dark out in the driveway.

KELLY (O.S.)
Call me as soon as you get this. Here's
a kiss.

He turns. There's Kelly in a chaise lounge. Upset, she
hangs up her cell phone.

KELLY
Dad, jeez, will you quit it?

DAN
Where is everybody?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KELLY
I'm here.

*
*

DAN
You know what I mean.

*
*

KELLY
They went for hot chocolate.

*

Dan's about to leave. Instead, he looks at his daughter, so young, so angry -- and lingers.

DAN
So, how's tattoo-hippy-man-with-the-pierced ear?

*
*

KELLY
You don't care.

DAN
I care about you, so I think I do, in a connect-the-dots-kind-a-way.

KELLY
Oh please.

*

DAN
No, I get it. You're here, and he's there, and there's this barrier between you.
(warming to his subject)
And that's frustrating, because there's something about this person, you really connect and if you could just be together...
(pause)
...he'd help you become the best possible version of yourself.

Kelly is stunned.

KELLY
Oh my God, that's it!
(jumping up, excited)
So I'm not grounded when we get home?

DAN
What?

KELLY
You just said what's happening to me is a good thing.

*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DAN

Hold on, Kelly, you broke a rule. I
can't ignore that. *

(her joy evaporates)

Okay -- I'll make it two weeks, not a
month.

KELLY

Two weeks!

Upset, she storms off. Jenny pokes her head in.

JENNY

What's wrong now? *

DAN

What isn't? *

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Dan and Miranda are working quickly, putting chicken, rice,
and vegetables on plates. Jenny and Ned are ferrying the
loaded plates to the dining room.

As Jenny and Ned exit with plates...

MIRANDA

Dad, Lilly asked me something.

DAN

What's that?

MIRANDA

She wanted to know why were you flirting
with Beth during the football game. *

That stops him cold. Ned and Jenny come back in. Miranda
and Dan fill their plates; Dan hurries the process.

NED

Easy, easy.

Jenny and Ned depart.

MIRANDA

Don't worry, I covered for you. I told
her it was nothing. *

DAN

It was.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MIRANDA

Dad, I'm seventeen, okay? You were SO flirting.

DAN

That wasn't flirting. It was ...
(busted)
Flirting.

*
*
*
*

Jenny and Ned return. Now Dan serves the plates at a speed approaching recklessness. They exit again.

MIRANDA

Look, it's okay, I know men can't always control it. And luckily, it's obvious that she's not the least bit interested in you.

(beat)

But "cool it," all right?

*
*
*
*

He nods.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The usual clamor of dinner conversation. As he dines, Dan makes an effort NOT to look at Beth. Instead, he gives his full attention to two little kids.

Beth watches as he makes the little ones giggle. That makes her smile. Lilly sees Beth smiling at her father and frowns.

*

Dan sees Lilly leave the table, looking troubled.

INT. GIRL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

This room is a "girls' dorm." It's in wild disarray -- except the corner where Lilly sleeps -- which is spotless. Lilly's perched on her bed, alone, reading EMMA.

Her locket is open. *It displays a picture of Lilly with Suzanne, standing on a stone pier. Both of them are smiling radiantly.* Dan enters.

DAN

Hey, peanut.

She doesn't look up. He sits on her bed.

DAN

You're going to miss dessert.

*
*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Still nothing.

DAN
Okay. Truth is, I was flirting with Beth
during the game.
(now she meets his gaze)
But it was just silliness.

*

LILLY
She's Uncle Lowell's girlfriend.

*

DAN
I know that. I really do.

LILLY
For sure?

He nods. Relieved, she returns to her book.

INT. FRONT LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A guilty Dan descends the stairs. Seeing the living room
packed with kids watching TV, he goes out the front door.

EXT. FRONT STEPS/BEACH HOUSE - NIGHT

*

He stands on the porch. It's cold and windy, the moon is
full. He sees rustling in the distant bushes.

*

*

DAN
(under his breath)
Buster.

*

*

*

Dan goes to retrieve Buster.

*

DAN
Come here, boy.

*

*

He parts the bushes and sees a couple moaning as they make
out in the shadows. Shirts and belts are unbuttoned.

*

DAN
Oh, sorry, sorry...

*

*

They turn his way. It's Kelly -- and Marty Barasco.

MARTY
(ever-so-polite)
Hello, Mr. Ashburn.

EXT. BEACH ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Dan escorts Kelly (who is wearing Marty's coat) back to the house as she tucks in her blouse. Marty trails after, coatless.

*
*
*

DAN

I don't believe this! I am beside myself!

*
*

(beat)

What are you thinking?

*
*

KELLY

I didn't lie. I just didn't say anything.

*

DAN

Deliberately omitting the truth - that's just as bad.

*

MARTY

(speaking at the same time)

I have relatives in Philly. So I got a cheap ticket, flew in over night, took the bus, and here I am.

*
*
*
*

DAN

I can see that!

(to Kelly)

What was about to happen back there?

KELLY

You really want to know?

They arrive at the beach house. Dan turns to Marty.

DAN

Excuse me, you, but I need to go inside and have a conversation with my *fifteen-year-old underage* daughter.

*

INT. FAMILY ROOM/BEACH HOUSE - NIGHT

Dan and Kelly enter. The little kids (including Gregory) are still watching cartoons. Dan turns to Kelly.

DAN

I am saying this for the last time --
NO SEX!

*

That gets the kids's attention.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KELLY

I have to see him, Dad. Nana!

She bolts. Dan reaches for her, STUMBLES, and smacks his shins on the edge of a table.

DAN

Shit!

One of the boys squeals with delight.

LITTLE BOY

Bad word, bad word!!!

All the little kids look accusingly at Dan.

