

SIGNIFICANT OTHER

Ronald Bass
Al Franken
First Draft

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INT. APARTMENT BUILDING HALLWAY - NIGHT

Upper West Side Manhattan Co-op. On the slightly worn hallway carpet, we see...

...the disembodied head and shoulders of Make-Me-Pretty Barbie, a plastic bust with Barbie-doll features, perfect blonde hair, and make-up haphazardly scrawled across her face. PULL UP now to...

...a TRAIL of objects strewn the length of the corridor, disappearing around a corner. Assorted Lincoln Logs, small sofa cushion, My Little Ponies defaced with scribble, large kitchen utensils, as TEARING around the corner comes...

...CASEY, three and round and perfect, lugging one more piece of treasure to the end of the line. She deposits the Fisher-Price cash register, and we FOLLOW her now as she...

...DASHES back around the corner, down the trail and into an open apartment doorway, after passing...

...JESS, her cynical seven-year-old sister, who sits with arms and legs crossed. A construction supervisor who is not amused. Calls out...

JESS

...it needs BOOKS!

Waiting, stone-faced, for her minion who...

...BURSTS from the doorway with an armload of books, and we FOLLOW Casey around the corner, as she DUMPS the books unceremoniously and looks up to...

...the elevator opening. A lone man with a comfortable old leather briefcase. This is MICHAEL GREEN, thirty, and angular and not very perfect this time of day. Casey explains...

CASEY

...it needed books.

...and BOLTS off, disappearing around the corner.

MICHAEL

Uh, Casey...?

...no response. He bends slowly, and begins to scoop all the objects into his arms. He's done this before. Juggling more and more, he rounds the corner. Picking up the stuff in front of Jess. Without looking at her...

MICHAEL

...what needed books?

She stares balefully at his armload.

JESS
Doesn't matter now.

Thus greeted, Michael enters his apartment. Down the hall.

MICHAEL
Sa-brina...?

...no response again. Into the living room where SABRINA, the clearly pregnant babysitter, sits doing her girlfriend's hair. Both girls are nineteen, black, and calmly watching the goriest videocassette available. Michael stops.

MICHAEL
Sabrina?

Nada. He steps directly between them and the video mayhem, as shouts of Casey chasing Jess fill the air. Both Sabrina and her companion look up, blinking at the interruption.

MICHAEL
...when you get a chance.

...and DUMPS EVERYTHING on the floor in front of them. As he heads off, Sabrina goes back to styling her friend's hair.

SABRINA
No problem.

...as we follow Michael into the bedroom where...

...ALICE is fastening an earring at her mirror. She is sleek and lovely. Hair falling in ringlets across bare shoulders. Dressed for evening, less tired from her day than he is. All that remains of her drink on the dresser is the ice cubes.

MICHAEL
God, you look great.

ALICE
...he said with mild astonishment.

He kisses her neck. She does look great.

MICHAEL
...dressed already?

ALICE
Look at your watch.

He does. Shit. Late.

MICHAEL
Uh...where did I say this was?

Casey DASHES in, pulling a stream of toilet paper that is obviously unravelling from some distant bathroom. She carries a half-eaten Dove Bar, part of which slathers her face and t-shirt.

ALICE
You said Gramercy Park.

Michael is finally beginning to understand he has a time problem.

MICHAEL
So what do you think...

...peers resignedly into the closet.

MICHAEL
...the gray, or...?

ALICE
It's on the door.

He sees the blue suit, shirt, tie, socks and shoes already laid out for him. Alice fastens her necklace, and in a single motion...

...reaches smoothly to snap Casey's paper streamer. Tearing off a wad of tissue, as...

ALICE
Who are these people anyway?
Am I gonna have fun...?

...wiping off her daughter. Absently, but tenderly.

MICHAEL
Actually. No.

ALICE
Odd. An evening devoted to your work that I won't enjoy.

Jess appears in the doorway, sucking a glass of soda through a straw.

MICHAEL
Even for a fund-raiser, this is the worst.

Alice is re-wrapping the Dove Bar handle in toilet paper, so it won't drip.

MICHAEL
The host's a plastic surgeon. He just does eyes. He's invited half his patients.

Jess has set her soda on the nightstand. Starts jumping on the bed.

ALICE
...what kind of Democrats get
their eyes done?

Casey scrambles onto the bed. Michael opens his freshly-laundered shirt...

MICHAEL
...incredibly rich ones with
droopy lids who like to meet
congressmen.

As the kids bounce like crazy, Alice scoops up the cardboard and paper that Michael has carelessly dropped on the floor.

ALICE
...you mean Harold's actually
flying up for this?

MICHAEL
He swears he is. Which means,
we'll find out when we get there.

Alice is now putting on lipstick, throwing away Michael's garbage, and watching the kids in the mirror all at once. No big deal. She always does three things at the same time.

ALICE
...my day was great, thanks.

Oh.

MICHAEL
How was your day?

Since he asked...

ALICE
None of your business.
(then)
Engineer quit, we were off air
for twenty-two seconds. We've got
cost overruns on the new studio
construction. I have vendor grief
coming out of my ears...
(to Jess)
If you jump up again, don't bother
coming down.

Jess steps up the pace.

MICHAEL
Uh. Isn't Sabrina supposed to
be...watching them or something?

ALICE
Oh, I don't know. We'd probably
have to pay her.

...as Jess STUMBLES, falls against the nightstand and her glass...

...CRASHES onto the floor, the soda spilling over the area rug, as Alice WHIRLS at Jess...

ALICE
GodDAMN you, I...

...and SWATS Jess. A little too hard. Everything stops. Jess blinks back into her mother's glare. In the silence, Michael looks down at his feet...

INT. DOORWAY - NIGHT

Dressed to go, saying good-bye. As Michael watches, Casey hugs her mommy tight. Alice glances up to Sabrina...

ALICE
...if Jess wants a cupcake before
bed, it's okay.

CASEY
Me too!

Alice nods, sure. Kisses the baby's nose. Jess' turn now. Alice puts her hands on her...

ALICE
Sorry I yelled, kid.

Heartfelt. Jess' kiss says it's okay.

INT. GRAMERCY PARK APARTMENT - NIGHT

Smiling Irish eyes. PULL BACK to see the rest of the smiling Irish face of CONGRESSMAN HAROLD DWYER. Mid-fifties, heavy, genial. The face...

...is on a campaign poster. The poster hangs proudly on the wall of...

...an apartment decorated in antiseptic chic. Victim of someone's overbearing design concept. The poster is a temporary resident alongside valuable Hockneys and Schnabels. The surgeon and half his patients are milling decorously, while in a corner...

...Michael is on the phone. He does not look happy. Standing over him is PETER. He looks worse. Peter is a black of Dominican heritage. Mid-twenties, earnest and scared. Eyes glued, as Michael murmurs his good-byes, hangs up the receiver, looks gravely to Peter...

MICHAEL
Elvis has left the airport.

Peter's eyes close. Not good news. He turns to the guests...

PETER
Folks...

...a little shrill. Everyone turns. Now he's really nervous.

PETER
Uh...the Congressman is just
leaving the airport...

Assorted grousing.

PETER
Well, he was...

MICHAEL
...detained at a late session on
the Hill, to vote on a very...
special bill...

Everyone stares. Come on, brain!

MICHAEL
...and I'm sure the...widows and
orphans of our...local longshoremen
...will thank you and Dr. Altschuler
for...your patience here tonight.

The crowd is a little slow to nod. But they mostly buy it.
Except maybe for Dr. Altschuler.

MICHAEL
Now until Harold arrives, if there
are any questions on the Congressman's
policy positions, I'd be happy to...

ALICE
...yeh, there's one over here!

...Alice looks gorgeous, cheerful and drunk. She's locked arms
with MR. WICKHAM, a sixtyish investment banker, with a slightly
younger and much flashier wife.

ALICE
Mr. Wickham and I were just
discussing Harold's position on
abortion. Would you like to speak
to that. Honey.

This is not a lob.

MICHAEL
Uh, my pleasure. Darling.
(grins)
While Harold is personally opposed
to abortion...as a devout, practicing
Roman Catholic...he does recognize
the inherent right of a woman to
control her reproductive...

ALICE
So Harold thinks it's murder. And
should be legal.

Silence.

MICHAEL
Well, I said 'personally opposed'.
I didn't say 'murder'.

ALICE
If he's not personally opposed to
killing the fetus, what exactly
would his objection be?

Michael clears his throat. Alice laughs. Turns to the extremely
uncomfortable Mr. Wickham...

ALICE
Isn't he cute when he thinks on
his feet? Actually, we're quite
experienced with abortion in our
family. I've had seven.
(beat)
Michael performed the last three
himself.
(beat)
In the privacy of our breakfast nook.

All eyes. Turn to Michael.

MICHAEL
My wife. Is being ironic.

ALICE
Actually, I was being sarcastic.
Irony is when you say one thing...
and mean the opposite...like...

Looks to Mrs. Wickham.

ALICE
...great eye job. You look
twenty years younger.

And as if that weren't enough...

ALICE
...or, I love your hair color...
(turns to Michael)
When actually, the shade is sort
of Baboon Butt Red.

The Wickhams, Dr. Altschuler, and others. Are tense.

MICHAEL
I think this might be an
appropriate time to mention that
the legal limit...for federal

MICHAEL (cont'd)
campaign contributions...is two
thousand dollars.

Alice watching her man work. She does admire his panache.

MICHAEL
...so you'll want to keep that in
mind. When writing your checks...
(beat)
...later...
(beat)
...tonight.

Just keeps smiling.

INT. BEDROOM - LATE NIGHT

Darkened room. Light flicks on...

...Alice struts in. Still feeling frisky. After a beat, Michael
follows. Weary. And wary. She turns to him. Close.

ALICE
Ooooooh. Such a face.

Closer still.

ALICE
I want. To apologize.

She strokes his hair. He just stares.

ALICE
I was mean. And I was drunk.

MICHAEL
...don't forget ironic.

She winds both arms around his neck...

ALICE
I'm still drunk.

Kisses his mouth. With surprising tenderness.

ALICE
But I'm not mean. Anymore.

Michael's not sure he wants to do this.

ALICE
How about...if I make this...
a formal apology.

Which she does. Reaching below frame. He chokes slightly on...

MICHAEL
...accepted.

She pulls him down to the bed. Wraps her legs through his. They begin to make love. Like the evening never happened.

INT. BATHROOM - MORNING

Michael in the bathroom mirror. Knotting his tie. Stops. Staring now, from the corner of his eye. At...

...the john. We can't see what he's looking at. But he is completely stupefied. He turns to face it...

...reaching down. Into the bowl. He draws out the life-sized head of...

...Make-Me-Pretty Barbie. By her drenched golden hair. A modern Marie Antoinette, with her phony make-up streaming.

Eye-to-eye now. Sizing each other up.

INT. HALLWAY

Michael carries his grisly, dripping prize...

MICHAEL
Casey...?

He's grinning now. Her room is empty. Resumes his search...

MICHAEL
Uh, Case...?

Kitchen doorway. Casey perched on a stool, inches from the TV. Frozen in rapt fascination, she stares at Count Duckula as her handful of dry cereal remains suspended in midair.

MICHAEL
Something Barbie said...?

Oblivious. He turns slightly, suddenly noticing Jess at the table. She glares over her empty cereal bowl directly at...

... her mom. Who is glaring back. Stomach-knotting tension. It holds. Almost frightening. And...

...Alice's glance flicks to Michael, who is caught stupidly holding Barbie's head beside his own. Lamé grin...

MICHAEL
Guess which one of us was...

This is not working.

MICHAEL
...in the toilet.

Flint-hard glare. As if his wife's cold rage has been transferred to him. We notice now that she doesn't look so great this morning. Something more than tired.

JESS

She says I can't have breakfast.

ALICE

She deliberately went to bed
without doing her homework.

Deliberately. Ball's in his court.

MICHAEL

Wasn't Sabrina supposed to...

ALICE

...and don't go blaming every
goddam thing in this house on
Sabrina!

His stomach has sunk. Softly...

MICHAEL

Oh, boy.

ALICE

Oh boy what.

MICHAEL

Well. When you start defending
Sabrina...

ALICE

Sabrina loves my children, and
she does the best she can!

Michael catches Jess' look, which says, See what I'm dealing with here?

ALICE

She's not even your child! You
wanna play father, go talk to
your own kid...

(gestures to Casey)

...she won't eat anything but
frosted chemicals!!

SLAMS a drawer, rattling every knife in the place, and BOMBS out of the room. Michael looks at his daughter. Casey stares resolutely at her cartoon. As if zoning out protects her from the storm.

He turns back to his stepdaughter. Let's make a deal.

MICHAEL

If you do the homework. She'll
let you eat.

(beat)

I'll help, okay? What is it,
addition? I can do addition.

Sounds like he's groveling. Even to him.

JESS

I can't do it. I'm too hungry!

Pouting. Accusing. Man or mouse, bud? He storms over to the
counter. Snatches up Casey's box of frosted chemicals. Pours
into Jess' bowl. And at the sound...

...Jess' eyes come up. Past his shoulder. He turns to face the
music. Stares into Alice's death-ray eyes.

MICHAEL

What?

Like he doesn't know. She stalks her prey. One step at a time.

MICHAEL

C'mon, you can't send her to
school without...

ALICE

You wanna be a take-charge guy
for once? I mean, that'd be a
real thrill for me, 'cos I'll just
head straight for the office.

Bluff called. She gilds his lily...

ALICE

You got two lunches to make, no
mayo on Casey's baloney, a per-
mission slip for Jess, make sure
they brush their teeth, pee, and
the bus you need is the one-oh-four.

Right. He takes a step backward...

MICHAEL

Actually. I got an early, uh...

Sends Jess a look of apology. But he can't meet her eyes for
long. Lowers them. Backing one step through the door.

INT. MICHAEL'S OFFICE - DAY

Storefront Congressional district office. Furnished just this
side of second-hand. Harold's poster beams down on his skeleton
local staff.

Michael sits at his word processor. But his eyes are far away.
Someplace disturbing. Blinks as...

...Peter sticks his nose inches from Michael's. As if that was
needed to get his attention.

PETER
I said. Harold's speech for the
Friends of the Zoo. He needs it
tonight.

Michael stares him down.

MICHAEL
Just punching the finish.
(beat)
As we speak.

Right.

PETER
You're the boss.

Dubious, Peter leaves him to it. As Michael turns for the first
time to the words on his computer screen, he senses...

...HILDY staring over his shoulder. Glasses, forty, serious. A
lifer.

MICHAEL
Hildy...

HILDY
Isn't this the same speech you
wrote for the Meat Packers Union?

He turns to her. A long look.

MICHAEL
I had a dream about you.

That takes her back. Just a little.

MICHAEL
Well, actually...it was kind of
...an erotic dream.

Nearby, a few eyes are glancing up.

MICHAEL
Okay. It wasn't exactly a dream.
It was more of a...

Dramatic pause.

MICHAEL
...fantasy.

His eyes so straight and direct. Before she can pull away...

MICHAEL

Okay, I was masturbating.

Gentle laughter. Mostly from women. Hildy has colored and retreated. When Michael turns again, only Peter isn't smiling.

PETER

Meat. Packers. Union?

Michael's eyes go flat.

MICHAEL

You wanna be a take-charge guy
for once? You write the speech.

Enough edge to that. To make the room a little quiet. Michael stands...

MICHAEL

It'd be a real thrill for me.
Have somebody else do one
goddam thing for a change.

Somewhere, a throat clears. Eyes look away. Michael feels awkward now. Sorry. Nothing to do but sit back down.

MICHAEL

What's with you guys...?

Starts typing away.

MICHAEL

...never see an asshole before?

Lightens the room. All except Peter. Worried for a friend.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING HALLWAY - NIGHT

Elevator opens. Michael trudges out, coat over his shoulder. Carries animal-shaped helium balloons stamped FRIENDS OF THE ZOO. Long, long day. Stops at his door. Through his exhaustion, we see the anxiety rising.

Deep breath. What's he going to find? Key in the lock now. Fumbles getting it open, to find...

MICHAEL

Sabrina? It's...it's...
(checks his watch)
...after nine.

SABRINA

I noticed.

HEAR the TV from another room. Incredibly loud and violent. He winces at the sounds as he steps inside.

MICHAEL
Where's Alice?

SABRINA
Yeh. Where's Alice?

Sabrina is pissed. She's got her coat, purse and attitude. About to take them all out the door. He has to stop her...

MICHAEL
She didn't call?

SABRINA
You neither. I got a blind date.

Involuntarily, his eyes flick to her pregnant belly. A moment of adjustment to that thought, before...

MICHAEL
What'd you tell the kids?

SABRINA
I say she be comin' home any minute.

Oh.

MICHAEL
How long you been saying that?

SABRINA
Three and a half hours.

Hold the look. And gone. He's staring at a closed door. A sickening CRASH from the distant TV, victims WAILING in excruciating death. Numb, he wanders toward them.

The kids are sprawled on the living room rug. All the junk food in the house is spread or spilled before them on bath towels. On TV, the gory cassette Sabrina and her girlfriend once watched. His anxiety and anger spill out in a self-righteous...

MICHAEL
Where's your mom?

The kids see him now. Although what Casey sees is mostly the balloons...

CASEY
I want the rabbit!