KELLY (O.S.)

Nana!

Dan sees Marty, shivering outside, peering in a window, like a big puppy dog. *

DAN

No, no, no -- you stay outside! *

Dan locks the door. Marty smiles at someone. Dan turns. There's Kelly. The little ones are enthralled by this unfolding melodrama.

DAN

He can't come in. *

KELLY

(cool as ice)
Then I'll go out.

ALL THE KIDS

OOOOOOOOOOOOHHHHHHHHHHHHH.

Dan, exasperated, tries to block the door, but bumps into a side table, which tips over and sends a ceramic lamp to the floor. It shatters with a CRASH!

The kids are thrilled. Nana and Jenny rush in.

NANA

(upset)
What is going on in here!!

The little ones gleefully point to Dan.

FOUR-YEAR-OLD BOY

He pushed the table!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

THREE-YEAR-OLD GIRL
And broke the lamp!

FIVE-YEAR-OLD BOY
And said a bad word!

GREGORY
(points to Marty)
And he won't let him in.

Bewildered, Nana turns to her son.

DAN
Mom, hold on.

*

INT. KITCHEN/BEACH HOUSE - NIGHT

A somber Dan sits at the butcher block table with Aimee,
Poppy, Nana and Lilly.

*

DAN
So, tell me what to do. Not to state the
obvious, but they're both 15 and he's
here without his parents.

*

POPPY
Son, you're the expert ...

*

*

DAN
That's not helpful.

*

*

Nana thinks for a moment. Then...

*

NANA
I can't believe you broke that lamp.

*

*

DAN
Mom!

NANA
Okay, we'll call his mother. He can
spend the night and take the bus back to
Philly first thing tomorrow. But
remember...

*

*

(beat)
...the tricky thing about love -- you
can't exactly forbid it.

INT. FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

*

Dan has a conference with Marty and Kelly.

*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAN
I forbid it.

KELLY
But I love him.

DAN
No, you don't.

KELLY
Yes, I do.

DAN
No, Kelly, no you don't. This is all
kinds of things. Mainly it's puberty run
amok.

KELLY
It's love.

DAN
Marty, repeat after me: No s-e-x.

MARTY
Mr. Ashburn, I would never do anything
Kelly doesn't want to do. I love her.

DAN
Ahhh! You just think you do. You think
it's some insta-thing. That somehow you
just know. When the truth is - How could
you know?

A door creaks open as Lowell tries to come to Kelly & Marty's
defense.

LOWELL
Easy, bro --

DAN
Out. Out!

Lowell disappears fast.

KELLY
(to Marty, in Spanish)
Let's go for a walk.

MARTY
(in Spanish)
I don't want to show disrespect.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DAN

Whoa, whoa - I only got through Spanish
Two.

Kelly starts to pull Marty toward the door.

DAN

No leaving! No, no, no!

Marty is much bigger than Dan. He stops, smiles sweetly.

MARTY

We should do what your dad says.

Kelly bursts into tears and runs back inside.

DAN

Thank you, Martin.

(beat)

Now, it's way past your bedtime ...

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM/DAN'S ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Angle on Dan sitting on his cot. He lies back, revealing
Marty lying down next to him on a cot of his own. The only
way out would be for Marty to climb over Dan.

They lie there in silence. Finally, Dan speaks:

DAN

So when did you know that you - uhm -
felt 'love' for my daughter?

MARTY

(in Spanish, which Dan can't
understand, so then in
English)

Love isn't a feeling. It's an ability.

DAN

Did you read that on a Hallmark card?

MARTY

No, actually, I made it up myself.

Beat. It's as if Dan's just been given a swift kick to the
gut. He reaches up and pulls the light bulb string. Lights
out.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEACH HOUSE - NEXT MORNING

It's goodbye-to-Marty time. Dan is in charge.

Kelly is weeping -- big, heaving sobs. It's Greek, her grief.

DAN

Say goodbye here. Wyatt will drive
Marty to the bus.

Marty and Kelly go to hug. Dan splits them apart.

DAN

The bus leaves at 7:05. You don't want
to miss it.

Marty climbs in. He waves out the back as the car drives
off. Kelly makes a desperate sprint and chases after the
car.

BETH

That's sweet.

DAN

What's sweet? How is that sweet?

BETH

To be that certain ... to feel so much
love ...

DAN

Pshaw. Love isn't a feeling ...

BETH

No?

DAN

It's an ability.

BETH

Well, if that's true you have one gifted
daughter.

KELLY

(in the distance now, turns and
screams)
You're a Murderer of Love!!!

INT. HOUSE - MINUTES LATER

Kelly -- her mascara tear-stained down her face -- has completely recovered and along with Miranda, is taking down names and talents.

AIMEE

Gregory is going to do dog tricks with Buster. Danielle brought her clarinet.

DAN

(passing me)
Put me down.

KELLY

(suddenly glum again)
As if you'd ever ...

AIMEE

Really? What's your talent?

DAN

(as he goes)
Murderer of love.

INT. BEACH HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Christmas lights have been wrapped around the beams of the cathedral ceiling living room. Furniture has been moved to create an audience area which faces a make-shift stage. The performance area is lit with Chinese lanterns. The whole setting has been 'thrown together' on the cheap but with great love.

Miranda, the MC for this year's festivities, steps forward. She may hold a flashlight under her face. Or stand next to a floor lamp. In any event, she's illuminated in an almost magical fashion.

She holds a clipboard.

The family is seated throughout the room. Nana and Poppy share the biggest, cushiest chair. Kids sit on laps, on the floor. They clap and cheer for Miranda

MIRANDA

Well, it's that time of year again.
Welcome, first-timers.

Miranda smiles in Beth's direction. Beth smiles back.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MIRANDA

Remember what someone really smart once
said: "Better to have failed, than to
have never tried at all."

Angle on Dan sitting off in the far corner, curiously removed
from the festivities.

MIRANDA

Or as Nana likes to say ...

NANA

Show us your stuff!

Laughter.

MIRANDA

We have quite a line-up. So without
further ado, please sit back and enjoy
the comic stylings of Big Lou.

Big Lou bounds out on 'stage.' He is 12 years old. He wears
a too-big suit, holds a martini glass full of milk, and
proceeds to do last year's jokes. The punch-lines of which
are so familiar that many in the crowd say them in unison
with Big Lou.

BIG LOU

What did Pinocchio say when he asked if
he was lying? *Who nose?*

Why wouldn't the apple join the
other fruits in the salad? *She didn't
find it as a-peeling.*

What do you get when a bunch of
grapes tries to cross a highway? *A
traffic jam.*

Why did the watch go visit its
parents? *It wanted to have some family
"time."*

Beth takes in the room. What a family. Then she notices Dan
in the back corner, watching the festivities.

BETH

(to Kelly, who is next to her)
What's your dad's talent?

KELLY

Doesn't have one.

LILLY

He's the only one excused from
participating ...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Before Beth can ask why, Big Lou finishes and the audience
applauds.

MIRANDA

Okay, thank you, Big Lou. Next we
have...

CUT TO:

Danielle, age 13, playing 'I Love You Truly' on a squeaky
clarinet.

During the clarinet solo, a nervous Lowell sidles up to Dan.

LOWELL

Hey, bro. I don't have a good feeling.

DAN

It'll be fine. Just do what you always
do.

LOWELL

Come on, Beth's not a lip sync type of
girl. It's gotta be something special.

CUT TO:

Uncle Wyatt's Astonishing Card Trick. Uncle Wyatt fans out a
deck of cards. Beth helps Lilly pick a card.

Wyatt covers his eyes.

WYATT

Show the disbelievers your card.

Lilly shows the card to the audience.

The card is slid back into the deck. Wyatt shuffles, cuts...

WYATT

Is this your card?

LILLY

No.

WYATT

(holding up another card)
Is this your card?

Lilly shakes her head.

WYATT

Is this? Or this? What about this?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

No. No. No.

WYATT

(spreads the rest of the deck
for the room)

This?!

ROOM

Yes!

CUT TO:

Later. Close on Miranda's Clipboard. Many of the acts have
performed and been crossed off.

MIRANDA

Lowell, you're up.

LOWELL

Can someone else ...?

BETH

I'll go.

The lights are turned out. Tchaichovsky's 'Dance of the
Sugar Plum.' A flashlight is turned on. Kelly holds the
flashlight.

Beth does a shadow puppet performance with her hands. She
makes various shapes - a swan, a flying bird, a growing tree.

Meanwhile, Lowell who is next to Dan, sighs wearily.

LOWELL

I'm dying here, bro. You could solve all
my problems.

DAN

Sorry. No. And you're missing her.

Beth's hands make the shadow of a bird flying higher, higher
until it disappears out of sight. Flashlight off.

MIRANDA

Nana, Poppy.

A grandson puts an *actual* record on an *actual* record player
as Poppy and Nana take their positions.

Music starts.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

To Glenn Miller's String of Pearls, Poppy and Nana jitterbug. They move together, spinning and twirling, Poppy leading but with ease, and Nana, still some dancer.

It can't be denied. After all these years, these two are still very much in love.

LOWELL

I am so toast. I'm begging you.

Dan ignores him.

And as the dance appears to come to a natural end, the Music shifts to ...

"Play that Funky Music, White Boy!" by the _____.

The change in music affects all in the room, especially our dancers. They bump, swirl and grind. They are loose, silly, and may be the sexiest grandparents in history.

Kelly covers her mouth - Who knew Grandparents could be so cool?

Beth looks on. So this is possible?

For the grand finale, Poppy dips Nana and somehow plants a kiss on her. The room goes wild!

Angle on Dan who claps. He notices ...

Lowell, across the room, holding up a guitar case, mouthing one final plea of 'Help me.'

CUT TO:

Close on Miranda:

MIRANDA

And last ...

SOMEONE IN THE AUDIENCE (O.S.)

And certainly least!

Lowell appears before the crowd. He smiles and says:

LOWELL

This year I thought I'd try something different. But first, I'd like to introduce my band.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

Lowell points to Dan who is already seated, tuning a guitar.
He has positioned himself so he's practically sitting with
his back to the audience. His intention is only to accompany
Lowell.

AIMEE

I don't believe it.

Beth, turning as if to say "Believe what?"

AIMEE

He hasn't played since she -

LOWELL

Needless to say, this song is dedicated
to ... a certain someone.

Gregory, age 6, gives a playful stinging slap to the side of
Beth's head.

Wyatt pulls Gregory away from Beth.

LOWELL

(under his breath)
So here goes nothing.

Dan's POV - Lowell's knees are shaking.

DAN

(whispers)
Lowell. Lowell. Dude.

Lowell turns. We see he's panicked.

DAN

(whispers)
Trust the song.

Lowell nods that he's ready and Dan plays the first chords of
the Beatles' If I Fell.

LOWELL

(barely audible)
*If I fell in love with you
Would you promise to be true
And help me understand*

Dan strums the chord, waiting for Lowell, who has gone blank.

DAN

(singing, but too prompt)
Cause I've been in love before ...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

DAN/LOWELL

*And I've found that love was more
than just holding hands*

For a few bars, Lowell does his best to sing with Dan. But Lowell's mouth is drying out, his tongue can't seem to work right, he lacks breath support. For Lowell, all systems are down. And while Dan's voice is not the greatest, it's not bad either - sincere and, at least, audible.