JESS
She'll be home any minute.
Meanwhile, we're snacking.
It's a slumber party.

He surveys the carnage on TV and bath towels. Handles the situation with...

MICHAEL
I gotta make a call.

Down the hall, moving fast. Into his bedroom, snatch up the phone, punch out the number as he whirls around to sit on the bed, coming face-to-face with...

CASEY
You still got the rabbit.

He does. Thrusts all the balloons toward her, as into the phone...

MICHAEL
Uh, Bryan, yeh, Michael. Great...
just...just great. Listen, is
Alice still...

Casey talks to her balloons. His face has darkened. Strains to hear over Casey's chatter...

MICHAEL
...four o'clock? Right, she
didn't say where she was...
(forced cheer)
...no, no problem. As long as
she didn't leave with the Jets
special teams unit...

Strained male bonding laugh at...

MICHAEL
...Darryl Strawberry, eh? Great.
Yeh, okay. Right. We'll have to
do that.

Disconnect. Raw, quiet panic. Turns to get a sunny...

CASEY
When's mommy gonna read me?

Stares at his little girl. She takes advantage of the silence...

CASEY
The rabbit's name is Greg.

INT. GIRLS' ROOM - LATER

Michael sits on Casey's lower bunk. He reads as fast as he can to get it over with. Whatever he's thinking, it's not...

MICHAEL
...and today the great Yertle, that
marvelous he, is king of the mud,
that is all he can see, and the
turtles of course all the turtles
are free as turtles and maybe all
creatures should be.

Closes the book with a sudden magnanimous smile...

MICHAEL
Well. Night-night.

PULL BACK slightly to see Jess in her top bunk. She is underwhelmed...

JESS
Mi-chael...

A righteous reproach. Busted, but he'll shoot his way out...

MICHAEL
If your mother knew how late
you were...

CASEY
...tell a story.

Even in his obsessive self-pity, that smooth small face stops him.
But only for a beat.

MICHAEL
I just did.

CASEY
That was from the book.
(beat)
Tell a story. From your face.

And with a quiet that sounds close to honesty...

MICHAEL
...not tonight, babe.

Silence. And...

JESS
Tell us a Stupid Daddy story.

He peers up at her. A what?

JESS
That's where Stupid Daddy can't
do anything right. He tries to
cook dinner and puts lemonade in
the oven and soup in the freezer,
and...

CASEY
...burns everything to a crips.

JESS
...crisp. And can't find any
pots or saucepans, and...

MICHAEL

Jess.

She stops. Waiting for...

MICHAEL

Are these stories mommy tells
you?

Silence. Until a cheerful...

CASEY

Every night!!

INT. KITCHEN - LATE NIGHT

Digital clock beside a blender says 1:14. HEAR the disgusting screeches of the gory video, still playing in another room. From someplace nearer, the drone of two men's voices filters through. See now...

...Michael at the kitchen counter. In his zoned-out vigil, he is perched on Casey's stool. Eating her cereal. Staring blankly at her TV. Going through a panicked rosary of his worst fears. On the tube...

...an Australian Rules football game. Twenty guys running around in underwear, killing each other.

AUSSIE COLOR MAN (V.O.)

Right, Vic. Only, it's slightly
smaller than the rugby ball...

AMERICAN PLAY-BY-PLAY (V.O.)

Fascinating, Barry. And they
wear no equipment...

Michael's hand mechanically shoving home the sugar pops...

AUSSIE (V.O.)

Wal, y'do have to be half-crazy
to play this sport!

WOMAN (V.O.)

...and totally crazy to watch it.

Michael's eyes flash up. Alice is standing in the doorway. The suit she wore to the office. She seems calm, together.

Michael tries to shout, but his mouth is stuffed with sugar pops. His hand, also full of them, makes a useless accusatory gesture...

ALICE

Don't wave your cereal at me.
(quietly)
God. You look pathetic.

The worst part is. He does. Desperate to seize the initiative, he storms off the stool, choking down his mouthful. Dragging her to...

MICHAEL

...I'll show you pathetic!

...the scene of the crime. Remains of the junk food binge are strewn across the bath towels. The TV blares the umpteenth rerun of the gory cassette. As she surveys the wreckage, he fumbles with something in his shirt pocket...

ALICE

Okay. I was remiss.

When she turns back to him...

MICHAEL

Remiss?? That is your children's dinner! And that is their evening's entertainment!!

She is unfazed. In fact, pissed. SLAMS off the TV. The sudden SILENCE is shocking.

ALICE

In that case. You oughta be ashamed of yourself.

He's speechless.

ALICE

Yeh, you.

This. He cannot handle.

MICHAEL

Un. Fucking. Believable. I come home at...Sabrina has a goddam blind date for chri...I'm standing there with my fucking zoo balloons and the kids are watching this sickening...I can't even...I called fourteen hospitals, and the girls were eating this...if you saw the stuff they were, look, look, just look at this shit, I can't even believe you're saying...

ALICE

...I take responsibility for those kids every minute of their lives. You get the ball for one lousy night, and you're proud to tell me how bad you fucked it up!!

Hear the liquor in her voice, now. We can see it too, at the edges. He swings back, with a quiet...

MICHAEL
Don't worry. They got their
Stupid Daddy story.

They stare at each other. For about a week.

ALICE
Stupid Daddy. Is their favorite
story. Because they love you.

MICHAEL
Yeh, well, stupidity is loveable.

ALICE
That's why we're standing here,
buster. Stupid Daddy can't take
care of things, maybe. But he is
sweet, and good, and most important,
always, always, always...always
funny.

(beat)
It's what makes him. Irresistible.

She seems to mean that. That stops him for a beat. Then...

MICHAEL
Where were you?

ALICE
Where am I allowed to be? The
Guggenheim? The Opera? Children's
Hospital?

MICHAEL
...your point being. You can go
where you want.

ALICE
...where I fucking want.

MICHAEL
So where was it, you fucking
wanted to go??

She's quiet. But her motor is really running. Rubs her arm
absently. Deciding. Deciding. And...just above a whisper...

ALICE
...to a bar.

Christ. I knew it! He WHIRLS around, STORMS off, STORMS back.
Barely holding in his apoplexy...

MICHAEL
All right. All right. Let
me hear the WHOLE thing.

She's staring at him. Can she say it?

ALICE
I got...a little...
(stops)
I got drunk.

Searching his eyes...

ALICE
And I didn't want to...come
home. Like that.

A beat before...

MICHAEL
You mean. Not to our home.

ALICE
What is that supposed to...

MICHAEL
...what's it sound like? All I
want to know is who...the hell...
IS he??

Her fingers go to her lips. Can scarcely believe...

ALICE
That's...what you think this is?
That I'm humping some guy!?

Her outrage slows him down. But he's committed...

MICHAEL
Goddam straight, I do. This is
going on for months. I don't
know where you are half the time,
you're acting crazy, you're drinking
too much...you never have any time
for me, we argue all the time, your
mind is off in some...some secret
world, or something...
(take a breath)
What does that sound like to you?

Quietly...

ALICE
Sounds like. We need a divorce.

His worst fear spoken. And in the silence...

...a high buzzing TONE sings out. From his shirt pocket. His
face freezes. She studies his guilty, trapped expression, and
reaches to his pocket, pulling out...

...a tape recorder. Her turn for moral outrage...

ALICE
You. Were taping this?

Well...

MICHAEL
Every time we have an argument...
next morning, it's like you never
even said this stuff. Like I'm
making it up! Like I'm some
kinda nut!

She's just glaring at him. From her moral high ground. He grabs
the thing back, fumbling with the rewind button. Hear the WHIRR,
as...

MICHAEL
Just once. I want you to hear
what you sound like!

Punches the PLAY button...HEAR...

MICHAEL (V.O.)
...zoo balloons and the kids are
watching this sickening...I can't
even...I called...

He cuts it. But has to face...

ALICE
You're right. I sound like shit.

Gently takes it back from his hand. As she pushes RECORD...

ALICE
I hate it. When I whine like
that.

Leans into the recorder now...

ALICE
Stupid Daddy. Is a thirty-two
year old child. Uncaring, unfeeling
and always, always self-absorbed.

Their eyes lock. And so quietly...

ALICE
He saves his best love. For
himself. And he always will.
(whisper)
Stupid. Daddy.

CLICKS off the machine. Holding eye contact, she slips it back in
his pocket...

...and leaves him standing there.

INT. BEDROOM - LATER

Alice alone in bed. Faint light slanting from the street. She is wide awake. Going through a rosary of her own.

She rises. We see that it is against her will. Goes to her dresser. The drawer next to the bottom. When it's open, she flicks on a dim lamp.

Staring at sweaters. Clean. Folded. Staring, until tears come to her eyes. But she pulls the sweaters aside, revealing...

...two bottles. One is full. The other nearly empty. She reaches fast now. Takes the nearly empty one, before she can change her mind. Unscrews the top, and...

...closes her eyes. Drinks the dregs in one deep swallow. Hold the pose. She is crying now. Soundlessly. And she waits until it stops. Then she screws the top back on the bottle. Carefully. And...

...slips into the darkened hall. Soundlessly to the front door, and...

...into the fluorescence of the building's hallway. Past silent apartment doors. To...

...the garbage chute. Pulls it open with a shaky hand. Stares blankly into it. And...

...holds the bottle out. Dead center, in the middle of the chute. Her hand is really shaking now, and she grasps her forearm with the other hand to steady it. Concentrating to position the bottle in the precise center of the open chute, she...

...lets go. The bottle drops straight to the bottom. Only when she hears it hit, several floors below, does she turn away.

She wanders back now, almost absently, to her door. To find it...

...LOCKED. Panic. She can't believe this. WHIRLS away, SHIT! Turns back, and her fists FLY UP impulsively, as if to bang on the goddam door, and...

...stop. In mid-air. She's helpless. Useless. All her strength now, fighting back tears. Holding herself together. No way around it. She has to...

...ring the bell.

ANGLE...Michael sleeping in a heap on the living room sofa as the BUZZER SOUNDS. He rolls over, burying his head under an arm. A second BUZZER. One eyes opens.

ANGLE...Michael opening the door to see...

...Alice in her nightgown. Perfectly composed. He is, to say the least, surprised to see her.

ALICE
Well. Everything's fine in
the hall.

He blinks.

MICHAEL
Uh. Everything's pretty good
in the house.

She nods. Good. And her eyes soften. She reaches a hand to
tenderly touch his face. The look holds a full beat. And...

...she steps past him, into the apartment. Hold on him as he
turns to watch her walk away. And hold. And hold. And...

EXT. MANHATTAN STREET - DUSK

Taxi pulling up to the co-op. Alice climbs out slow and wobbly,
holding onto the door. Stands now, in the middle of the street,
as the cab pulls away. Steadying herself for the walk to the
curb. Sets out now, but...

...STUMBLES at the sidewalk, and SLIPS to one knee. Passersby
slow, watching the sight. She is just frozen there, supported by
her hands, arms locked, staring dumbly at the pavement. And
somehow...

...rises, to the co-op steps now. Grip the rail with all her
strength. Start slowly up...

INT. BUILDING HALLWAY - DAY

Over Alice's shoulder, as the front door is opened by...

...Sabrina. Whatever she sees in Alice's face produces quiet
shock.

ALICE
Sorry, I'm late.

SABRINA
It's not late.

There's a heartfelt concern we didn't know Sabrina was capable of.
As Alice steps inside, Sabrina's eyes are moving over her...

SABRINA
Uh, Casey's on a playdate with
Kevin. And Jess is teachin'
Samantha to use the computer.
You all right?

Alice forces up a weak smile. Holding it together with everything
she's got.

ALICE
Food poisoning. The doctor gave
me some...I don't know, I'm just...
I'll be fine...see you t'morrow...

SABRINA
I'll go call my mom. I can stay
a while...

In a flicker, Alice's watery eyes have hardened...

ALICE
I said. See you tomorrow.

Real awkward silence. Sabrina looks older than we've ever seen her.

SABRINA
Alice, I think you...

ALICE
...go home!
(softer)
Please.

A beat. Sabrina nods hesitantly...

SABRINA
You get some rest.

Backs out the door...

SABRINA
You owe me three dollars for
the laundry. Tomorrow be fine...
whenever. No rush.

Alice nods. The door closes. Real quiet. She sags back against
the wall for a beat. Her head is spinning. Down the hall now,
to...

...the living room. Jess sits at a small computer in the corner.
In her lap is Samantha, a small rag doll. Samantha is well-worn,
slightly soiled. A long-time companion. Jess is murmuring
instructions in the doll's ear as she punches the controls, and...

...stops. Sees Alice in the doorway, weaving slightly.

JESS
Mom. Samantha beat me in
Raise the Flags.

A frozen, awkward beat. Alice's condition is now becoming
apparent to her daughter. A mumbled...

ALICE
...do your homework.

...and Alice moves on. Through the bedroom. Into the bathroom.
A flash of herself in the cabinet mirror and she...

...TEARS the cabinet open. Scans quickly, her hand STABS out for the Xanax, knocking other objects from the shelf. As they clatter onto the sink and floor...

JESS

Mommy...?

Alice ignores this. Shaking a few pills out into her hand...

JESS

Mommy, are you sick...?

Alice FLASHES up, the rest of the Xanax spilling all over the floor...

ALICE

I said, do your god-damned
HOMEWORK!

The shriek is scarcely human. It widens Jess' eyes. She backs up. And out of the doorway, as Alice...

...stumbles into the bedroom. Throws open the dresser drawer. Sweeps the sweaters aside, snatches up the vodka bottle...

She's still clutching her pills in one hand. Makes it hard to unscrew the bottle. Frustration ignites into a desperate tearing at the bottle top, until...

...it's off. She throws the pills into her mouth. Tilts her head back, and CHOKES them down with vodka. She can't get them all the way down. Has to take another hit from the vodka, as we hear a shaky...

JESS (V.O.)

Mom...

...startled, Alice WHIRLS and in a single motion, SLAPS Jess across the face, and...

...silence. Jess has backed off. Shocked tears on her face...

JESS

I did my homework! That's all
I wanted to tell you!!

...a frozen instant, and...

...she races sobbing from the room. Hear her running down the hall. Her door slam. Her mother never moves. Only a murmured...

ALICE

...Jess.

INT. GIRLS' ROOM - DUSK

Silent room. Little girl things strewn around. At first, the room seems empty. Until we PAN TO...

...the top bunk. Jess sits wedged into a corner. Her face is quiet and lost and staring. In her lap, she cuddles Samantha who wears Walkman headphones. From another room...

...a phone begins RINGING. The only sound in the world. As it continues, Jess leans and absently kisses the top of Samantha's head. A murmured...

JESS
...good girl.

INT. ALICE'S ROOM

Jess timidly outside her mother's doorway...

JESS
Mommy? Kevin's mom is on the
phone...

No response. A step closer...

JESS
...she wants to know can Casey
stay for dinner.

The silence is absolute. She ventures in...

JESS
Mom...?

...the room is empty. That really unsettles her. She goes quickly to the bathroom. Empty as well. Turns back, and from the angle of the bedroom mirror, sees...

...Alice's leg. From behind the bed.

Jess stands frozen. Then RUNS to her mother, only to...

...stop just short. As she gets down on her knees, we share her view of...

...Alice's body. Twisted unnaturally. Her mouth gapes, and spittle has run down the side of her cheek. A large darkening bruise where her face hit something on the way down. Jess reaches tentatively for her mother's foot...

JESS
Mommy...

...shakes it. As much as she dares.

JESS
Mommy, wake up.

And when she stops. There is only silence.

INT. MICHAEL'S OFFICE - DUSK

MR. RAMIREZ is enormous, menacing and slightly sloppy. Just now, he is bellowing...

RAMIREZ

...why don't you get your ass
back to your fucking desk man,
I was talking to the lady!

PULL BACK to see he is hulking over Hildy's desk. She cowers in her seat, as Michael leans across the desk, shielding her...

MICHAEL

...you weren't talking to anybody,
man, you were scaring the shit out
of her!

Michael's got blood in his eye. Like he could come right across the desk at this guy.

MICHAEL

This woman works for me, and
she is the best. She spent
twenty hours on the phone, your
son is getting the visa...

PETER (V.O.)

Mike, line four...

That sounded urgent. Michael just waves him off...

MICHAEL

I think you owe this woman a
little gratitude, an apology
wouldn't be out of line here,
for...

...but Peter has GRABBED Michael's arm, roughly WHIRLED him around. Michael, shocked, is face-to-face with Peter's grim stare. Peter shoves the receiver up between them...

...the look holds a beat. Michael takes the receiver slowly to his ear. The voice he hears is small and alone.

JESS (V.O.)

Michael. Mommy died.

She's crying now. Softly. He can only hold the receiver. The spine of his world snapped.

INT. HOSPITAL - FIRST LIGHT

C.U. of Alice. Her eyes are closed. The first real peace we've seen on this face. And despite the blackened bruise, the serenity makes her beautiful. HOLD a moment on her stillness. And...

...she stirs. The eyes flutter. Open. PULL BACK to see...

...Michael. He sits by her pillow. First light filters into the hospital room. She focuses on him...

MICHAEL
You're all right. The doctor
says...

ALICE
...how's Jess?

He touches her face. We see the love in a way we haven't before.

MICHAEL
The kids are fine. Even though
Sabrina's with them.