DAN/LOWELL

*If I give my heart to you
then I must be sure
from the very start ...*

Somewhere around here Lowell drops out and it's only Dan singing now.

DAN

*That you would love me more than her / if
I trust in you like her*

A sympathetic family member tosses a tambourine which Lowell manages to catch. He does his best to keep a steady beat as Dan continues singing.

DAN

*Cause I couldn't stand the pain
and I would be sad
if our new love was in vain*

The once raucous room is now very subdued - everyone listening. For Lowell, it has become a song about a tambourine. For everyone else, this moment is exquisitely real - everyone witnessing as Dan sings for the first time in years.

DAN

*And I hope you see that I would
love to love you
and that she would cry
if we were two*

Angle on Beth, barely able to breathe.

DAN

*If I fell in love with you
If I fell in love with you*

Dan finishes playing to a pin-drop silent room.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

More people are wiping eyes than clapping. Lowell and his tambourine take a bow. Then he points to Dan and, over the applause, shouts to Beth:

LOWELL
What he said!

Beth does her best to smile.

INT. BASEMENT LAUNDRY ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Dan is changing into his sleep clothes -- a T-shirt and flannel pajama pants.

The door to the laundry starts to open.

DAN
Buster, outta here!

Dan moves to shut the door only to find that it's not Buster. It's Beth, pissed.

DAN
Oh, hello.

BETH
What was that up there? What were you thinking?

DAN
He wanted my help.

BETH
So you think you were being helpful.

DAN
Look, it took a lot for him to sing for you --

BETH
He didn't sing for me. You sang for me. He played the tambourine.

DAN
Which is not an easy instrument --

BETH
Stop it.

Beth, full of conflicted feelings, struggles for words.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LOWELL (O.S.)	*
Beth? Anybody seen Beth?	*
DAN	*
Don't underestimate that it was a Beatles	*
song. No matter how badly sung, Beatles	*
songs open your heart.	*
BETH	*
Did the Beatles write your beautiful	*
book?	*
DAN	*
Well, no.	*
BETH	*
Did Ringo raise your daughters?	*
DAN	*
No.	*
BETH	*
This isn't about the Beatles. It's about	*
you. And me. And our serious problem.	*
Dan looks at Beth.	*
LOWELL	*
Honey, are you down there?	*
Dan hands her a stack of her clean clothes.	*
BETH	*
(calling out)	*
Coming.	*
(to Dan)	*
I don't know if I can keep pretending.	*
DAN	*
(terrified)	*
You can. You have to.	*
Beth leaves and Dan sits on his cot, his head in his hands.	*
LILLY (O.S.)	*
Dad?	*
DAN	*
Yeah, peanut.	*
LILLY	*
Can you come up to my room? I want to	*
show what I've learned on power point.	*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DAN
Can we do it tomorrow? I promise.

LILLY
Sure thing, Dad.

Lilly crosses to him and kisses him on the forehead. Then she leaves and Dan turns out the light.

INT. THE KITCHEN - THE NEXT MORNING

Dan comes up into the kitchen only to find the kitchen and dining room empty - as if everyone fled mid-meal.

Curious, Dan looks about ... walks down the hallway ...

DAN
Hello? Hello.

JENNY
Shhh.

He enters the living room and sees that family members are peeking out of every available window.

Dan squeezes in between two kids to see for himself ...

Dan's POV through window: Beth and Lowell in the driveway. From the looks of things, Beth is breaking up with Lowell. They hug goodbye.

Angle from outside:

Every window in the house has at least one family member looking out.

Beth gets in the car and drives away.

Lowell watches, then turns back to the house, smiles as if to say, I'm OK.

Standing near Dan, Jenny lets out a phew ...

Which turns out to be premature because a composed Lowell suddenly attacks the nearest snowman, pounding it into bits.

NANA
Oh dear.

INT. KITCHEN/BEACH HOUSE - DAY

The Post Mortem. Aimee, Wyatt, Jenny, Nana and Dan are gathered around Lowell at the table. Miranda, Poppy and Mitch are also there. Everyone is trying to console Lowell.

LOWELL

Something about pretending. Not wanting to. And that she liked me a lot but there was probably a better match out there for the both of us. And --

JENNY

(interrupting)

OK, now that she's gone, I can say it. I've had my suspicions about her. She was too nice and smart and pretty and... nice.

AIMEE

And the way she joined in all the family activities ... it was ... and the way she played with the kids was ... was ...

LOWELL

Yes?

AIMEE

Actually she was really good with the kids.

WYATT

But there was one time I thought she was rude -- it turned out I was wrong -- but I could see how she could be.

LOWELL

(staring in Dan's direction)

There has to be something. Some reason she ...

DAN

Why are you looking at me?

LOWELL

I'm not looking at you. I'm looking into the vast void that is my future. You just happen to be there.

AIMEE

Dan, do you have anything add?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WYATT

Yeah, what does the expert have to say?

This snaps Lowell out of his funk. He turns to Dan, sincerely needing to hear his thoughts.

DAN

Oh. Uhm. Well, for starters, I mean, there are other fish in the --

LOWELL

But that was some fish. I liked that fish.

NANA

The hard fact is...we all liked her a lot...

LILLY

Yeah, we really did.

Lowell looks around, sees the population of the room has doubled.

LOWELL

This isn't helping.

Lowell stands suddenly. As he exits:

LOWELL

Somebody think of something fun to do!

INT. GARAGE OF SUMMER HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

In the garage, Dan talks on his cell phone, keeping eye on the door to the house. We hear the Message Beep.