ALICE
...I hit her hard, Michael. I
hit her...so hard.

He just nods. He knew that.

MICHAEL
She's real happy. You're okay.

That brings tears. Standing in her eyes.

MICHAEL
All that shit. I said in that
fight. I...

ALICE
...Michael.

...the tone stops him.

ALICE
I'm an alcoholic.

Her eyes moving over his face. She's said the words.

MICHAEL
Look. This isn't a time for you
to be...beating yourself up, you....

ALICE
...I've known it. For six months.

He's stroking her hair. Like he's calming her down. She shakes her head, has to make him see...

ALICE
I start at four in the morning.
And it goes all day. I drink in
the john. I drink in the closet.
When the kids are gone, I drink in
their room...

ALICE (cont'd)
...you know how when we get to the
elevator? And I have to run back
inside for a second...?

His hand comes away. It's beginning to sink in.

MICHAEL
I thought you got up at four
because you were a go-getter.

ALICE
I just told you what I was going
and getting.

He's still working on this...

MICHAEL
But you...do all this stuff. You
take care of...

ALICE
...I have to be high to do it,
Michael. I'm scared all the time.
I need a drink before I do anything.
A meeting, a phone call, I drank for
the goddam teacher's conference,
Michael, I drink...
(can barely say)
...a quart a day.

He can't believe it.

MICHAEL
How could you hide a...

ALICE
...it's vodka. You couldn't smell
it. And I wasn't taking care of
anything. I was screwing up at
work and with the girls, and...
and with...you.

He looks so overwhelmed. She tries a smile. Small and sweet.

ALICE
Michael. I've been remiss.

She takes his fingers. Brings them to her lips.

MICHAEL
Boy...

Shakes his head.

MICHAEL
This explains. So much.

She nods. Guess maybe it does.

ALICE
We have to find me a good place,
Michael. I have to go into rehab.

He slows down.

MICHAEL
Well. We'll think about it.

ALICE
I've been thinking about it.
For six months.

She sounds strong. And sure. And her look is so loving, so connected to him, that he smiles.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Alice has her coat on. Ready to go. Michael's got her overnight case. Sabrina has the kids by the door. Alice turns to Michael...

ALICE
You wanna wait. By the elevator.

They share a small grin. He closes the door behind him. Leaves her staring at...

ALICE
Sabrina...

SABRINA
I'll wait in the kitchen.

A savvy response. Alone with her babies now, Alice sinks to sit on her heels. Gathers them close.

ALICE
So we'll talk on the phone. And
you'll come visit. And then...
I'll be home.

CASEY
And we'll go to the beach.

Alice nods. To the beach. Casey looks all right. Jess is on the edge of breaking down. So Alice can't look at her just now. Holds Casey's face in her hands...

ALICE
You gonna take care of Daddy?

And Casey grins.

CASEY
...Stupid Daddy.

That shades her mother's smile. But Alice hangs on. Best she can. Turns to Jess now...

ALICE
Sorry, baby.

Very straight between them. So softly...

ALICE
...I'm gonna do better.

Her daughter is crying now. Alice can only kiss her. Hold her. Whisper...

ALICE
...Mommy loves.

INT. HOSPITAL ELEVATOR - DAY

Michael and Alice alone in a hospital elevator. He's carrying her overnight case. They're both smiling. It's not that the anxiety is unacknowledged. But they're doing the best they can. She breaks the silence with...

ALICE
You're just glad it's all my fault.

His smile is light. But his eyes are studying her.

MICHAEL
I'm just glad you're not dating Darryl Strawberry.

Who?

MICHAEL
And. That it's all your fault.

The door opens. A long antiseptic corridor. This is, after all, a hospital. The sign: DETOXIFICATION UNIT. As they head toward the sign...

...a male nurse supports the arm of a patient in a hospital gown. She is frighteningly thin, smoking shakily as they go. Michael sees Alice's eyes riveted.

MICHAEL
Well. This is good.

She nods, absently.

MICHAEL
I mean, it's like anything else.

She's still nodding...

MICHAEL
...your gallbladder hurts, you
cut it out.

Stop at the doorway.

ALICE
Babe...

MICHAEL
It's gonna be fine.

She's searching his eyes.

MICHAEL
You'll get a rest. You'll get
some time for yourself. And
when you come out...I'll take
good care of you.

Strokes her hair...

MICHAEL
...that'll be a change, huh?
Do us both good.

Yeh. She tries to look reassured. Very small voice with...

ALICE
...one thing?

He nods. Anything.

ALICE
...can I have a drink first?

Keeps his deadpan. Why not? Holds her hand and...

...in they go. The holding room is bleak and almost empty. A
single COP sits, reading a magazine. As Alice sits, her glance
keeps flicking to the policeman.

MICHAEL
Doesn't this kind of remind you
of your mom's place?

ALICE
I bet the food's better.

But her heart isn't in it. The fear is right there at the surface
now. Scares him to see it.

MICHAEL
No, I read the brochure. The
methodology here is impeccable.
Whirlpool, horseback riding,
genital electrodes...

Her eyes thank him for the effort. The cop stands now, and they turn to see...

...a PATIENT being escorted from detox by a NURSE. The patient is just a scared kid. His eyes meet the cop, who handcuffs him without a word. Leads him out. When we turn back to the nurse...

MICHAEL
We're Alice Green.

The nurse sends a flat look. She is a slight, bird-like woman with plain features and shapeless hair. She steps up to frisk Alice...

NURSE
This is just routine...

Michael and Alice watch each other during the procedure. Now the nurse takes the overnight bag. Opens it on the counter. Starts to expertly examine the contents...

MICHAEL
So. From here, she goes...

The nurse never looks up. Her head gestures...

NURSE
...in there.

...examining the sides and bottom of the case. Closes it now. Motions for Alice to come...

MICHAEL
Well. Thanks for the briefing.

Alice takes a step, and then turns to him. For the first time, we see straight panic. He forces up a smile.

MICHAEL
Look, I'll call you tonight. And
Peter's going to cover for me, so
...I'll be here first thing in the...

NURSE
(gently)
...there's no phone calls.

They turn to her together. They look just alike.

NURSE
She'll be in detox through Tuesday.
You can see her the following
Sunday. In rehab.

Straight look. Not unsympathetic. But that's the reality.

MICHAEL

Well, that's...eleven days. I
mean. What's the point of that?

She's heard this, in fact everything, before.

NURSE

She'll be busy.

Alice reaches for Michael's hand. When he turns to her...

ALICE

Casey has Dr. Saunders on Thursday.
It's in my book behind the phone
machine.

Nothing more to say. He's holding both her hands now. Very
softly...

MICHAEL

...no mayo on her baloney. And
the bus is the one-oh-four.

Tears in her eyes.

ALICE

Bye, babe.

He's never loved her quite this much. Leans to kiss her mouth.
When he pulls back...

ALICE

...love you.

He nods. Him, too. The nurse starts to take her...

NURSE

We'll call you if we need you.

...and then he's alone. He stands for a beat in the empty room.
Utterly discounted. Nothing to do but leave.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

A well-set breakfast table. Places for three, including folded
napkins, forks, spoons and even knives. Juice and milk both
waiting for the absent kids. PAN TO...

...Michael at the range. Stirring oatmeal with the zeal of the
newly purposeful. Calls out...

MICHAEL

Kids...!

No answer. We now see that he is frying bacon and scrambling eggs
at the same time. And doing okay. Calls louder...

MICHAEL

Gettin' late...!

Nada. He heads off to investigate. Stops. Turns back. Lowers all the burners. Feels good about his presence of mind. Off again...

...entering the kids' bedroom to find the girls are...

...unconscious. He's stumped.

MICHAEL

Uh...guys?

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Skeleton family around the table. Jess eats dispiritedly. Casey stares at her oatmeal.

MICHAEL

It won't taste good when it's cold.

Like, now it's great.

JESS

She likes real cereal.

CASEY

(wistful)

...Ninja Turtles is on.

He nods. Maybe even expected this.

MICHAEL

Well, I think when Mommy comes home, it might be nice if we're all eating actual food for a change, and...

Nobody's listening much. He changes tack...

MICHAEL

When Mommy was sick, sometimes things were a little...weird around...

JESS

...everything was great!

Challenging look. In fact, outright defiance.

MICHAEL

Well, Mommy was great. Is...great. And I'm really...sad. That she's in the hospital. But I'm happy. That she's getting all better...

Jess' look isn't getting any easier.

MICHAEL

And I thought...maybe instead of watching TV. We could...y'know, talk. About...

Mt. Rushmore.

MICHAEL

...about how you feel, too.
How you feel sad. Or...mad.
Or scared, or...

O-kay.

MICHAEL

So. If you ever feel anything.
Let me know.

He turns to Casey who is crying with such soundless red-faced agony, she can't catch her breath. As he watches, his heart breaks. Until a sobbing...

CASEY

...Mommy always lets me watch Turtles!

Oh. Jess slips a comforting arm around her sister.

JESS

You want to take Samantha to school?

Still crying ferociously, Casey nods her head.

JESS

...should I brush your hair?

Casey holds out her hand. The sobbing diminishing to choking sniffles. Jess leads her away. Michael just sits there with his teeth in his mouth. Calls out...

MICHAEL

Like I said! I'm here!
(beat)
Mr. Feelings.

EXT. SCHOOL COURTYARD - DAY

Drop-off time. Kids, mommies, teachers, milling around playing match-up. School day beginning.

Michael has Jess by the hand. She pulls him toward JANET SUSSMAN, her teacher. She is thirty, dark, attractive in a pleasant, open way. She's surprised to see him.

JANET

Michael. It's really good to see you.

He lets go. Jess bolts off to join friends, without a word of good-bye. He watches her, a little wistfully, as...

JANET
...how's Alice?

That brings his eyes back.

MICHAEL
Uh, fine. Actually...she...checked
into the hospital for some...tests.

Janet's face clouds with concern.

MICHAEL
...but she's fine.

JANET
Which hospital? I'd love to
visit her.

Other moms seem to be listening now.

MICHAEL
Well...there's no...visitors. Yet.
But I'll...tell her you asked about
her, and...that's very sweet.

JANET
...but she's fine.

He nods into her obvious doubts. Fine.

JANET
How long will she be there?

MICHAEL
Twenty-eight days.

EXT. BUS STOP - MORNING

Michael standing by the bus stop. Staring blankly. MRS. NAGEL steps up next to him. One of the moms who heard our story at the schoolyard.

MRS. NAGEL
Michael. I couldn't help overhearing.
And I know what it must be for you...
to manage the girls alone...

CUT TO...the curb outside Michael's apartment. He stands at his steps, being confronted by MRS. BELL, fifty and ample. Both hold grocery sacks.

MRS. BELL
...so if there's anything...any-
thing-at-all...that Nate or I could
ever do to help...

CUT TO...the entryway of the building. AL the doorman, a happy former welterweight...

AL

...y'see most folks gonna offer to help you out. They tell you they gonna be there for you...

CUT TO...Michael's office. Hildy standing at his desk. As her hand comes to her breast...

HILDY

...but I mean it. From the heart.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Michael and Sabrina side-by-side. Folding laundry on the kitchen table...

MICHAEL

..I got Peter down at the hearing. He covered the community board meeting Friday...took Harold to the airport on Monday...

If Sabrina's listening, she's fooled us.

MICHAEL

...then on the weekend, when I shoulda been catching up, I was taking Casey to her playdate, Jess to dance class, Casey to a goddam birthday party, and Alice hadn't bought the present...

He holds up a jumper. Sabrina points to the right stack.

MICHAEL

...and dinner. Fucking dinner. By the time I leave work, shop for the stuff, clean it, cook it, eat it, wash up...meanwhile, I'm breaking up fights... just dinner takes four hours.

He looks over to punctuate his point with a meaningful glance. Sabrina tries to look impressed.

MICHAEL

I have to make snack for twenty-eight kids! It's our 'turn'...

(beat)

...and then there's money. We're not covered on the rehab. And without her check this month...

Shakes his head...

MICHAEL

...thank god we have enough to hire
you. I can't imagine being a single
parent without...

...and he stops. Looks over at his companion. Can't keep his
eyes from drifting to her belly...

MICHAEL

Oh jeez, Sabrina, I'm really sorry,
I...

SABRINA

That's okay. I'm gonna live with
my momma.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Silence of a sleeping house. Michael alone in the kitchen. Dirty
dishes stacked fairly neatly. Waiting till we finish...

...making snack. For twenty-eight kids. He has bought twenty-
eight regular meatball subs, which line every available inch of
counters, tables, tops of appliances. The floor is littered with
Blimpies bags. Each sandwich wrapping has been opened, and
Michael is now applying...

...the finishing touch. Planting an American Flag toothpick in
each sub as...

...the phone RINGS. He lets it go for a couple, just to get a few
more toothpicks in. Then snatches up the receiver...

MICHAEL

Yah...

Silence. Before the faint...

ALICE (V.O.)

...Michael?

He lights up.

MICHAEL

Honey! You can call! That's
great, listen, the kids are in
bed, and everything's great, I'm
just making snack for Casey's class,
it was our turn so I figured I'd
pitch in, and...

He stops. Nothing coming back.

MICHAEL

Honey. How are you doing?

Dead. Silence. He waits. Waits. Decides to fill it with...

MICHAEL

Like I said, don't worry about us,
because we're...just...tell you a
funny story...okay...?

No response. He's losing confidence. Sucks it up...

MICHAEL

...so, y'see, everyday I been
sending the kids to school in their
wool stuff, 'cos it's cold in the
morning. But, when they come back
from their playdates, they're wearing
these other kids' clothes. I got
half of Kevin Dryer's t-shirts and
shorts, here.

He has to grin at himself. She must be loving this.

MICHAEL

...so it finally occurred to me,
why people watch the weather
report in the morning...

He stops once more. Waits. And from far away...

...Alice's sudden heartfelt SOBBING. He is stunned. A beat
before he can even...

MICHAEL

Honey...?

...but the crying escalates. Becomes an hysterical outpouring of
all the suffering in Alice's soul. He can only listen. Helpless.
And clearly moved. Tears standing in his own eyes now, as...

...Alice struggles to get hold of herself. We hear her choking it
back. Gasping for air. Calming. Calming. Until...a weak...

ALICE (V.O.)

...god, I'm sorry, baby. I'm...
I'm really...I'm okay, now. I
promise.

Now the silence. Is at his end.

ALICE (V.O.)

...it's just...so...hard.

Nothing he can say.

ALICE (V.O.)

...honey. Are you there?

MICHAEL

(softly)

I'm here, babe. I love you.

Holding the receiver. What the hell is coming next?

ALICE (V.O.)
So. I'll see you Sunday, and...

MICHAEL
...the kids are all excited.

But that brings a silence. Maybe he shouldn't have interrupted.

ALICE (V.O.)
Look, I can only talk a second.
There's one phone, and a whole
line of people...
(a little shaky)
So. Bring my sweatsuit, okay?
The grey one.

He nods. Anything she wants. So quiet now, that...

MICHAEL
See, everybody says they tear you
down the first two weeks. So they
can build you back up. So...it
sounds like...this is just...

Deep breath.

MICHAEL
...the tearing down. Part.

...and suddenly, a wrenching MOAN from Alice, and the crying
resumes, more desperate and uncontrolled than ever. And...

...disconnect. Soft buzzing of a dead line. Michael still with the
receiver. Too many feelings to put it down. And when he does...

...through the apartment, now. To the bedroom. He stares at the
dresser. Photo of Alice with Jess as a two-year-old. He's just
standing there. Trying not to cry.

Opens a drawer now. And another. Pulls out the grey sweatpants
that Alice wanted. Can't find the shirt, tho. Opens the bottom
drawer. Pulling sweaters aside, to see...

...the bottle. Nearly full. He stares at it. Finally lifts it
out. As if studying it could solve some desperate mystery.

Back through the apartment with it. Into the kitchen. Picks up a
full garbage bag, and...

...out the front door, leaving it ajar. Down the corridor to the
garbage chute. He sets the sack on the carpet. Opens the chute.
As he reaches the bottle toward it...

JESS (V.O.)
You have to drop it...

...STARTLED, he TURNS to see her. Small and sleepy. In her
flower pajamas.

JESS
...down the middle.

He can only stare. Finally...

MICHAEL
Down the middle.

JESS
...so it won't hit the sides.

Something in her tone. This is not trivial.

MICHAEL
Why?

JESS
Because if people hear it. God
knows what they'll think of us.

She watches the effect of that on him. His face is older than
she's ever seen it. A quiet...

MICHAEL
Mommy told you that.

She nods. He nods back. Lifts the bottle, and...

...CRASHES it down the chute, the METAL CLANGING ferociously in
the late night silence. He's staring after it, now. Actually,
breathing hard. As if he's killed something. When he turns...

...he sees her shock. And so he smiles.

MICHAEL
Want to do one?

Half a beat. And she nods.

He spills the garbage from the sack, rummaging to find an apple
juice bottle. And holds it out to her...

...like a gift. She takes it slowly. Looking to his eyes all the
way. He just sends her all the reassurance in his heart. Go
ahead. Trash the sucker! And...she...

...DOES! The bottle CRACKS against the metal sides, REVERBERATING
all the way down. A noise to raise the dead. And when it stops.
She looks to him, with...