DAN

Beth. Uhm. Where are you? We're all in process here. Adjusting to no Beth.

(beat)

Call me. Or don't. But call me.

NANA

(opening the door to the garage)

The expert better get to his appointment or he won't be much of an expert.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE LAMSON FAMILY COMPOUND - LATER THAT MORNING

Dan is driving. As he snakes down the winding driveway, approaching the mansion on the bluff, he talks on his cell phone.

DAN

We don't even have to talk. Just call and say you're OK. If you are OK.

Dan comes to a stop, notices the house for the first time, takes in a deep breath.

CUT TO:

INT. LAMSON FAMILY MANSION

Dan sits in the out-of-the-19th-Century library. He is meeting with James Lamson, Jr., the head of Lamson Family Papers, his father, the founder of Lamson Family Papers, and other family members, all of whom appear to be deeply serious about their business.

DAN

What am I saying? What am I saying?

Beat. They stare at him, stonefaced. *What is he saying?*

DAN

Some people write what they know. Others write what they're trying to learn.

JAMES LAMSON, JR.

In which category would we find you?

DAN

Good question. Too early to tell?

Beat. That was an attempt at a joke. But no one is laughing.

DAN

In my columns I think you'll find, more so than in my life, that it's pretty simple. What I believe. It's a scary world that doesn't have to be so scary, if we abide by certain rules and courtesies and kindnesses. All of us, especially young people, make things much harder than they need to be.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAN (cont'd)

I just try to find fresh ways to keep
saying the same thing.

JAMES LAMSON, JR.

And what would you say that same thing
is?

DAN

Think things through. Be level headed.
Careful. Restraint. Beware the
Impulsive Act. Your Actions have
Consequences. This is my message, some
of it anyway ...

Cell phone rings. Dan practically dives for it. Then
realizes they're all watching.

DAN

May I?

They talk amongst themselves while Dan answers his phone.

DAN

Is it you? I can't believe you left.

BETH (O.S.)

Here's the thing:

DAN

What? What!

Dan's voice echoes through the great, grand room.

BETH (O.S.)

I don't know how to say this -

DAN

Just say it!

BETH (O.S.)

I didn't get very far.

DAN

(way too loud)

Yes!

Angle on the Lamson family looking at Dan.

DAN

Excuse me. Are we done?

The Members of the Lamson family appear puzzled by the
question.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DAN

Because everything I just told you, I
need to go contradict.

*
*
*

EXT. OCEAN DRIVE ROAD

*

Dan races in his car down Ocean Drive Road. It hugs the
coastline. Music blares on his car stereo. Dan seems
reckless -- he's hatless and he's driving with the window
down.

*
*
*
*

The road is empty and, without realizing it, he shoots past a
stop sign.

*
*

That's when the SHRILL WAIL of a Police Siren can be heard.
And a Police Car speeds after Dan, in hot pursuit.

*
*

EXT. SIDE OF ROAD

*

Dan has pulled over. The Policeman approaches and, sure
enough, he's the same Jersey cop from before.

*
*

POLICEMAN

You again.

*
*

DAN

(unusually chipper)
Nice to see you, officer. How are you
today?

*
*
*
*

POLICEMAN

Do you know why I pulled you over?

*
*

DAN

I sure do. I know what I was doing. And
I know it's all wrong.

*
*
*

Beat. Policeman looks at him curiously. *This is some
strange bird.*

*
*

POLICEMAN

This is gonna cost you.

*
*

DAN

I would think.

*
*

POLICEMAN

What with ...

*
*

DAN

The speeding ...

*
*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POLICE
 Yep.

DAN
 The stop sign.

POLICEMAN
 Yep.

DAN
 And the seat belt.

POLICEMAN
 (checking the seat belt)
 You're wearing yours.

DAN
 But I wasn't. When you were walking over
 here, I slipped it on. What the hell,
 right? It's time for the truth!

POLICEMAN
 Have you been drinking?

DAN
 Just orange juice, sir.
 (beat as he smiles)
 Honest.

EXT. STREETS OF BEACH HAVEN - DAY

Angle from inside Dan's car -- the windshield wipers sweep
 the sleet away as Dan drives through Beach Haven, looking for
 ... looking for ...

Beth's car which is parked outside the Beach Haven Bowling
 Alley.

He pulls up next to her.

Beth sits in her car, wearing a baseball cap, pulled down as
 a disguise.

Dan gets out of his mini-van and gets into Beth's car.

They look at each other, searching for what to say. Behind
 them, a large neon outline of a bowling pin *blinks*.

BETH
 Now what?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAN

Uhm.

Dan decides to brave it. He leans in to kiss her.

BETH

Shouldn't we go on a date first?

INT. BOWLING ALLEY - MINUTES LATER

Dan and Beth sit side by side as they finish putting on their bowling shoes.

BETH

I think we need to talk about your daughters.

DAN

And we will. Plenty, I'm sure.

BETH

I don't want to mess things up between you and them.

DAN

We won't. I won't let it. But right now - for the time being - can we just bowl?

BETH

Sure, we can bowl. Just one other thing -

DAN

Yes?

BETH

Are you prepared to lose?

CUT TO:

Beth goes first. She positions her sparkly pink ball expertly. Brings the ball back -- her form is exquisite -- the ball speeds down the lane ...

Into the gutter.

DAN

(teasing)

Oh, I'm scared.

BETH

You should be.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Instead of waiting for her ball to return, Beth takes Dan's ball, lets it roll and all ten pins scatter. Strike!

DAN

It's on.

He tries to cram his finger's into Beth's pink ball. He makes fun of the weight. He tries a few other balls until he finds the ball - the ball of balls.