...a little girl's LAUGH. A sweet small devil. That was loud,
wasn't it? He nods. It sure was.

INT. SECURITY AREA, REHAB CENTER - DAY

Antiseptic institutional lobby. Flowers try helplessly to soften
the surroundings. A long line of visitors stretches out the door.

They are all ages, all stations of life. United only by their awkwardness, the line is uncomfortably silent. At its head now, we see...

...Michael, holding each girl by one hand. They have been freshly scrubbed. Wearing the best he could find.

Behind the desk, a security officer examines the gym bag. Grey sweatsuit. New York Times. Pink soap. He holds out his hand toward Jessie. Michael doesn't understand.

OFFICER

The backpack.

Really? The man nods. Michael helps Jess off with the backpack. And hands it over. She looks nervous as the officer peers inside, shuffling through contents we can't see...

OFFICER

I found three grams of crack once. In a baby's bottle.

Apparently, Jess is clean. He zips up the pack. Hands it across with the smile he saves for kids.

OFFICER

Have a real nice visit.

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

Narrow, crowded entryway. Patients and visitors, counsellors and staff, all mingling, moving. Michael holding tight to the kids, sees at the end of the corridor...

...Alice. She wears jeans and a flannel shirt. Squinting in the fluorescent light until she SEES us. Waves, and...

...the kids break from Michael. Run through the crowded distance, Jess leaving her sister a little behind. Michael stands and watches as the girls...

...reach her. As they squeeze and kiss, he heads toward them. Weaving through the strangers. He seems apprehensive, uncertain as to how she'll greet him. And then...

...he's there. She looks up to him, without a word. Reaches behind his head and draws his mouth into hers. Raw and hungry. It seems to relax them both. And when she turns to the kids...

ALICE

Want some brownies...?

They do.

ALICE

Malcolm'll take you to the kitchen.

They look up to see MALCOLM. Huge and black with a gap-toothed grin. Burnt-out behind the eyes. He holds out his hand and Michael takes it...

MALCOLM

Hey, Mike. You got a great woman here. Everybody loves her...

The two men sort of nod at each other. Michael tries to look gratified by the compliment.

MICHAEL

It's very good to meet you.

(beat)

How far is the kitchen?

ALICE

We'll see you guys in a minute, okay?

The veneer of her voice can't mask her tightness. Malcolm's eyes linger on Michael for a beat. Then he leads the girls off, chatting as they go...

Michael watches after them.

MICHAEL

You're sure Malcolm is...the best...choice...

ALICE

Michael, he's not a child molester...

Opens a door, leads him into...

ALICE

He's an armed robber.

...a smoke-filled lounge. She walks ahead of him. Comfortable in a place where he is not. The room is jammed with patients and visitors. Hunched together, speaking in low tones to preserve their privacy. Shielded from each other only by the thick smoke and hazy fluorescent glare.

She leads him to an empty spot in a corner. As he looks around, she sees his disapproval...

ALICE

What?

MICHAEL

I'm just. Sorry. You have to be with...

ALICE

...people like these? Like Malcolm?

Yeh. Maybe.

ALICE
Well, whatever you think of these
people. Think that of me, Michael.
Because it fits.

She pulls out a pack of cigarettes. That takes him back a little.

MICHAEL
I thought you quit.

ALICE
I did.

She strikes a match. Lights up.

ALICE
Malcolm and I. We talk about
our secrets. We cry together.
Truth is...right now...I need
these people.

Hard edge that has him uncomfortable. He glances around...

MICHAEL
...even that one?

...he means DANNY. A scraggly kid who is twenty going on fifty.
He looks wasted and dangerous. Time-bomb eyes.

ALICE
(has to admit)
Well...

A grudging smile.

ALICE
All the girls tell you right
away. Don't go in the laundry
room with Danny.

Draws deep on the cigarette. Just staring at each other.

ALICE
I'm sorry I cried on the phone.
You were talking about the weather
report, and...

Hold the look.

ALICE
We spent. A very different eleven
days. You and I.

He looks down. Guess they have. Tries a smile.

MICHAEL

So what do you do all day? Make
license plates?

She has to smile. He can still give her that.

ALICE

We talk. We have jobs...I do
laundry. And we write up lists.
Today's list is...

(beat)

...what we're afraid of.

He doesn't ask. But he wants to know.

ALICE

Being a bag lady.

He seems amused. Like it was a joke.

ALICE

Rachel is in my group. She's
forty-six. Taught Russian History
at Cornell. Her family has money.
She has two kids.

(beat)

She lived in Grand Central for
three years. Before her sister
found her...brought her here.

Searching his eyes...

ALICE

You think. It can't happen to me...

The look holds.

ALICE

Ask me. How much I want a drink.
Right now.

EXT. CAFETERIA TERRACE - DAY

Small balcony with outdoor tables. Malcolm is showing Casey how
to back-flip off his knees. She is giggling up a storm. Michael
sits to one side, staring...

...through glass doors. Inside the cafeteria, Alice sits with
Jess. The backpack is open, and Alice is perusing the contents,
which seem to be a stack of papers. Alice talks earnestly now.
Jess listens, with her eyes cast down. Alice reaches, gently
lifts her chin, and...

...says something so heartfelt. Right to Jess' eyes.

...Michael. Can't take his eyes from them.

INT. CAB - DAY

Three in the back seat. Riding home. Michael cuddles Casey in his lap. A long beat. Finally, to Jess...

MICHAEL

So. You had a good talk with your mom?

Jess stares straight ahead. Not defiant. Just quiet.

MICHAEL

You show her whatever was in your pack...?

A beat. Jess barely nods. He waits, and...

MICHAEL

...you talked a long time.

No reaction. As if she can't hear him. Michael's gaze lingers. Then he looks the other way. Mutters...

MICHAEL

The return. Of Mr. Feelings.

INT. BINGO'S ICE CREAM PARLOR - DAY

CRASHING cymbals, swirling mayhem, as a CLOWN in full make-up leads a BRASS BAND through...

...a jam-packed ice cream parlor. Five birthday parties in the room, not one kid over six. Helpless parents trapped by screeching slide whistles, frightening sparklers, and an earth-trembling bass drum. Everywhere, balloons, fudge, bedlam and...

...at a choice table, Michael sits with Casey on his shoulders. He is frazzled, dazed. The few mothers nearby chat with each other as if oblivious. They do this a lot.

HELEN

...yeh, Sara Morgenstern...in
Riverside Park.

They're actually talking across Michael, who as the only dad on the premises, has exercised his prerogative to zone out.

RUTH

...this was Sunday?

PHYLLIS

Saturday, shhh.

HELEN

...so she wasn't watching Adam
for two seconds...

PHYLLIS
...and this street person grabs
him up...

Suddenly, Michael has tuned in.

HELEN
...paces off with him...

Michael looks around...

PHYLLIS
...if it hadn't been for some
hot dog guy...

Doesn't see what he's looking for...

HELEN
...the child would have been gone.

Michael stands up.

MICHAEL
Casey...?

His moment of blind panic. Whirling in all directions. Forgotten
atop his shoulders, Casey is loving the ride.

MICHAEL
CASEY!!

Hearing him shout, Casey panics too. Starts looking around, as...

...Michael stops. Realizes that his hands are holding her legs.
By now, every eye is on him. Even the clown. The first silence
in Bingo's since 1963.

MICHAEL
I've had. A tough.
(beat)
Week.

He sits. Slowly. They're still staring...

MICHAEL
Anybody wanna...cut me some
slack, here?

And Casey leans down. Kisses his head.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

A steaming bowl of oatmeal. A large spoon comes into frame,
heaping with brown sugar. Delicately layers the top of the cereal
until it's all brown.

MICHAEL
You eat this off the top again,
I rip your belly-button out
through your nose!

Casey laughs. Loves that image.

MICHAEL
I will.
(calls out)
Jess...!

INT. GIRLS' ROOM - MORNING

Jess sits on the floor. Samantha is propped up across from her, head slumping down slightly. Spread between them on the floor is Jess' open backpack, and a stack of papers which Jess peruses...

JESS
Yes, you did do your homework.
And you did it very good.

She looks up meaningfully. Studies the slumped doll.

JESS
But you don't have to do your
homework. To be wonderful.

Not sure if Samantha's getting this. Her voice softens, in a chilling imitation of a caring adult...

JESS
You're wonderful. Just the way
you are.

Silence. She reaches now. Gently lifts Samantha's cotton chin. So their eyes meet.

JESS
And anybody. Who would hit. Such
a wonderful girl. Has to be crazy.

The look between them holds, as we PULL BACK to...

...Michael unnoticed in the doorway. Frozen for a raw instant. Then...

...backs away. Leaves Jess and her baby alone.

DISSOLVE SLOWLY TO...

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Long butcher paper banner. Taped low along the wall. WELCOME HOME MOMMY! Jess and Casey on their knees with crayons and felt-tipped markers. Small monks illuminating their manuscript...

JESS

Mi-chael! I'm out of burnt sienna!!

ANGLE...in the bathroom, Michael pursues his own welcome home ritual, cleaning the toilet bowl. Shouts back...

MICHAEL

I'm up to my ears in here! Try
raw sienna! Or maybe maize!
(mutters to himself)
...or maybe just orange.

The DOORBELL interrupts. He rises, but stops. Quick sniff of the surrounding airspace. Good enough.

ANGLE...opens the front door for Peter. He carries a pizza box, on which rests a worn briefcase and a paper sack. Brushes past Michael like he owns the place...

...sets his stuff on the kitchen table. Calls out...

PETER

Case! Where's my French kiss...?

MICHAEL

Don't arouse her. She's working.

As they head off to the living room...

PETER

...too bad you left the jail barge
hearing. People were shrying,
worse, gentiles were shrying...
(Jewish)
...rapists will be swimming from
barges on us!

...in the living room now. Down on his knees. Casey turns to Peter and they waggle their tongues ferociously at each other. Then kiss discreetly on the lips. Their version of frenching. Jess keeps working...

JESS

What are you bringing me from
Santo Domingo?

PETER

Maybe a shortstop. That's what
we've got the most of.

Takes a strange-looking pen from his pocket. Leans to autograph the poster...LET'S HAVE SEX AGAIN REAL SOON. Signs his name.

MICHAEL

Thanks. Kids, Uncle Peter's had
a hard month.

JESS
Who didn't.

...as the men head off, Peter is showing Michael the pen...

PETER
...these are space pens. The
astronauts write upside-down with
these. I got 'em for Harold to
give away to the Science Fair
finalists...

...in the kitchen now. Pulling a six-pack from the paper bag.
Cracking two...

PETER
...he winds up doing twenty minutes
on the pens. We got a room full of
ten-year-olds sort of looking at
each other...

MICHAEL
...this is plain cheese?

...staring down at the pizza. Lifting a slice...

PETER
Well, I got it for the kids.

MICHAEL
Look at this. It's naked.

PETER
(around a mouthful)
I don't know how they eat this shit.

Michael raises his beer. Toasts...

MICHAEL
...twenty-eight days.

They both stare blankly. Accumulated exhaustion on display.

PETER
The hardest. Month. Of my life.
If I'd known how tedious your gig
really was, I wouldn't have been
backstabbing you all this time to
get it.

MICHAEL
Look, just don't leave til Tuesday.
(beat)
I need to give Monday to Alice.

PETER
Ah. Polishing the old beef bayonet,
huh? The old mutton cutlass. The
old...

Michael holds up a hand. Got the picture.

MICHAEL
(clears his throat)
Let's say. I'm just falling over
the finish line, here.
(admits)
Last night. I had a dream about
Hildy.

PETER
You gonna be yodeling in the canyon.
Saying hi to Mr...

But Michael is looking down at his beer. Turning the can in his
fingers. A full beat before...

MICHAEL
...she's getting stronger, man.
Every call. Every weekend. She's
...gonna make it.

They share a look. And then a smile. Softly...

MICHAEL
When you leave. Don't forget
your six-pack.

EXT. CAFETERIA TERRACE - DAY

Group meeting on the outdoor terrace. Patients, spouses, parents,
a black woman COUNSELLOR. Through the glass, children of these
families, including Jess and Casey, eat ice cream.

Alice snuggles slightly closer to Michael. Puts her hand over
his.

COUNSELLOR
...for most of you, this is
graduation day. This is our last
session together as a group. And,
significantly, we have invited your
significant others to take part with us.

Several patients are lighting cigarettes. Alice among them.

COUNSELLOR
...this is because the environment
that the alcoholic or addict comes
home to...plays a key role in the
recovery process.

Michael glances down at Alice. She looks a little tense.
Probably to be expected.

COUNSELLOR

So let's start by asking our
significant others...how you would
feel about drinking in front of your
alcoholic...

Dead. Silence.

DANNY

How 'bout Alice's old man?

And, unfairly, everyone looks at Michael. A full beat, before...

MICHAEL

Well. I don't...really...drink.
That much.

DANNY

...yeh, right.

The reedy kid's sarcasm sneaks under Michael's skin.

MICHAEL

If I have pizza. Maybe I'll
have a beer.

DANNY

...one beer, huh?

MICHAEL

...maybe two.

DANNY

Now it's two.

...looks around knowingly at the others.

MICHAEL

No, really. I've only been drunk
maybe five times in my life...

DANNY

...gimme a flying break!

ALICE

Sit on it, Danny.

But Michael can't stop defending himself...

MICHAEL

Like, if I have an Italian meal,
maybe I'll have one glass of red
wine...

DANNY

Man, I've been down that road.
(shaking his head)
Denial, man. This is a cunning.
Baffling. Disease.

Not much anyone can say to that.

COUNSELLOR

Danny. Mr. Green does not have
a problem with alcohol.

(beat)

You. Do.

EXT. CURB - DAY

Cab waiting at the curb. Michael is putting Alice's two bags in the trunk. She has a daughter by each hand. As Jess starts to climb in, Alice gently pulls her back.

Staring down at the girls. Suddenly, a hard moment.

ALICE

Guys...

Her voice almost broke on that. It makes Michael look over. Alice sinks to her heels, facing the kids. Her back is to him.

ALICE

Mommy's not...coming home.

She didn't know how to face him with this. Only we can see him...

ALICE

We're dropping you off with
Sabrina's mom. And Daddy...has to
drive me...to another hospital.

He's too shocked to move. Feel his heart sinking.

CASEY

Why, mommy?

ALICE

Because. I'm not all better. Yet.

Casey looks sad for her. As if forgetting her own plight, she puts her arms around Alice's neck. Buries her face in her shoulder. Alice holds eye contact with...

JESS

Are you ever. Really coming
home?

...and that brings Alice straight to the edge. Fights it for a long beat. Before she can whisper...

ALICE

...promise.

INT. CAB, MANHATTAN - DAY

The silent ride to Sabrina's mom. Casey held tight on Alice's lap. Jess next to her mother, squeezing her hand, staring straight ahead.

Michael by the door. Alone, as if he were on the moon.

INT. CAR, PENNSYLVANIA - DAY

Michael, tight-lipped, driving the interstate. Alice, silent beside him. The tension thick between them.

MICHAEL
...hey, I'm glad it's not Montana.

ALICE
Actually, they suggested Ohio.
But Pennsylvania is closer.

He nods. Yes, it is.

MICHAEL
A stone's throw.

ALICE
...no one expects you to visit.

Mutual sullen. Then...

MICHAEL
I mean, how did you screw up?

ALICE
I don't know.
(beat)
They said I was talking the talk.
But not walking the walk.

MICHAEL
JESUS!
(mutters)
...fucking jargon.

Keep driving. She's looking down at her hands now. Really feeling scared.

MICHAEL
You said you didn't want a drink...

ALICE
...last thing I want.

MICHAEL
And you told them.

ALICE
...I told them.

MICHAEL
So what's their problem?

And quietly...

ALICE
I don't know if I can make it.
(beat)
I told them that, too.

He's looking out the window...

MICHAEL
Peter's gone. He's been covering
for me like crazy. Now I gotta
do his job and mine...

...anywhere but at her.

MICHAEL
I just don't know if the kids
and I can make it another month...

And very softly...

ALICE
Could be. Longer than that.
She sneaks a glance. It's what she expected.

ALICE
There's a halfway house. For
some people. It's six...it's
six months.

Holy Mother of God.

MICHAEL
This is for lottery winners, or...

ALICE
It's for people. Who wouldn't
make it. In their home environ...

MICHAEL
...god-DAMMIT, what did you tell
these people about me?

Her voice gets very small...

ALICE
I told them. You were funny.

And that reaches him. She touches his hand...

ALICE
I know I've made things. Horrible.
For you. And I just want you to
know...

She's crying softly. His rage has turned to savage guilt.

ALICE
...I miss you.

Her fingers close around his now. Squeeze for all they're worth.
He can barely say...

MICHAEL

Me, too.

He eases off the turnpike now. The moment of connection holds.
Holds. Then, she begins to...

...look around. Still tender. But beginning to wonder. Then
sees...

...the Motel Six. Stares at the sign, as he pulls in...

ALICE

Where are we going?

He parks. Her gaze turns to him...waits for...

MICHAEL

Well. It's, uh...been twenty-
eight days...

Quietly incredulous...

ALICE

You. Want to get laid...?

Hold the look. And...

INT. CAR, COUNTRYSIDE - LATER

Angry. Silent. Driving.

EXT. PARKING LOT, COUNTRY REHAB - DAY

The car pulls to an abrupt stop, not quite in the parking space.
Trunk pops open. She's out of the car fast. Heartfelt
disappointment having blossomed into a snit.

He gets out slower, to underscore his brooding. He stares
deliberately at the manicured grounds of the estate. While he's
pouting...

...she's grabbed the big suitcase from the trunk. Marching off.
This takes him by surprise, and he...

...runs around to the trunk. Snatches up the little overnight
bag, and hurries after her. Catches up, he reaches for the handle
of the large bag, but she...

...YANKS it away.

ALICE

...don't go doing me any
goddamned favors!

He catches up again and she...

...SWINGS the bag, CRASHING it into his shin. It really hurts.
Stalks away...

ALICE
...you'd just put it on your
list of everything you've done
for me.

This. After all he's done for her. As he stands in pain and
righteous outrage, he notices just to one side...

...brake lights, backing right toward him. At three miles an
hour. The small woman driver isn't looking.

He can't believe this. So instead of stepping aside...

...he lets her hit him. And...

...goes DOWN HARD. Clutching his leg. SCREAMING in a manly
understated way, as...

...Alice turns. Shocked to see him lying wounded. She drops her
bag, and RUNS to him...

MICHAEL
I'm okay, I'm okay...

His face twisted in agony. Turning away in a classic display of
stoicism.

ALICE
My God, what happened?

What happened?!

MICHAEL
I got hit by a car!

WOMAN
(cries)
I wasn't looking!!

The driver has appeared. An older woman, she is devastated by the
consequence of her negligence. Alice takes hold of his arm,
rather tenderly, but he contorts in pain as if the movement has
prompted spinal complications...

WOMAN
Don't move him! I think he has
to lie still!

She's fluttering around. Alice is starting to wise up.

ALICE
How fast was she going?

MICHAEL
Excuse me, I didn't catch her on
my radar gun.

ALICE

(dry)

...that's okay. The Highway
Patrol can measure the skid marks.

He looks at his wife. The jig is up. The driver, however, is
distraught. He painfully raises an arm to Alice...

MICHAEL

I think. If I lean on you...

Her very small smile. She helps him up, tenderly. He limps
horribly as they head off. The driver calls out...

WOMAN

Don't worry! It was all my fault!

And up the road, Alice murmurs...

ALICE

I'll call Mt. Sinai.

MICHAEL

Don't bother. You'd just put it
on your list of everything you've
done for me.

INT. RECEPTION AREA, REHAB - DAY

Michael sits at a reception desk. Pen in hand, paper before him,
leg angled awkwardly to one side.

MICHAEL

I don't know. An accident report.
(tests the leg)
...it's really coming around.

Hovering over him is the rehab DIRECTOR, the older woman driver,
and a bemused Alice.

DIRECTOR

Our insurance requires it.

ALICE

Better safe than sorry. Honey.

Thanks. Reluctantly, he begins to fill the thing out. And
hesitantly...

DIRECTOR

Mr. Green. Maybe you'd like to
consider our family counselling
program.

As he writes...

MICHAEL

Gee, that's a good idea. If I
get up at midnight, shower real
quick, I could zip down here...
be back to work just after lunch.
(keeps writing)
...then if I get fired, you could
counsel me about that.

He looks up. Studies the director's kindly sympathy...

MICHAEL

Why. Would I. Need counselling?

Well...

DIRECTOR

...sometimes. Significant others
tend to see themselves...
(very quiet)
...as victims.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

Michael and Alice alone, taking him back to the car. He's still
walking with a faint limp. She takes his hand. Softly...

ALICE

...coming around?

He is so sorry. That he's an asshole. Can barely answer...

MICHAEL

Coming around.

They're back at the car now. He still has her hand. Grins...

MICHAEL

...so Sunday. I'll just...get up
at midnight...

ALICE

...don't come.

Said with love. Very straight.

ALICE

I'll be better alone, this
time. Okay...?

Hits him so hard. He can just manage a nod. Sure.

MICHAEL

I'll be there. When you're ready.

...and she smiles. A sweetness to it. And a sadness.

ALICE
I know you want to be.
(beat)
They say...more than half the time...

MICHAEL
...guys cut out? Yeh, but they're
not married to you.

She takes the compliment. Only makes it harder to say...

ALICE
I wouldn't blame you either way.
(beat)
And sometimes. It's the alcoholic.
Who...makes the choice.

MICHAEL
...you trying to tell me something?

He is clearly frightened. She's so sorry for that.

ALICE
I'm trying to say. Relationships
are fragile. In the best of
circumstances. And alcoholism.
Is close to the worst.

MICHAEL
A cunning. Baffling. Disease.

He wins one more smile. It fades to...

ALICE
We can't see the future, babe.
They tell us here...don't try
to handle...more than today.

Her smile returns...

ALICE
And, frankly, today...

MICHAEL
...was all you could handle, yeh.

Well. Nothing more to say. She leans to...

...kiss him. The first beautiful kiss between them. And,
somehow, the saddest.

He gets in the car. He turns the key. Looks to her now. He
wants to say so much...

...but he doesn't know what it is. She waves. It's okay. And he
waves back...

...pulls off. Watching her in his mirror. She just stands.
Hands in the pockets of her dress...

Farther. And farther. Away.

EXT. TWO-LANE HIGHWAY, COUNTRYSIDE - DUSK

Michael driving a lonely, darkening stretch of road. He is a mask of depression. If he had a life, it would be flashing before his eyes. Coming at us, over a rise...

...an enormous SEMI. Lights already on against the hazy dusk. It's approaching fast. Michael, mesmerized by self-pity and grief, drifts...

...across the center line, and...

...HORN BLARES, Michael SNAPS alert to see the huge thing BEARING down on him, and SWERVES as the lights BLAST by us...

ANGLE...Michael stopped on the shoulder. Breathing hard. Hands gripping the wheel. Forehead resting on it. Eyes staring in disbelief. Then, growing heavy. Then...

...fluttering closed. And DISSOLVE TO...

EXT. HIGHWAY

A fantasy repeat of the near-accident. His most self-indulgent feelings externalized. As he drives, hot tears of wrong and hurt stain his innocent face. Passing a sign that says NEW YORK: 3,000,000 MILES. Here comes the semi, only much, much bigger, and he sets his jaw with determination. Suddenly swerves...

...INTO THE LIGHTS. The sound of the CRASH would end the world, as we CUT TO...

EXT. GRAVESITE - DAY

Funeral in a thunderstorm. Michael lays in an open casket, shielded by the loving umbrellas of the grief-stricken. PAN the weeping Peter...Hildy...

MINISTER (V.O.)

...how typical, that Michael's last act was to pull the semi driver from his burning, twisted, molten, heap...

...see the SEMI DRIVER now with his cap, arm in a sling, nodding confirmation.

MINISTER (V.O.)

...respected, admired, yes even adored, by his colleagues...

...CONGRESSMAN HAROLD DWYER, just bawling.

MINISTER (V.O.)

...a loss felt by all whose lives were touched, even for a moment...

...Sabrina. Even Michael can't imagine her crying. But she is shaking her head in tortured disbelief.

MINISTER (V.O.)
...but above all, a man worshipped
by his children...

...little Casey. Jess. Holding their tiny umbrellas to help shield him from the downpour...

MINISTER (V.O.)
...who knew him, in their hearts,
as Well-Meaning Daddy...

PAN finally to Alice. A grief beyond tears. A guilt beyond belief...

MINISTER (V.O.)
...and above even that, his devotion
to his alcoholic wife. For whom...
he saved...his best love. Always.

The others begin to murmur now, tho not in unison...

EVERYONE
...her fault...her fault...it's
all her fault...

Alice thrusts her umbrella over Michael, drenching herself in the process, as...

...a BOLT OF LIGHTNING hits her umbrella, ZAPPING down the handle to her arm, and CUT TO...

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Michael's living room desk strewn with office work, files. Political speech up on the computer terminal. Michael cradles the phone to his ear, oblivious to...

...ungodly clutter of kid's toys, clothes, bath accessories and leftovers. From another room, the girls are really SCREAMING at each other...

MICHAEL
...I swear to God. Tomorrow at
eight sharp. I'm just punching
the finish now...

He glances at the computer. Not excited. Tells the phone...

MICHAEL
...I'm excited. Yeh, really...it's
our first crack at that union and...
y'know, restaurant workers...vote,
and...they make great volunteers.

More SHRIEKING from the other room. Not playful at all. Sounds raw and angry. He looks simply exhausted...

MICHAEL
...no, doin' great, actually.
Thanks. Yeh, two and a half
weeks, she'll be...

The girls' fight INTENSIFIES. Michael's about ready to lose it.

MICHAEL
...well, I appreciate that. And...
I'm sorry about yesterday...

A sudden SHARP HOWL that demands attention...

MICHAEL
... 'scuse me a minute, Harold.

Puts down the phone and rises quickly, as we CUT TO...

ANGLE...the girls' room is in shambles, Casey is crying hysterically, as Jess...

...HITS her with a stuffed gorilla, and sends the baby sprawling.
Draws it back to hit her again, as...

...it is SNATCHED from her hand, and she turns, shocked, as Michael SWATS her butt. She screams in outrage...

JESS
She bit me! She bit me hard!

He can't believe he's doing this. Turns to Casey...

MICHAEL
Did you bite her?

Casey, crying her heart out, nods 'yes'. Back to Jess...

MICHAEL
Well, that's no excuse! She's
your baby sister, and you could
have hurt her, and you should love
each other! Did you spill that?

...a can of Coke, spilled across the rug.

JESS/CASEY
She did it!!

He glares at both of them. He is close to losing his mind.
Stalks out. Down the hall. Into the kitchen, where...

...Sabrina's eating a hot dog. Watching TV.

MICHAEL
Don't you hear those kids
fighting?!

She looks up. Provocatively slow.

SABRINA
I got to eat sometime. It's
ten o'clock.

MICHAEL
Why don't you put them to bed?

SABRINA
Why don't you? I put 'em down,
they jump back out.

He's stretched too thin for patience.

MICHAEL
They spilled some Coke.

Sabrina takes another bite of her dinner. Looks back to the TV.

SABRINA
I'll get it in a minute.

MICHAEL
In a minute? It's soaking into
the rug!

She turns back to him.

SABRINA
Don't yell at me. I only took
these nights to help you out.

Disgusted. He WHIRLS around to the sink. But the paper towel
rack is empty.

MICHAEL
Where's the paper towels?

She's just watching TV. He looks under the sink...

MICHAEL
There are no paper towels!

She accepts the news calmly.

MICHAEL
Jesus Christ! I'm in a CRISIS here!!

Down to pure ranting...

MICHAEL
I need some help! I need someone
who can look around the house and
when there's no paper towels, go
to the goddamn store and buy some...

MICHAEL (cont'd)
How many stores do you pass coming
home from school!! I need someone
to use a little common SENSE around...

But he's stopped. Because she's standing. Swallows her mouthful
with what could only be described as dignity.

SABRINA
You better get. Somebody else.

Hold the look. Out the door. Hear the front door open and shut.
Gone.

And then. It sinks in.

MICHAEL
No.

Followed by...

MICHAEL
No. No. Noooo...

Starts HOPPING around the room, PUMPING his fists.

MICHAEL
No! No! NO, NO, NO, NO, NO...

...and suddenly stops. Because he's remembered to...

...RACE through the hall, into the living room, SNATCH up the
phone...

MICHAEL
Harold...?

HEAR the buzz of Harold's long-ago disconnect. A far-off stare.
A quiet...

MICHAEL
...no.

EXT. BUS STOP - MORNING

Michael at the bus stop. Looks hopefully at Mrs. Nagel, the mom
who offered to help awhile back. She's uncomfortable...

MRS. NAGEL
This is just. A very bad month.

MICHAEL
Month?

She studies her weekly planner...

MRS. NAGEL
Things look better in July.

CUT TO...the curb outside Michael's apartment. He's holding three grocery bags, as Mrs. Bell's schnauser strains at her leash...

MICHAEL

So. You and Nate have...a terrific time.

(beat)

In Bermuda.

CUT TO...the entryway of the building. Al the doorman is also sorry.

AL

You catchin' me at a bad time.
I got me a new lady friend...

...if you know what I mean. Michael knows what he means. Starts to turn away, as...

AL

And she's kinda demanding...

MICHAEL

...I got it, Al.

Al feels he should add...

AL

Like being back in training,
y'know...?

Does a little Ali Shuffle, as we...

CUT TO...Michael's office. Standing at Hildy's desk...

HILDY

...it's just that...at the moment,
I'm...sort of...involved. With
someone.

He sees the blush. For just a moment, Michael forgets his sorrows and is happy for her.

MICHAEL

...lucky guy.

They connect in this moment. He turns away, but stopped by a thought, turns back...

MICHAEL

His name wouldn't be Al...?

EXT. SCHOOL COURTYARD - AFTERNOON

Pick-up time. Or at least, it was. The courtyard is empty now. Jess sits glumly with Janet, her teacher, on the little brick retaining wall. They stare out at...

...gridlock. Angry horns. And down the block, a cab door opens, and...

...Michael comes running. Not real fast. More anxiety than stamina. They just sit and watch until he arrives. Breathing hard. Forcing up a smile, gesturing at...

MICHAEL
...traffic.

The teacher is staring at him. Strangely intense.

JANET
Michael. Can I talk with you a minute?

He looks from one. To the other. What is this?

MICHAEL
Actually, we're real late to get Case at Kindergym...

But Janet doesn't move. Quietly...

JANET
Jess, you want to go to your cubby, and get...that volcano you've been making? I think Michael would love to see it.

Jess' turn to look from one. To the other.

JESS
Why don't I just go stand over there?

EXT. PARK PLAYGROUND - AFTERNOON

Busy afternoon at the slide. Casey waiting her turn. She's made friends with every kid in line. PULL BACK to...

...Jess and Michael. Alone on a bench. Twin blank stares. Until...

JESS
You're mad.

He stands up. Shoves his hands in his pockets. Walks in a little circle, kicking at the dirt. And quietly...

MICHAEL
Yeh. I'm real mad.

Looks at her...

MICHAEL
How could you say all that stuff to a stranger?

JESS
She's my teacher.

MICHAEL
Yeh, well, I'm your father!

Straight look...

JESS
No. You're not.

MICHAEL
I'm the only father you've got,
little girl, so you better start
thinking about treating me like
one!

Silence. Very raw between them.

MICHAEL
You told your teacher I'm not
taking care of you...

JESS
(looks down)
No. You're not.

MICHAEL
The hell I'm not.
(beat)
You told her you cry all the
time...

Still looking down. Her voice is just a murmur...

JESS
...when you don't see...

That sounded pretty real. It changes his voice...

MICHAEL
What do you want me to do?

And she looks up...

JESS
I'm gonna go to my daddy.

The only card she had left to play. She's been guarding it closely.

MICHAEL
Your 'daddy' calls you from
Oregon twice a year. When was
the last time he asked you out
there...?

JESS
Plenty of times! All the time!
You don't know!!

She holding back the tears. His voice is very soft...

MICHAEL

Sure I do, kid. And so do you.

And her tears come. But her helpless rage shines through. It masquerades as courage. It's all she has left, and it breaks him in half...

MICHAEL

I'm...I didn't mean that. Your dad loves you a lot, and he...

JESS

I want my MOMMY!!

...shrieking, turning every head, as she swings her legs over the bench and...

...RUNS from him. Fleeing for her life across the grass. He stands, too impotent to move or breathe and then he...

...BOLTS after her. Running with everything in him. Gaining with every stride. Hear her SOBS now, as she GASPS for breath, and he...

...PLUCKS her up, the momentum and her flailing making him...

...fall, and they tumble and roll and...

...he's got her now. She's hitting with her fists and knees and butting her head, SCREAMING...

JESS

I want my MOMMY, you give me my MOMMY, you...

...he grasps her little arms. Pins her against him.

HOLD on him now. As she writhes.

EXT. SMALL AIRPORT, STEVEN'S POINT, WISCONSIN - DAY

A dozen people on the tarmac, waiting for the DC-3 to unload. CLOSE now on...

...the KOENIG family. WALTER is sixty and wiry. More than quiet. A man who shut down years ago. EMILY is tight and spare. The assertive look of a woman who has to do everything if anything is going to get done. Their daughter ELIZABETH is overweight, farsighted, and genuinely kind. As they watch...

...Michael and the girls climb down the ramp. At the tarmac, they see the family, and Casey...

...races across the distance. Michael has to prod Jess a little, and she heads after her sister. Up ahead now...

...Casey has run into the arms of a beaming Aunt Elizabeth, who picks her up like she was weightless. Grandma greets the girls with restrained affection, but keen interest.

Walking as slow as he can, Michael finally reaches them anyway. Grandpa holds out his hand, Grandma offers a cheek...

MICHAEL

Walter. Emily...

He is as tense as we've ever seen him. He saves his only honest smile for Elizabeth, but it doesn't cheer him much.

EMILY

Was Alice any better, Sunday?

Grave concern. Judgment. And interrogation. In one sentence.

MICHAEL

I didn't see her Sunday.

Just a flicker. Emily has that down to a science.

EMILY

Oh. I just thought you...visited regularly.

If there was any doubt how Michael and Emily feel about each other, it disappears in the awkward silence.