As he holds it up to taunt Beth, the lights go out. It's 'Black Light' Bowling. The Music gets louder. The battle begins.

The effect is psychedelic, magical, intimate. It's now virtually impossible to see anything beyond Dan and Beth's immediate lane. The alleys and pins glow.

Dan looks at Beth. The image of her face, rainbowed by a mirror ball which spins above, mesmerizes him.

MONTAGE: Dan and Beth bowl as the Music booms away. Beth is the better bowler, but Dan is having just as much fun.

Finally, Dan throws a ball which appears to be a strike. 9 pins fall. One wobbles ...

Dan is crouched down, waving for the pin to fall.

Beth is behind him, praying for the same result.

They're so busy watching the pin, they don't notice the Lights switch back to normal.

DAN

Come on, come on ...

The pin wobbles right, then left, then ...

It falls.

Dan and Beth celebrate. High fives. They jump around. They are about to kiss when ...

LILLY (O.S.)

Dad?

Dan FREEZES. He and Beth turn.

DAN'S POV:

Standing there, on the lane to the left, are Lilly, Mitch, Aimee, Kelly, and Miranda.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

KELLY

Oh my God, Dad, what are you doing?

LOWELL (O.S.)

Beth?

*

Beth and Dan turn the other way...

THE LANE ON THEIR RIGHT:

Poppy, Nana, Wyatt, Jenny, and Lowell are there. Equally stunned.

*

LOWELL

What the hell!

*

*

All the family members converge in a noisy cluster.

DAN

Lowell, I can explain. You guys broke up, she's free now.

*

*

LOWELL

Two hours ago! We broke up two hours ago.

POPPY

Son, what is going on?

LOWELL

(to Beth)

I thought you left!

DAN

She did leave. She just didn't get very far.

*

Dan laughs nervously.

*

BETH

Lowell, everyone ...

*

*

DAN

Let me explain it.

*

*

LOWELL

Yeah. Let him explain it.

*

*

Everyone grows silent. Dan looks at the circle of shocked faces around him. He gathers his courage.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

DAN

Remember the girl in the book store?
 Here she is. You told me to go after her
 - and I didn't. I know how it looks.
 But I also know how it feels. How this
 feels. Right here.

Dan touches his heart.

DAN

I love her. As much as I can. Without
 ever dating her. Without really knowing
 her. Without ever even ...

He looks at Beth. He looks at his family. *Aw, fuck it.*
 What follows is somewhat desperate and not well thought out.
 Dan turns, takes Beth's head in his hands and plants a
 whopper of a kiss on her beautiful mouth.

There's something fierce, almost courageous about this one
 purely impulsive act -- finally, maybe for the first time in
 a long time, he's truly being Dan in Real Life.

As they kiss, and even after they stop, no one moves. But
 the bowling ball Lowell is holding drops to the floor.

LOWELL

That sonofabitch.

Here it gets ugly, in a funny violent way. Lowell leaps on
 Dan. It's a melee. And Dan takes a licking.

BETH

(to Nana and Poppy)

I'm sorry. This was never the plan.

In tears, Beth flees the bowling alley ...

Dan, seeing her go, breaks free, and chases after ...

EXT. BOWLING ALLEY - DAY

Beth hurries to her BMW and gets in. Dan runs out,
 disheveled, his lip cut and one eye starting to swell.

DAN

Beth, no -- don't go!

BETH

I don't know what we were thinking --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She starts the engine and rips out of the lot. Dan scrambles toward the rented mini-van. As he does, Miranda emerges from the bowling alley. *

MIRANDA

Dad, wait, what are you doing? *

Dan hops in and guns the engine.

MIRANDA *

DAD!

Dan floors it in reverse, flies out of the parking space and...CRASH!!

...collides with a Beach Haven Police Car. The two vehicles are now merged in a tangle of broken glass and twisted metal.

A moment later, the STERN POLICEMAN, his hat knocked askew gets slowly out of his very-dented cruiser.

His eyes meet Dan's.

INT. BEACH HAVEN POLICE STATION - DAY *

Poppy sits next to Dan who still wears his bowling shoes and sports a black eye. *

Across from A YOUNG POLICEMAN (barely 21) walks up and hands Dan a summons. *

YOUNG POLICEMAN

This is your summons for your court appearance. One last thing -- you'll need to surrender your license. *

Dan surrenders his license. The Policeman leaves. Poppy pats Dan on the knee. *

INT. ASHBURN HOUSE - DAY *

Poppy enters, followed by a hobbling Dan. He comes inside expecting the worst, but he doesn't expect to find ... *

NANA

(with the most forced of smiles) *

Dan, you have some guests. *

On Dan. What? *

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Dan looks around the archway. *

Sitting in the living room -- James Lamson, Jr. and Sr. --
share a sofa. Across from them, Miranda and Lilly sit
dutifully. *

DAN
Oh, hello. *

In this light, Dan's black eye is even more pronounced.
Basically, he looks like shit. *

JAMES LAMSON, JR.
We've had the pleasure of meeting your
two lovely daughters. *

Miranda forces a smile in Dan's direction. Lilly looks away. *

DAN
Where's Kelly? *

Poppy goes to find Kelly. *

DAN
You were saying? *

JAMES LAMSON, JR.
This must seem out of the ordinary.
Because we're a family owned business, we
try to do things in a more personal way.
To the point, we found your candor
earlier today, your honesty, to be most
refreshing. *

Miranda rolls her eyes. *

James Lamson, Sr., while a man of few words, does notice
Miranda's reaction. He also notes that Lilly is near tears.
And who is that large, looming man scowling in the archway? *

LOWELL
(to Dan)
How could you? *

JAMES LAMSON, JR.
So we'd like to bring you and your *Dan in*
Real Life to all 18 of our newspapers ... *