WALTER

So. How was the flight...?

CASEY

I had chocolate lemon twist.

This from Elizabeth's maternal arms. Grandpa smiles...

WALTER

There ya go.

But Michael and Emily. Look only at each other.

EMILY

You did the right thing, Michael.
Bringing them to me.

A compliment that grinds every internal organ he has left.

MICHAEL

I, uh...thought of keeping Casey...

Shaking her head. A mother's wisdom.

EMILY

They belong together. At a time
like this.

Right. Great.

MICHAEL
I'm really sorry, but...if I
miss the flight back to O'Hare...

She understands. Completely.

EMILY
You shouldn't feel a moment's
shame about any of this, Michael...

MICHAEL
I don't. And neither should your
daughter.

Said very bland. She matches his tone precisely...

EMILY
Of course not.

He'd give up an arm to get out of here.

MICHAEL
Well. I really appreciate...
everything.

And in the silence.

JESS
So this is where we're gonna live
from now on?

Unblinking gaze. An honest question.

JESS
I mean. If she doesn't come home.

And he is stopped. So silent, so unprepared. They just stare at
each other for an eternity.

EMILY (V.O.)
Of course, she's coming home. And
you'll hug her and kiss her, and
tell her all the fun you had at
Grandma's...

But the child's eyes are asking Michael. And he has no answer.

CASEY
Daddy, can I have chocolate on
the new plane...?

ELIZABETH
Shhh, baby. You know you're
staying with us...

But now Casey doesn't want to. Squirms to get free...

CASEY
Daa-ddeee!!

Heart-reaching. But Jess never takes her eyes from Michael. A look that nails him to the wall.

JESS
It's okay, Case, we'll be fine.
(beat)
Right here.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Darkened room. Lit only by the flicker of a soundless TV in the corner. Absolute silence. As Michael sits...

...alone. On the floor, legs crossed. His back is to us. A long beat, before we HEAR...

ALICE (V.O.)
...I take responsibility for those kids every minute of their lives...

Our view begins to circle him, as...

ALICE (V.O.)
...you get the ball for one lousy night, and you're proud to tell me how bad you fucked it up!!

Hear the CLICK. We see his face now. Lost. Staring. He reaches next to him...

...a bottle of Jack Daniels. A water glass. As he pours the glass nearly half full, he watches it intently. Sets it aside. Brings up the tape recorder from his lap. A brief WHIRR, and...

ALICE (V.O.)
Stupid Daddy. Is their favorite story. Because they love you.

CLICK. Lifts the glass now. Takes a sip. Winces a little. Takes some getting used to. The WHIRR once more, and...

ALICE (V.O.)
...thirty two year old child. Uncaring, unfeeling and always, always self-absorbed...

CLICK. Deep swallow on the Daniels. As the WHIRR stops at...

ALICE (V.O.)
I hate it. When I whine like that.

EXT. REHAB PARKING LOT - DUSK

Michael climbing out of the car. Light is fading quickly now. He

looks at the manicured grounds for a beat, without really seeing them. He's scared. Takes a long breath against that.

Checks out his smile in the side mirror. Is that something in his teeth? Decides not. As he straightens, he looks across the lot...

...she's standing there. Bag in each hand. No smile. That registers on him for a frightened instant, and she...

...DROPS the bags, and...

...RUNS to him. Across the distance. He freezes where he stands, as she runs with everything in her, and...

...INTO his arms. Holding him. Her head buried in his shoulder. Holding him. Holding him. And when she pulls back...

...her face is shining.

ALICE

God, it's great to get out of there.

What's left of his smile. Isn't sure how to take that.

INT. APARTMENT - LATE NIGHT

Soft light in the spotless bedroom. Jess sleeps in her bunk. She's scrunched down at the bottom, covers billowing around her. Below, Casey sleeps flat on her back. Mouth open, arms spread wide. SEE now...

...Alice. Watching them. And however long she's been standing there. It isn't long enough. And finally...

...makes herself go. Slowly, thoughtfully, down the hall and into her bedroom. She looks around at her things. Sits on the bed. Looks down, gathering herself a little, and...

...Michael enters with two mugs of coffee. She gives him a bright smile.

ALICE

House looks nice.

He nods. His answering smile is awkward. So is the silence. He holds out her coffee...

MICHAEL

You said you're drinking decaf now. So...I've been getting used to it. And...it's...

Staring at her. Why so awkward with someone I love this much?

MICHAEL

...good. It's good.

He sips.

ALICE
How was my mom?

That lets them share small smiles of mutual loathing.

MICHAEL
Oh. Perky. Bubbly...
(beat)
Pert. Y'know. Your mom.

She liked that. And it relieves him. Maybe now, things will go easier. She sets her coffee down. Looks straight to his eyes, and...

ALICE
Honey. Let's talk.

Pats the place beside her on the bed.

MICHAEL
Just what this marriage needed.
More talk.

He looks okay. So she risks it...

ALICE
I don't think. I want to have
...sex. Tonight.

He just blinks.

MICHAEL
Never entered my mind.

Seems breezy enough. She so wants him to be all right with this.

ALICE
I've thought about this night.
And I didn't know...how I'd feel.
And then...

A smile that melts him.

ALICE
I saw you. And I wanted to...
hold you.

A sweetness to it, that he savors before...

MICHAEL
Well, let's not drag sex into
any of that.

She smiles. But sorry at the edges.

ALICE
Would it be better. If I told
you...why. We're not going to
have sex?

MICHAEL
Not much.

She reaches out her hand. He takes it. Sits next to her.

ALICE
I love you. And I want it to
work for us...

MICHAEL
...want it to work?

Button pushed. For the first time, his anger is real.

MICHAEL
...like it's a longshot. Maybe if
you'd start thinking it's gonna work,
without always...

Real and scared and hurt. And she sees it all.

ALICE
Right now. I just feel like a
huge...open...wound, or something.
And I have to heal.

MICHAEL
So that would be. Sort of. When?
(beat)
I mean, I want to pace myself, here.

But he can't get her angry. She won't fight back.

ALICE
I know why you're mad. And it's
not about sex.

MICHAEL
I'm not mad, I'm horny. A subtle,
and rapidly disappearing, distinction.

Her eyes moving over his face. Then...

ALICE
There's a group called Al-Anon.
Family members of alcoholics. And
they have meetings...

MICHAEL
Do they have sex?

But she's determined to see this through.

ALICE
They can help you understand.
How my alcoholism affects you.

MICHAEL
...you mean even better than
right now.

...and from the street a CAR ALARM suddenly BLASTS out at the
night.

ALICE
Look. I do love you. And the
old me would have done what you
wanted tonight...

MICHAEL
..thank God, that shallow little
strumpet's gone!

ALICE
...because I wouldn't have wanted
you to feel bad. But now. I have
to listen to how I feel.

Now it's said. Staring at each other, as if the car alarm's blare
was stone silence.

ALICE
I'm scared about me, Michael.
And I'm thinking about me first.
I have to.

He's on his feet.

MICHAEL
You don't understand. Whatever
you need, I want to give you, I
mean like the decaf, or...

ALICE
Michael, you don't understand. It's
not about anything you have to give
me. It's about what I have to give
to myself.

He's pacing like an animal. Waving his arms. Over the car
alarm...

MICHAEL
...I mean, if you don't wanna work,
you don't wanna have sex, you want
me to take care of the kids, I'm
telling you whatever it takes to
make us work, I'm gonna give you,
don't you understand that!

So hard for her. We see the love he can't right now. How does
she tell him...

ALICE
You've got every right. To be
so angry...

She's almost in tears...

ALICE
I screwed up your life. I put
you through hell. And now you're
scared we're going to break up.

MICHAEL
I am not ANGRY!!

...and WHIRLING to the window...

MICHAEL
SHUT THE FUCK UP! WILL SOMEBODY
FUCKING SHUT THAT FUCKING THING...

CASEY (V.O.)
Mommy...!!

Jess sleepy in the doorway. Casey already running to...

...her mother's arms. Jess piles on top, and the three tumble
joyously on the bed. Kissing and tickling and nuzzling and
laughing...

CASEY
Can we go to the beach tomorrow?

ALICE
Whatever you say, baby.

JESS
...can you make the good French
toast for breakfast...?

ALICE
...anything you want.

Ignored in his rage, Michael glowers at the oblivious reunion.
And as he...

...STORMS out. Alice, catching a glimpse, looks concerned.

EXT. STREET - LATE NIGHT

His fury heightened to Guinness proportions, Michael emerges from
his building. Mayhem in his eyes. Two cartons of eggs under his
arm.

MICHAEL
This fucking town.

And as the car alarm CONTINUES, he stops. Realizing, with a
twisted smile...

MICHAEL
...it's the Porsche.

And CURSING incoherently, he proceeds to...

...EGG the car. Shoving a raw egg into every available orifice of the vehicle. Smearing the windshield. It becomes a project. In the middle of his rantings, he looks up to see...

...his wife and daughters. Watching from a window. Grinning, because he's...

...looking like an idiot.

INT. BEDROOM - LATER

Michael appears in the doorway. His rounds completed. He is caked with egg, sweat and cathartic exhaustion. He looks disgusting.

Alice sits alone. Cross-legged on the bed. He sends her the lamest smile we've ever seen. And calmly...

ALICE
If I fuck you. Will you go to
Al-Anon?

Half a beat on Michael's reaction, and...

INT. CHURCH BASEMENT - EVENING

LEADER
Welcome to Al-Anon.

We are in a church basement. Forty people, nearly all women, gathered on folding chairs, facing...

LEADER
We hope you will find in this
fellowship. The help and friendship
we have been privileged to enjoy...

He is nearly sixty, a corporate executive in his Ralph Lauren casual gear. Friendly. Likes to do this.

LEADER
All of us here. Were lonely.

Michael at one side, looking at all the female faces. All the slogans on the wall. The Twelve Steps. Feeling out of place...

LEADER (V.O.)
But in Al-Anon, we discover that
no situation is truly hopeless...

Sees one male face nearby. This is LEON. Forty, chunky, great tan.

LEADER (V.O.)
That we can find contentment,
even happiness, regardless of
our alcoholic's behavior...

They make eye contact. Sensing Michael's unease, Leon offers a smile that is small and kind. Michael feels a little less alone...

LATER...Leon standing. His turn to share.

LEON
My name is Leon...

Right away, Leon is clearly gay. Michael reacts with diminished identification.

MANY
Hi, Leon!

Leon's a regular. Draws an exaggerated breath, to communicate the ordeal of revealing...

LEON
I didn't have the courage. To
leave my alcoholic lover...

Lover. Michael's not fooled.

LEON
...because he has this fabulous
apartment. Anyway, I'm working
in this restaurant...dirty, filthy
place, I don't know why I'm working
there...anyway, I meet this waitress.
And she invites me back to her place...

Michael reacts.

LEON
...for tea.

Oh.

LEON
And. She has this incredible
loft! And she says...she's moving
to Minneapolis...she's a dancer...
and do I know anyone who needs an
apartment!

Leon's mouth drops open. As if the import of his tale is manifest. Michael doesn't get it.

LEON
And I just know...the Higher
Power...put that apartment in
my life.

Michael's mouth opens slightly.

LEON
...to give me the courage. To
leave my lover.

What am I doing here? Michael rises to scram. On his feet, he
hears...

JOANNA
My name is Joanna...

MANY
Hi, Joanna!

Michael mimes a disgusted 'Hi, Joanna'. Turns to go...

JOANNA
I want to talk about. How we
co-dependents. Have suffered.

This. Slows Michael down.

JOANNA
We spend our lives, focusing on
every mood, every tantrum, every
whim of our alcoholic...

Suddenly. His attention is rapt.

JOANNA
Everything gets twisted. To make
us feel guilty for our genuine
concern. As if, somehow, it's
all...our...fault.

Scales. Torn from his eyes.

JOANNA
Well, I came to realize. I need
to pay attention to myself for
a change!
(heartfelt)
I need. To take care. Of me!

And right where he stands. Michael...

...BURSTS into TEARS. Everything comes out of him in a funny,
pathetic, touching torrent. The group just sort of stares.
Finally, a woman reaches a comforting hand to his shoulder, as the
waves of self-pity continue...

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Alice alone in the quiet kitchen. Kids are asleep. She's making
snack for Casey's class. Devilled eggs, carefully prepared.

Carrot and celery sticks. Home-made muffins. Into each muffin, she is placing an American Flag toothpick, as...

...she hears Michael come through the front door. Keeps working. She looks content, comfortable.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

Honey...

...when she turns. He's beaming. Almost goofy.

MICHAEL

I can't. Thank you. Enough.

ALICE

You liked it...?

She's thrilled and surprised.

MICHAEL

Liked it? It's like a zillion
pound weight. Has been lifted!

Her skepticism begins. He kisses her enthusiastically, and notices...

MICHAEL

Snack, huh? Looks good.

(lifts an egg)

Lot of work went into this.

Lot of love...

ALICE

Uh, there's only twenty-eight.

He stops just short of eating it. An oops smile. Puts it back.

ALICE

What did you make for your snack?

Oh...

MICHAEL

It was...a lot like this. Right
down to the toothpicks.

Opens the fridge...

ALICE

So it was...good, huh? The
meeting.

MICHAEL

See, it's just like your A.A.
meetings...

As if he's enlightening her.

MICHAEL
We got the same Twelve Steps.
Twelve Traditions. No cross-talk...
that's a tough one when you get
excited...

When he turns, he's munching an apple. Happily.

ALICE
It's great to see you so...up.

MICHAEL
Good apple!

Offers her a bite. Thanks anyway.

MICHAEL
So I'm on my ninth step...

ALICE
In one meeting?

MICHAEL
...where we have to make amends
to people we've harmed. And I
can't think of anyone I'd rather
start with...

Just grins at her.

ALICE
That's sweet, but...

MICHAEL
...no, no, no, no! No. This
is for my benefit. Working my
program, here.

She nods hesitantly. Okay...

MICHAEL
So. Uh...I'm sorry...that...
(beat)
I'm sorry. I yelled at you.
When you came home drunk.

Fishing for another...

MICHAEL
I'm sorry I thought you were
cheating on me. When you were
only out drinking.

He's failing to notice her slow burn.

MICHAEL
I'm sorry I didn't cover for you...

ALICE
...when I was shit-faced.

He looks at her. Yeh. Then.

ALICE
Thanks. For your amends.

He sits back on a stool now. Spreads his arms. Waiting. She doesn't get it.

MICHAEL
Here I am. Any time. Ready
to listen...to your...
(beat)
...amends.

Oh. Well...

ALICE
Michael, I take this stuff
seriously.

What could that possibly mean?

ALICE
Now, I am sorry for the wrongs
I've done you. And I've said
it over and over...
(beat)
But what you just did. Are not
amends.

No?

ALICE
You're saying, 'I'm sorry I didn't
have a Kleenex when you were puking
in the gutter, disgracing me, our
children, our flag and our ancestors!'
(beat)
See, that's not an amends. It's
an accusation.

He straightens his spine a little. This is so unfair.

ALICE
And now, you won't be satisfied
unless I prostrate myself before
you, and beg your divine mercy for
my crime.

He can't be fazed. He wears the even gaze of the righteous.

MICHAEL
Honey. I know alcoholism isn't
your fault. It's a disease. But
you know...

MICHAEL (cont'd)
 ...Hitler had a disease. He was
 a paranoid schizophrenic.

At this, her eyes are a little glassy.

MICHAEL
 Hey, Adolph...sorry about the
 schizophrenia. But what about
 the six million Jews?

Into it now, he's off the stool...

MICHAEL
 So I guess, honey, all I'm saying
 is...
 (beat)
 ...what about the six million Jews?!

Gonzo.

ALICE
 (very quietly)
 ...an apt analogy.

And in a reflex...

MICHAEL
 You hit our kid.

I what? She can't remotely believe he said that. He's just
 realized he crossed a line. Desperate to justify himself...

MICHAEL
You were in detox. I had to
 look at that swollen little face
 everyday...
 (beat)
 I mean. You really tagged her.

He's pushed a button. That says: Get...the fuck...out!

EXT. STREET, 110TH AND AMSTERDAM - LATE NIGHT

Very late. Very dark. Way uptown. Cab pulls up to a tenement,
 and out climbs...

...Michael. This time, it's his own suitcase. As he squints in
 the dim light, looking for the right number, he is...

...JUMPED from behind. The kid puts a CHOKE HOLD on Michael, and
 in the struggle, the kid's partner TEARS Michael's pants pocket.
 They've got the wallet, and...

...TAKE OFF. Michael scrambles to his feet and BOLTS after them.
 RACING down the empty street, as if his life were at stake, heart
 POUNDING, GASPING for breath, until he...

...has to stop. The kids were too fast. Hands on his knees, struggling to keep from blacking out, he looks up at...

...four younger black kids. These are maybe fifteen.

MICHAEL

Why didn't you stop those guys?

ARCHIE, the littlest, can't quite believe he heard that. But since he asked...

ARCHIE

...we coulda got hurt!

Michael shoots Archie a disgusted look. Like he's let him down. And starts to head off...

ARCHIE (V.O.)

Want your wallet back?

Michael stops. Turns back...

MICHAEL

'Scuse me...?

ARCHIE

...we know those guys. We can get your wallet back.

Really? He nods. A little slow.

ARCHIE

...what's the re-ward?

MICHAEL

Sorry...?

ARCHIE

The re-ward. The cash. For gettin'...

MICHAEL

...my wallet back, yeh. Well...

He walks purposefully toward them...

MICHAEL

The reward. Is the feeling inside. For doing...the right...thing.

...this guy's full of surprises.

ARCHIE

The right thing? Man, I don't know what that is.

...and Michael suddenly GRABS Archie's shirt...

MICHAEL
...getting my FUCKING WALLET BACK!!

...three KNIVES CLICK open. And Michael slowly lets go. Takes one step back, as Archie shakes his head...

ARCHIE
Man. You must be crazy.

INT. PETER'S APARTMENT - LATE NIGHT

Just inside the door. Michael THROWS his bag down...

MICHAEL
What kind of a neighborhood do you LIVE in?!

Peter looks at him not unlike Archie.

PETER
Those kids coulda killed you.
They shoulda killed you. I
woulda killed you.

MICHAEL
Welcome. To your lovely home.

PETER
Things more genial back at your place?

Not really. Michael throws his bag on the couch, as Peter watches. Still amazed...

PETER
Four kids, huh? What got you so wired? You shooting crack?

MICHAEL
I went to an Al-Anon meeting.

PETER
Don't try for two.

MICHAEL
Are you kidding? It's the greatest thing ever happened to me. I learned something there...
(beat)
I've been abused.

Peter doesn't know whether to smile or not. Chooses...

PETER
(stoner imitation)
I love you, man.

They've done this before. Michael SLAMS over a chair and CROONS like a Sixties Deadhead...

MICHAEL
I LOVE YOU TOO, MAN!

Both on their feet now. Woes forgotten in their homage to dooper male bonding. Over and over...a cacophony of...

BOTH
I LO-OVE YOU, MAN!

Opposite sides of the room. BANGING their heads against the wall...

MICHAEL
YOU ARE THE BEST, MAN...

PETER
NO, MAN...YOU ARE!

Just stop now. Staring at each other. As if timing one climactic simultaneous...

MICHAEL/PETER
I LOOO-OOOVE YOUUU, MANNN!!

INT. CHURCH BASEMENT - DAY

Meeting in full swing. The same leader, driving his point home...

LEADER
...absolutely essential. That
you make no major...life...decisions.
For six to nine months.

A hand goes meekly up. The leader nods toward it...

MICHAEL
Uh. Would that include...
(full beat)
...leaving your wife?

And on the leader's look...

MICHAEL
...man, you must be crazy?

LEADER
Well. That's not a word we like
to use...

INT. HALLWAY, MICHAEL'S BUILDING - DAY

Michael waiting at his apartment door. Holding a dozen irises wrapped in paper. Astonished to see the door opened by...

...Sabrina. A frozen instant, and...

SABRINA
What're you doin' here?

Huh?

SABRINA
I thought Alice kick you out.

MICHAEL
Is it okay if I talk to her
about that?

SABRINA
Fine with me. She's at work.

He sort of peeks inside, around the door frame.

SABRINA
The kids are at Kevin's house.

He nods. Before he goes...

MICHAEL
You still mad?

She's not.

SABRINA
I find. That kinda thing. Only
hurts yourself.

EXT. SIXTH AVENUE - NIGHT

Michael and his irises. Sitting on the wall of a sculpture fountain. He's been there a while. So long, in fact, he is now just staring sightlessly at the night traffic.

Among the people leaving the building behind him, one passes him and stops. She turns back...

ALICE
Michael...?

He JOLTS to his feet. Disgusted with himself.

MICHAEL
Christ! I had this whole...
charming thing to do. When you
came out.

She has to smile. He can still give her that. Softly...

ALICE
...let's see it.

MICHAEL
Welllll...it's kinda witty...and
it's all in the...timing of it...

ALICE
...I'll take account.

He's deciding. Little boy deciding. She nods encouragingly. He nods back. Shakes himself loose. Gets his center. And...

...PLUNGES to his knees.

MICHAEL
PLEASE! Please, please, please,
please, PUH-LEEEZE, take me back!!

All. In the timing of it. She looks at him with unblinking honesty. And just above a whisper...

ALICE
...no.

In her eyes is sadness and affection. And no anger. That's what chills Michael to the bone. This is real.

ALICE
What happened the other night.
Was all for the best.

She draws a slow, ragged breath. He's still on his knees, looking up so helplessly. Can barely bring herself to say...

ALICE
Right now. We shouldn't be
together.

He's too stricken to rise. So, slowly, she sinks to her knees. Just in front of him.

ALICE
I've got...so much now. To keep
together. Can you understand
that in there?

Searching his eyes...

ALICE
I've got my job. Thank God they
let me back. I've got my A.A.
meetings. There's the house to
take care of...

MICHAEL
...but I could help with that.
And the kids...

The kids. Her saddest moment so far.

ALICE
The kids are my responsibility.
And they always have been. What
they need from me...has to come
first.

She touches his face. Tenderly. But almost as if he was her child himself.

ALICE
...and I can't give them. What
I need to give them. If you're
there. Just now.

MICHAEL
So it's all my fault, huh?

Her hands are twisted in her lap now. Tight together.

ALICE
I wish you could hear. How
mad you sound. Because I swear
to you...
(beat)
...the kids do.

And to her surprise. He seems to hear that one.

ALICE
I'm a real shaky little train
now, Michael. On a wobbly track.
It won't take much to derail me...

Tears are standing in her eyes. And in this moment, his heart
goes out to her.

ALICE
I wish I could say...it'll be
a week, or a month. I wish I
knew...when...I'll be ready for
us again.

MICHAEL
...what you really mean is. When
I'll be ready.

A pause. And...

ALICE
I guess I mean both. My sponsor,
Dana, just keeps telling me...today,
today...all we ever really have is
today.

MICHAEL
Dana.

ALICE
Dana says I have to take care of
me now. And Michael...

Her voice almost breaks with...

ALICE
...you. Have to take care of
you. Okay...?

Even Michael. Has to nod at that.

ALICE

See, if I screw up. I'll not only have no marriage...I'll lose my kids...and my job...and my sanity, and...maybe my life.

Whispers...

ALICE

And then I won't. Be any good. For anyone.

Silence. On a New York street. He's still holding the flowers, somehow. So he...

...gives them to her. She takes them slowly, and...

...leans. To kiss his face. And, gently, his mouth.

And stands. One last look. And gone.

HOLD on Michael. Alone in the world. And DISSOLVE SLOWLY TO...

INT. CHURCH BASEMENT - DAY

Leon standing. Not a large group today. He's resting his hand on the back of a chair. Seems to be gathering his thoughts.

LEON

As some of you know, I left my lover a couple of...months ago...

A slow deliberate quality to his speech. As if trying to bring rationality to emotion.

LEON

...I hadn't seen him since. And yesterday, he comes into this restaurant where I work...

See Michael now. Seated in the back. Like the others, he's held by the naked quality in Leon's voice...

LEON

So we have coffee. And I give him advice...I always did that. And I remember. How much I miss him, well...

Looks up. As if missing him were beside the point.

LEON

...I walked home. It's thirty-eight blocks. And I remembered...why...I missed him.

Watch him now. A bitter edge to his small smile.

LEON

I thought. I was obsessed with him. But actually...I scarcely knew him.

A long quiet. As if he were all alone. Reflecting. Then...

LEON

For two years and four months, I used that man. I manipulated him... controlled him...made him feel guilty and weak and useless. So that...he'd ...stay with me.

Leon's head lowers. There is not a sound in the world.

LEON

And I called that. Love.

Smiles at himself. Silly me. But no one else is smiling.

LEON

I guess...I felt so...needy. Like if he abandoned me, I...wouldn't even...exist, or something.

He shrugs his shoulders. And his voice drops...

LEON

So all there was. Was my own need. Pathetic.

So quiet. So precise.

LEON

And I just...wondered. Who was this man. I never got to know.

And without a glance up. Leon takes his seat. A beat of silence. The leader acknowledges a hand...

...in the back. Someone is rising. All heads turn to...

MICHAEL

I'm...Michael.

MANY

Hi, Michael!

Suddenly afraid to find himself doing this. His voice lowers to a barely audible mumble...

MICHAEL

I've been coming here for two months. This is the first time I've talked...

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And now he looks around. They're all listening. What was it he wanted to say? Seems to elude him now...

MICHAEL
My wife is an alcoholic. And
we're...separated. And she's...

His voice changes quality. Honest. And, in that, softer.

MICHAEL
...she's doing great. She seems
to...have her life...

...and he stops. Contrasting that thought with...

MICHAEL
I'm...not doing as good. Which
is funny, I guess.

He tries to smile a little. As if it were funny.

MICHAEL
I miss her. I miss...my daughters.
And things...at work, and...
everywhere, they just seem...
(beat)
I don't know. I can't get...a
handle on things. They seem...
loose. Fuzzy...

Everyone's still listening. He looks at their faces.

MICHAEL
Anyway. I just stood up to say...

...finds Leon's eyes. Looking back so directly.

MICHAEL
(very softly)
...thanks, Leon. For what
you said.

...and with an awkward scraping of his chair. Michael sits back down.

INT. MICHAEL'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Darkened office. Only two desk lamps lit. Michael sits at his word processor, tapping something out. His face is empty. His motions slightly slow, as if moving under water. And across the room...

...Peter watches. Quietly...

PETER
What do you think. Chinese?

...the slow tapping just goes on. As if Michael is too absorbed to hear.

PETER
So. What was the big call
from Harold?

And without looking up...

MICHAEL
Oh, Stan Randazzo is moving on.
Harold thought I might like his
job.

PETER
Why would you move to Washington,
just to be under Hogan's thumb?

MICHAEL
Well, it's a change of scenery.
Meet some people. Then maybe
when Hogan retires...Harold
moves me up.

PETER
Hogan. Is forty-two years old.

Michael keeps his eyes on the flickering screen.

MICHAEL
Forty-one.

PETER
So...no way you're going, right?

MICHAEL
You'd miss me, huh.

A beat.

PETER
If you go. I'll get stuck with
your job.

MICHAEL
Not necessarily. I told Harold
you weren't up to it.

Michael still hasn't looked at him.

MICHAEL
Anyway. I'm not going.

Peter studies his friend. And...

PETER
I loo-ove you, man...

Silence. And then a quiet...

MICHAEL
...Chinese is fine.

Switches off the computer. Rises to get his jacket. HOLD on Peter. Watching him go.

INT. HALLWAY, MICHAEL'S BUILDING - MORNING

Michael outside his apartment door. It is opened by...

...a MAN in his forties. Trim, graying, and unfortunately, attractive. Cardigan sweater and a pipe, for god's sake. Michael peers at the apartment number, like he's got the wrong place. The man extends his hand...

DANA
Michael. I'm Dana.

Michael's life flashes before his eyes in an instant of panic, which he turns into a chipper...

MICHAEL
Hi, Dana!

Dana smiles discreetly. Loves a good-natured jibe at the Program. As he lets Michael in...

DANA
Alice is just getting the kids
dressed for you...

Down the hall, walking slow like old pals...

DANA
...they're so excited about
their day at the beach. Alice
thought it might be a little cold,
but I told her...hey, they're kids,
not china dolls.

Michael smiles back discreetly. Loves a good-natured jibe at the overprotectiveness of mothers. In the living room now...

MICHAEL
You're the Dana. That's her
sponsor.

Dana nods. As they sit.

MICHAEL
I thought you were a woman.

Dana flicks an understanding smile. Likely mistake. The silence gets unbelievably awkward. But just for Michael.

MICHAEL
I bet you've heard. A lot
about me.

He has. Great.

MICHAEL
...including my psychopathic
jealous rages.

DANA
There's that sense of humor.
That Alice is...
(beat)
...always talking about.

Squirming under the microscope...

MICHAEL
...so you'd be here to...

DANA
...pick her up. For a meeting.

Right. An excruciating breath, before...

CASEY (V.O.)
Daddy!

...and she comes running in her bikini. Straight to his arms and he SWINGS her up. Spins her around. Holds her. Holds her tight, as she nuzzles his neck.

JESS (V.O.)
I got her sweatshirt...

Jess in the doorway, holding an armload of warm clothes and plastic toys. Beneath her typical jaded veneer, she seems a little excited herself.

JESS
...she'd freeze her butt in
that outfit.

He has set Casey down. And as he watches, she...

...runs to Dana. He scoops her into a very sweet kiss.

CASEY
Dana. Do you love my suit?

Dana does. And Michael watches him loving it. When he turns back to the doorway...

ALICE
Hi, stranger.

A lovely, friendly smile. Her hair is pulled back. Just a shirt and jeans. And she is beautiful enough to stop his brain in mid-synapse.

MICHAEL

Hi.

Nice opener.

MICHAEL

I, uh...don't want to keep you
guys from the meeting...

ALICE

...we've got a while.

So. He'll have to leave first. His glance flicks to Dana for an
instant. And back to her...

MICHAEL

I'll...drop 'em off at school.
In the morning.

(beat)

Thanks for...suggesting...they...
sleep over.

And Alice nods. My pleasure. He turns to Dana...

MICHAEL

So. I'll see you again...

DANA

...soon, I hope.

My fondest wish.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Windy, overcast beach. Casey in Alice's sweatshirt, which fits
her large, is kneeling on the wet sand. Michael, dressed more
warmly, but shivering, kneels with her. They are peering at...

...tiny holes in the mud uncovered by the receding surf. Looking,
looking and Michael suddenly...

...scoops out a tiny sand crab. The beetle-like creature waves
its legs furiously, as Michael holds it between his thumb and
forefinger. Casey is disgusted, enthralled and giddy. With
appropriate sounds for each. Michael...

...grabs her hand, like he's going to put the crab in it, and she
SQUEALS, yanking away so hard she falls over. She's laughing now,
almost uncontrollably.

So he holds the crab up over his own outstretched palm, and...

...DROPS it in. CLOSES his fingers. Grins at her, nothing to it,
and...

MICHAEL

WAAUUUGH!!

...FLINGING it a mile into the ocean, and pantomiming exaggerated creepy-crawly revulsion. Wiping the cooties from his palm on...

...Casey, as she giggles and wriggles, pinned to the sand.

When they catch their breath, he points to the airholes...

MICHAEL

...see any more animals, you
scream.

She nods. Scrutinizes the terrain, as he moves on...

...to Jess. She's building a reasonably elaborate castle-and-moat complex. He settles down flat beside her. Watching her work, without a word.

She's obviously aware of him, but does not look up. And they remain like that, in silence, for a long moment. Finally...

JESS

Does it look that funny?

She glances over. He just shakes his head. And quietly...

MICHAEL

I just want to learn how
to do this.

She really studies him. He seems to mean that. So, she starts to show him...

JESS

See, the water comes in here.
And it goes all around here...like
that...and then...goes out there.

And he nods. Getting it. Only thing is...

MICHAEL

What if it hits...there, first?

She hadn't thought of that. Covers with...

JESS

That's why I was just starting
to build this...

And starts a little retaining wall in the crucial spot. Glances over to see his reaction. He's impressed. Just settles in more comfortably. Going to stay awhile.

INT. SUBWAY EXPRESS TRAIN - NIGHT

Standing at the front of the first subway car. Michael holds Casey up to the front window so she can see...

...the tunnel as we RACE headlong through it, shifting light and shadow at amazing speed, FLYING through brightly lit stations and...

...PLUNGING back into darkness. Casey is mesmerized. He looks down to Jess in the deafening CLATTER...

MICHAEL
You can't see...

She's just a little short for the window. She shrugs, couldn't care less. He sets Casey's foot on a metal ledge, and she rests her weight against him, as he...

...scoops Jess up in his arms. For all her nonchalance, she doesn't resist. She looks at the flashing light show, pointing out a repair crew, silent moles toiling in eerie light as we SHOOT by them...

...Michael watching her reflection in the glass. Thinking about her, as he does. We see fear of loss in there somewhere. And as if feeling something she could never name, Jess absently snuggles back into him.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jess' sleeping face. At peace. A small child once more. Casey sits cross-legged, listening to a softly-spoken story. From her daddy's face.

MICHAEL
...so Stupid Daddy said to the waiter, what are these sticks for? And the waiter said, they're chopsticks and you eat with them. So Stupid Daddy...

CASEY
...picked up the fork with them. And couldn't eat like that.

She chuckles, small and happy. Stupid Daddy.

CASEY
...what did he do to the Fortune Cookies?

MICHAEL
Stupid Daddy. Ate the paper. And read the cookie.

She is loving this stuff.

CASEY
What did it say?

MICHAEL
It said, short cute people. Can have anything they want. For breakfast.

He slides her under the covers. Gently tucks her in.

CASEY

What if Peter wants his bed?
When he comes back.

MICHAEL

I think some lady. Has him
locked up for the night.

Kiss on the lips. Light goes out.

INT. PETER'S LIVING ROOM - LATE NIGHT

Michael sleeping on the rickety sofa bed. Dark dead of night. He
stirs. One eye opens. Listens and...

...rolls over. Casey is there with her stuffed frog. Almost too
sleepy to know she's come. Without a word, he lifts her up into
bed with him. Gets her snuggled in, and...