THUD! Everyone jumps. *

On Dan: *What's the hell was that?* *

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

They look out the picture window as the second of Kelly's boots is hurtling through the air, when SMACK, it hits the picture glass. *

Through the window, Kelly can be seen (and heard) screaming: *

KELLY
NOT ONLY ARE YOU A MURDERER OF LOVE, BUT
YOU ARE THE WORST PARENT EVER! EVER!!! *

Meanwhile, Miranda stomps off, Lilly asks to be excused and Lowell can't stop laughing. *

Nana and Poppy take in how quickly it can all go wrong. *

The Two Lamson men turn back to Dan, as if wanting him to explain. *

DAN
(attempting to)
The truth is ...
(beat)
I don't know anything. *

JAMES LAMSON, JR.
And that's what we found so refreshing. *

Mr. Lamson, Sr. leans over and whispers something in his son's ear. *

JAMES LAMSON, JR.
But now we're not so sure. *

DAN
Then if you'll excuse me ... *

Dan exits out of the house and chases after Kelly who tries to hit with a big chunk of ice. *

Nana, bereft, closes the curtain. *

KELLY (O.S.)
You're such a hypocrite! *

INT. DEN/BEACH HOUSE - LATER THAT DAY *

Kelly is letting Dan have it. Miranda is in the room, too. *

DAN
Kelly...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KELLY

No! You're a liar! Telling me how bad I was, while you were cheating on your own brother. Not to mention, how long have you know her? Three days! Well forget it, *I'm never listening to you again.*

*
*

He turns to Miranda.

MIRANDA

(sympathetic, but...)
Two moving violations and a collision with a police car?

KELLY

Worst of all -- you blew Lilly off.

*

Dan looks blank.

KELLY

She's been wanting to show you the power-point thing?

*
*
*

Angle on Dan. *Dammit.*

*

Kelly snaps on the laptop. A power-point presentation starts. Photos of Suzanne and Dan and the girls when they were younger floats into view, accompanied by music. The pictures were all taken at the pier Dan visited early in the movie.

*
*
*
*

MIRANDA

Poppy found an old roll of film and had it developed. Lilly put this together for you.

*
*
*

KELLY

(pointed)
But you never showed up.

Dan watches as carefree images of himself with Suzanne and his girls appear and dissolve, one after the other. Furious at himself, he hurries up the stairs.

INT. GIRL'S BEDROOM/BEACH HOUSE - DAY

Dan enters. Lilly's bed is made, her corner spotless, her dresser tidy and bare. But she's not there.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAN
Lilly? Where's Lilly?

ECU:

LILLY'S FACE

A fierce wind whips her features. She's been crying.

EXT. STONE PIER - DAY

She stands at the end of the stone pier, staring at the slate-gray sea, clutching her locket.

Dan, Nana and Poppy appear in the background, hurrying toward her, shouting her name. Lilly hears them, turns and runs -- into Nana's arms. She won't meet her father's gaze.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Dan returns from upstairs, full of self-contempt. Poppy busily cleans an already-spotless counter. Nana sits, wearing an empathetic expression.

DAN
I knocked. They told me to go away.
Said they were having a family meeting.
(beat)
I know. I really messed up.

POPPY
Well ...

NANA
It seems that way, but you didn't.

DAN
Come on, Mom. Kelly has never liked me much, and now she has a reason not to. Miranda's lost any respect she ever had for me. And Lilly ... Lilly ...

POPPY
Don't forget Lowell ...

NANA
Dad.

POPPY
And that you blew it with those newspaper people ...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NANA

Admittedly not a good day for you, Dan.

DAN

If I had just stayed focused on being
their father. They need a father - and
that's all I'm going to be, from now on.

(totally the martyr)

I have to earn their trust back first.
That'll take months. Maybe years.

NANA

Oh please. They're going to get over
this. Question is -- will you?

Beat. Dan can't answer.

NANA

Love is often messy.

(beat)

We've never told you this - but when your
father sat down next to me on that train
he was 3 weeks away from marrying someone
else.

POPPY

But I met your mother and I knew. And
the other woman was hurt. Until she
married the love of her life who also
happened to be a DuPont.

NANA

But that's not the point. We started out
messy. And people were hurt. Sometimes
that's the only way it happens.

DAN

(petulant)

But you guys -- look what I just did.

POPPY

Yeah, look what you did. You fell in
love with a woman who was going out with
your brother. You waited until they
broke up. When it all came out, you told
the truth and took responsibility.

DAN

(his trump card)

But I hurt my kids.

NANA

So go un-hurt them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Dan thinks. Then sighs.

NANA

Honey, you made a lot of mistakes this week. But falling for Beth wasn't one of them.

INT. HALLWAY/STAIRWELL - ASHBURN HOUSE

On his way to the stairs, Dan bumps into Lowell. Lowell's eyes are spider web red.

DAN

Oh, Lowell - uhm - so -

Lowell holds up a small bottle of Visine.

Dan waits as he puts a drop in each eye.

DAN

Lowell, I uhm -

LOWELL

Can you hold that thought?

Lowell blows by him, heads outside ...

Dan watches as a fabulous red sports car pulls into the circular drive. The tinted car window is lowered to reveal Ruthie Draper, wearing white ear muffs. She calls out to Lowell...

RUTHIE

Get in, beautiful.

Lowell does as she says and they drive off.

CUT TO:

INT. THE GIRL'S ROOM - DAY

Dan tries the softest of knocks. Miraculously, the door opens. He peeks in.

DAN

Girls, if I could talk with Lilly first, please, alone.

Instead of leaving, Miranda moves next to Lilly and sits. Kelly does the same on the other side.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

On Dan. *So that's how it's going to be.*

Dan gets down on his knees.

DAN

Okay, then all of you. There's so much I want to say. Look, I know I messed up big time.

KELLY

Yes, you did, buddy.

LILLY

You can't imagine our disappointment.

DAN

But it's not too late. At least I hope not. I want you to know that I'm back. I'm here. I'm not going anywhere. I'm sticking with you and your sisters.

LILLY

You're with us every day.

DAN

I'm trying to tell you that I'm going to keep choosing you. All of you. And your mom, who I miss, but who is still here ...

LILLY

Mom's gone.

DAN

No, I don't think so. I see her everywhere, I see in your tenacity, Miranda, and your fierce loyalty, Kelly - and you, Lilly, who looks the most like her.

(beat)

So I'm sorry. I got stupid.

LILLY

You didn't get stupid.

DAN

I did. I was big and dumb. And stupid.

LILLY

Up until today, you weren't stupid. But now you're the dumbest thing going.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MIRANDA

Dad, what are you doing here?

Dan doesn't understand.

LILLY

Why did you let Beth go?

Beat as Dan processes.

KELLY

You are so lame.

MIRANDA

We so prefer her to you.

Dan is more than a little confused.

MIRANDA

Get out of here.

LILLY

Go get her.

Beat.

KELLY

Go!

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. DAN'S ROOM IN THE BASEMENT - AND BEYOND

-- Dan races down the stairs ...

-- He finishes stuffing his clothes in his bag and dodges
Buster as he shoots up the stairs ...

-- Passing through the kitchen, he's handed a sack lunch by
Nana ...

-- Jenny wraps a scarf around his neck ...

The overall feeling is that everyone has rallied behind him.
And in short order, Dan is out the door heading toward his
rental mini-van. Then he stops, turns back:

DAN

I can't do it.

POPPY

Of course you can, son.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAN

No, I don't have a license. I'm not
allowed to drive.

He stops, looks at ...

Miranda, who smiles slightly. She holds up the car keys,
jangles them.

Dan nods and she heads to the the driver's seat.

LILLY

I'm pretty good with maps.

Lilly climbs in the back. This leaves only Kelly who says...

KELLY

This is so queer.

(passing her father)

But I wouldn't miss it for anything ...

NANA

(appearing on the porch)

What's going on?

POPPY

Honey, we're going to need some more
sandwiches!

EXT. ASHBURN HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

The Camera pulls back and up as the extended family sends Dan
and his daughters on their way. Before Dan and the girls
take off, Nana and Wyatt rush a quickly thrown together care
package of food and snacks out to the car.

Miranda shifts to reverse. Oops. Sudden stop. Then
forward. Not a great start, but off they go.

MUSIC OVER THE FOLLOWING:

As Miranda speeds onto the New Jersey turnpike, Dan grips the
arm rest. *He doesn't say a word as Miranda maneuvers the*
mini-van safely into the lane ...

DAN (V.O.)

*Dear Readers, in this my first column in
your paper, I'm going to break with my
usual format.*

Later - still in the car. Kelly leans over the seat, changes
the station. Dan goes to change it back, but then leaves it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAN (V.O.)
*Normally, I will be answering your
 questions. But today I want to write
 about one of the most frequently asked
 questions of all time.*

Lilly taps Dan on the shoulder and points out the window.

Dan's POV: The Manhattan sky line in the distance.

DAN (V.O.)
It has to do with the question of Plans.

A burst of light as The Mini-van emerges from the Holland Tunnel.

DAN (V.O.)
*All my life I've made them. I imagine
 you have, too. Sometimes they happen.
 Most of the time they don't.*

Stuck in mid-town traffic, the car inches along. Kelly is on the cell phone and writing down an address. We hear her say, "Thanks, Uncle Lowell."

Angle on the Grace Building, West 57th Street, as Beth and a fellow employee leave for the day.

DAN (V.O.)
*The next time someone asks you, "What are
 your plans? What do you plan to do with
 your life?" Consider saying this:*

Beth stops. No, it can't be. Dan is standing there.

DAN (V.O.)
I plan to be surprised.

They walk slowly up to each other and embrace.

FADE OUT:

On screen we read...

ONE YEAR LATER

EXT. BEACH HOUSE - DAY

It's winter again. A car zooms up to the beach house and parks. Miranda, wearing a puffy bridesmaid's gown, runs inside, carrying two newspapers.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAN (V.O.)
So that when we're old ...

*

INT. DEN/BEACH HOUSE - DAY

Miranda runs past Kelly, who's also dressed as a bridesmaid;
she's fixing Marty Barasco's tie.

DAN (V.O.)
And tell each other the stories of our
lives ...

*

*

INT. LIVING ROOM/BEACH HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

*

Lilly stands proudly beside Poppy and Nana. The crowd
includes Amy and Wyatt, Ned and Jenny and a smiling Lowell
with a very flashy redhead. Ruthie Draper? Yes, indeed.
Miranda joins them.

*

DAN (V.O.)
We'll find that while everything didn't
go according to plan ...

*

*

Beth joins Dan (handsome in his tux) over by the fireplace.
They kiss. Kelly and Marty finally enter. Everyone poses
for the post-wedding photo.

*

DAN (V.O.)
Maybe - just maybe - we'll find that our
lives turned out in ways we never could
have imagined.

*

*

*

*

OFF THE FLASH...

*

CUT TO:

AN HOUR LATER. Dan and the rest of guys sit in the den,
working on the crossword puzzle. Stumped.

*

*

DAN
Guys, come on. It's a three letter word.
Anybody?

*

*

*

From the other room, we hear the women CHEER.

*

*

THE END