...there is Jess, holding Samantha. Blinking at him, semi-
conscious. He seems really touched that Jess came too. Brings
her and the doll into his arms. As he cuddles Jess close, he
sees...in the dim light of the bedroom doorway...

...Peter, who's just evicted the girls. He shrugs. So much for
the lady jailer. And very quietly...

MICHAEL

...love you, man.

Settles his family down to sleep.

INT. HALLWAY, MICHAEL'S BUILDING - MORNING

Michael ringing his own bell. From within the apartment, the
Haffner Symphony is reaching a crescendo. He keeps ringing, but
it's doubtful anyone could hear over the music. So...

...he pulls out his key. Thinking it over. Nothing else to do,
but pick up his sack with the kids' stuff, and...

...let himself in.

MICHAEL

Alice...?

The music's even louder here. Down the hall to the living room.
Blasting now. Shuts the stereo off to sudden...

...quiet. Except for the water running in a distant bathroom.
Which now...

...stops. Suddenly, Michael feels like a trapped intruder.
Trying to get out in front of it, a nervous...

MICHAEL

Honey...?

(commits to it)

I'm home...!

Great. To be home. In the excruciating silence...

ALICE (V.O.)
Michael? In the bathroom...

Now what does he do? He stands there. And stands there...

ALICE (V.O.)
Michael? Did you get lost?

So, carries his sack down the hall, into the bedroom. Checks it out for a flicker. The bed is neatly made. And into the bathroom, where...

...Alice is dressed for work. Just finishing her make-up. One of them is uncomfortable, and it's not her.

MICHAEL
I'm sorry I used the key, but...

ALICE
...you guys have a good time?

She's putting on her lipstick fast. Clearly, in a hurry.

MICHAEL
Great. I, uh...brought the kids' stuff...

Holding up his sack. As proof positive.

MICHAEL
...so they'd...have it.

She's clipping on earrings. Quickly, expertly...

MICHAEL
And I thought. Maybe we could. Talk.

Her final check in the mirror. Faint disapproval, but it'll have to do...

ALICE
I'm really late, Michael, I'm sorry. Can we do it tonight...?

...she's heading by him...

ALICE
...I've got twenty minutes to get to a budget meeting that I'm running...

...he's following her to the living room. She's gathering up papers from the desk. Stuffing them into a leather folder. When she turns, she...

...stops. Sees his hangdog look.

ALICE
What's wrong?

MICHAEL
I thought. We could talk...about,
y'know...us.

She can't believe this.

ALICE
Now...is when you want to settle
...the rest of our lives. Now?

Well...sort of.

ALICE
After I told you I'm running
like an animal to make this
meeting?

MICHAEL
You're right, forget it.

She drops her folder on the desk. Hard.

ALICE
Michael, I will not feel guilty
because I can't put my life on
hold on three seconds' notice!

MICHAEL
Hey, you've got your priorities.
It's not like I'm your sponsor,
or something...

Now. She catches on.

ALICE
Is that what this is about...
Dana?

MICHAEL
Not...exactly.

ALICE
...just a little, huh?

MICHAEL
I saw you yesterday...in those
tight little jeans...and your
hair was all washed...

ALICE
...and you came by this morning
to see if Dana was still here.
In my tight little jeans.

Silence. Staring at each other.

MICHAEL
I haven't pushed you. I wanted
to give you...all the time you
needed. And maybe I was...
(beat)
...scared. Of what you'd say.

That's as honest as he's been in awhile.

MICHAEL
And I saw this guy and...

ALICE
(softly)
...thought you ran out of time.

She touches his hand. Her fingers take his...

ALICE
He's not my lover, Michael. He's
my real friend.

Searching his eyes. Can he hear this?

ALICE
He was there for me...when I
might have died without him.
He listened to my heart...my real
heart...to everything in me...

Her eyes are shining as she speaks of it. And quietly, his
fingers have let hers go. She's sorry to see that.

ALICE
Look. I'm qualifying tonight at
my A.A. meeting. I'm going to
tell my story...
(beat)
I'd like you to come.

A hitch. And...

MICHAEL
I might be flying down to
Washington.

Washington?

MICHAEL
Harold wants me to work with
him. On the hill.

He's studying her now. Her reaction.

MICHAEL

It's a great shot. Contacts,
committee work, speechwriting on
policy. It's...where the action is.

And she nods. That's great.

MICHAEL

I told him. I'd have to see how
you felt. About me...y'know,
moving down there.

But in her turn. She's reading his face. What does he want?

ALICE

Well. If it's something you
really want...I'd hate to see
you...

(beat)

...pass it up.

He just nods. And she nods back. Unspoken love in each
direction. No one wants to say don't leave me...

...and no one does.

MICHAEL

With the shuttle and everything.
It's no big deal.

ALICE

A stone's throw.

Yeh. A stone's throw. He reaches to the desk. Hands up her
folder...

MICHAEL

...you'll miss your meeting.

One last chance. That no one takes. She leans up...

...kisses his cheek.

ALICE

...well, good luck.

An awful moment. And she turns and goes.

HEAR her footfalls. Gaining speed. The front door.

And the silence.

INT. RESTAURANT - AFTERNOON

Slow time of day. The lunch crowd has gone. Leon is bringing a
menu and a set-up to the table in the corner. As he sets them in
place, he looks down to see...

MICHAEL
Got a minute?

Leon stares at the wan smile. The need isn't far from the surface. He glances quickly around...

LEON
I s'pose for a moment. If my boss rags on us, just ignore him. Talk about your dysfunctional personality...

As Leon sits, Michael studies the tablecloth.

MICHAEL
I just...I just came to say good-bye.

And looks up...

MICHAEL
I'm moving to Washington.

LEON
You don't look happy about it.

No. He supposes he doesn't.

LEON
Is your family joining you?

No, they aren't. Leon just watching him. He seems very wise in this moment.

LEON
...you spoke about your children.

MICHAEL
I'll see them. It's...
(beat)
A stone's throw.

Leon looks so quietly sad. Michael is embarrassed.

MICHAEL
I wanted to see you. And make amends.

LEON
Michael...

MICHAEL
No, I mean it. I used to watch you in the meetings. And I was ...judging you...

LEON
...because I'm gay.

Leon makes a sweet, funny face. Michael won't cheer up.

MICHAEL
...that. And I thought you...
were shallow, and...self-centered
and...

LEON
...guilty as charged, Michael.

A very straight moment between them.

MICHAEL
I don't think so. And I'm pretty
ashamed. And I'm sorry.

Leon is listening to more than the words.

LEON
...thank you, Michael.
(quietly)
What does your wife think?
About your leaving.

Seems like he really wants to know. So...

MICHAEL
I think she's pretty relieved.

LEON
Did she say so?

MICHAEL
People don't always say what
they think.

And Leon nods at that. Scribbles something absently now on a
matchbook cover, as...

MICHAEL
She's doing great without me.
Job, kids. This is the best
thing for her.

Leon folds his hands around the matchbook. Looks down at them.
Decides to say...

LEON
Maybe you could leave...what's
best for her...to her. And focus
on what's best...for you.

MICHAEL
That's all I ever think about.
That's how I got here. What I
want...what I need...

Leon is fingering the matchbook...

LEON

You don't sound happy about that,
either.

MICHAEL

At least I'm mad at the right
person for a change. That's a
start.

And when Leon looks up. His voice is strangely strong.

LEON

Is it?

Michael doesn't understand that. So...

LEON

...serenity, to accept the things
I cannot change. Courage, to...

But Michael's hand has SHOT up. The sudden flash of anger keeps
him silent, controlling himself to say...

MICHAEL

I just...I'm sorry. One more
slogan, one fucking piece of
jargon and I'll just...

LEON

...throw some queen through a
window?

And in the silence that follows. Leon's smile stays cheerful.

LEON

I'm just like you. Change?
Change? I have to drag myself
kicking and screaming...

The smile fades now. His point made, Leon stands...

LEON

I'll miss you at the meetings,
Michael.

(beat)

You take care.

Holds out his hand. Michael takes it. When Michael's hand comes
away. The matchbook is in it.

LEON

My number. No big deal.

INT. JESS' SCHOOL - LATE AFTERNOON

Jess kneeling at her cubby. Kids are rushing by. End of day.
Clatter echoing in the crowded corridor, but she is intent on
fitting an object we can't see into the cubby. Pretty jammed in
there, easy does it. Almost in, when...

...a hand. Touches her shoulder.

MICHAEL
...can I see it?

He's right down on the floor with her. Gently pulling the object back out.

JESS
I thought Sabrina was gonna pick me up. After movement class.

It's a wire mesh box. Inside, half a dozen insects creep around.

MICHAEL
She is. This is a visit.

JESS
...it's a bug box.

He's turning it slowly. Following a beetle.

MICHAEL
I like a name. That tells you what it is.

JESS
This way they can breathe. And the grass isn't to eat. It makes it wet, so they won't...

MICHAEL
...dry up, and keel over.

She likes that he knew that. He's really watching this thing intently.

JESS
How come you're here?

He looks up slowly. Time to put away the bug box. Settles comfortably on the floor.

MICHAEL
I came. To say I'm sorry.

She just blinks. No reaction he can read.

MICHAEL
I'm sorry for...the fight we had. In the park. That was all my fault.

She's looking at him. So intently.

MICHAEL
And for how I didn't make it better. When Mommy was away.

JESS
It wasn't so bad.

That chokes him a little. So he pauses before...

MICHAEL
And for leaving you with Grandma.

On that one, she nods.

MICHAEL
But mostly. I'm sorry for the
kind of daddy I was...or wasn't...
(beat)
...all the time. Since I know you.

A beat of reflection. And then...

JESS
Why are you saying this?

She made him smile. Right now, he didn't think he could do that.

MICHAEL
I'm going away. Tonight. To take
a job in Washington.

Full silence. We are aware now of kids and adults rushing by.
And...

JESS
Are you and mommy getting a
divorce?

Smart. Fucking. Kid. He just brings out the smile, the old
faithful...

MICHAEL
No. Nobody's talked about...that.

She is unconvinced.

MICHAEL
...and even if it ever happened,
Washington is real close. I'd
call all the time...and I'd come
up here...

JESS
... 'cos Casey. Would still be
your daughter...

That was hard for him. Just steadies himself. And his cheap,
worthless smile. Hanging in there.

MICHAEL
You're my daughter, kid. You
always will be. I'll always come
back...to see you.

Half a beat before...

JESS
...not like my daddy.

Tears standing in his eyes now. He doesn't notice them. His voice gets real soft against the surrounding noise...

MICHAEL
Well, I'll love you a lot. Like your real daddy. But I'm the type who's always...insecure.
(beat)
Do you know what that is?

She doesn't. But he sure does.

MICHAEL
It means scared. So I'll always be scared you don't know...how much...I love you.

Tears in her eyes now, too. The kind he's never seen.

MICHAEL
...so I'll always do stuff. So you'll know.

She just nods. She understands what he means.

JESS
You have to go there, huh.

MICHAEL
Well. It's a great...job. Great job. I'm...lucky. To have a job like that...

She has the point. Just reaches her arms around him. Holds him close.

She can't see his face now. Which is just as well.

INT. HALLWAY, MICHAEL'S BUILDING - DUSK

We've been here before. But Michael's never looked quite like this. Loss without self-pity makes him seem older somehow.

The bell is answered by silence. He takes out his key, and...
...lets himself in.

MICHAEL
Case...?

Dead silence. Looks at his watch. Time is tight. He paces aimlessly down the hall. Into...

...the girls' room. His eyes wander over objects. Maybe the last time for awhile. Samantha, on Jess' bunk. Stuffed gorilla in a rocking chair. Absently straightens Casey's bedcovers now, and...

...slumps in the rocking chair to wait. He's holding the stuffed gorilla in his lap. They rock slowly, as he looks at his watch again. Shit! And...

...out of the chair. Into what used to be his bedroom. Opens the narrow top drawer of his dresser. Pulls out...

...sunglasses. Passport. Braided keychain from Jess' arts and crafts. And...

...stop. In the back of the drawer...

...tape recorder. He lifts it out. Sits slowly on the bed...

...staring at it. Staring. Staring, and...

...CLICKS it to life. WHIRRING. Stopping...

ALICE (V.O.)
...can't take care of things,
maybe. But he is sweet...

...CLICK. Holds the cool metal against his face. Alone with his thoughts before...CLICK...

ALICE (V.O.)
...and good, and most important,
always, always...always funny.

...CLICK. Like he's killing himself. Slowly. Savoring the pain before...CLICK...

ALICE (V.O.)
It's what makes him. Irresistible.

Deep. Slow breath. All there behind his eyes, as we hear the WHIRRR, and...

ALICE (V.O.)
Sounds like. We need a divorce.

...and OFF. HOLD on him in the silence.

INT. SMALL SCHOOL GYM - NIGHT

CLOSE on Alice. Edgy and brave. On the brink of a moment. She stands in bright light and glances down, adjusting something. When we pull back slightly...it is a microphone...

ALICE
My name is Alice. I'm an
alcoholic.

GROUP
Hi, Alice!

...a huge swell of VOICES, nearly two hundred. They wash over her like a wave. She straightens her back...

ALICE
I've been sober. For one
hundred twenty-four days.

From the audience's POV now. She is on a slightly raised stage at one end of a school gym. The large group sits on folding chairs. We see Dana in the front row...

ALICE
I drank my first beer when I
was nine years old.

Her voice echoes on the primitive sound system. At the back, people are still arriving, unnoticed.

ALICE
My dad is an alcoholic. So my
mother blamed my...lapse on his
example.

Some laugh good-naturedly. Alice not among them.

ALICE
...that way, she could hurt both
of us at once.

SNAP to...REVERSE ANGLE. From Alice's POV, the slight glare of the lighting in the small gym makes it difficult to see the group clearly, but we can make out Dana at the front.

ALICE
Anyway, I liked my beer. And
the ones that followed.

Her words are measured. She stops, and smiles disarmingly.

ALICE
I, uh...tried not to plan out
what I was going to say tonight...
(softer)
I thought it would come out
clearer. If I just...said
what was in my heart...

She runs a hand through her hair...

ALICE
Ten months ago, I got drunk.
And couldn't stop getting drunk.
It had never happened...quite
like that...and I don't know why.

Slow dignity in...

ALICE

From that moment. I lied to everyone I loved. Everyone I knew. I was ashamed...and terrified...and humiliated. Every day.

Stops now. As if thinking. Choosing.

ALICE

One day, I stepped from my shower. Grabbed a towel. And decided...to go get the mail.

Her shy smile...

ALICE

No one saw me...in the hall...in the elevator...even in the lobby. Which was just as well. I was holding the towel. Folded. In my hand.

Gentle laughter. Alice grins with them. But when they stop...

ALICE

I took my baby on errands one Saturday. When I got home, I noticed...she wasn't with me.

...their smiles have faded now.

ALICE

I left her someplace. But since I couldn't remember where I'd been, there was no way to know where.

Remembering that moment. The cold, pure terror.

ALICE

I called every shop I'd ever gone to...for hours...until my doorbell rang. A man from the tile store found our address on a check. And brought her home.

Her eyes sharpen on...

ALICE

I rewarded him, of course, by never going back to his store.

That story seemed to make her stronger. Tells them...

ALICE

I've thrown up in sinks, bathtubs and showers at various parties. In my purse. In my shoe. Other colorful locales...

ALICE (cont'd)
. behind the desk of a United
States Senator...
(beat)
...in the wastebasket. Mostly.

Solid laughter now. She waits through it. And...

ALICE
My bottom. Was one hundred
twenty-four days ago.

And they quiet. To hear...

ALICE
My child watched me wash down
Xanax with vodka.
(beat)
And then I hit her.

A beat slower through...

ALICE
...and when I passed out. She
was alone with me. And thought
I was dead.

One raw breath.

ALICE
And all my life. I'll never
know. What that...did to her.

...almost breaks. Right there. The suddenness of that catches
them all up short. A different level of attention, as...

ALICE
And I know. I have to...forgive
myself. For that.

Suddenly, so fragile. Held together by spider's web.

ALICE
And for everything. And it's...
it's not...
(beat)
...easy.

Could scarcely hear that last. But she has them with her.

ALICE
I have to forgive myself. For
what I've done...to my husband.

There are tears now. Silent as the hall.

ALICE
For not showing. How much...I
loved him...

Fights to keep her voice clear. With everything in her.

ALICE
See, you can't hate little
children. And there's only...so
much...you can despise yourself.
Tho that's...quite a lot.
(beat)
...and in the end. The rest.
Has to go somewhere...

Her fingers pressed together at her lips.

ALICE
...so it went to him.

Her head shaking slightly.

ALICE
...it's horrifying. How much
you can...hate yourself. For
being low...and weak...
and...and he couldn't...save
me from it. So I turned
it on him...tried to...empty
it. Onto him. But there was
always...more. You know?

They know. She feels that. It gives her courage to stand
straighter...

ALICE
And we're...separated now. He's
moved away. It was so hard...
not to beg him...to stay. But
it's what he wants...and I'll
never use him again...for what I
need...

The tears just stop her now. They are the only sounds. Until...

ALICE
...and I don't know. If I'll
get a second chance. But I have
to believe...

Just above a whisper...

ALICE
...I deserve one. Because...
(beat)
...we all do.

End of the line. The tears take over now. Everyone waits in
silence. They will wait as long as it takes. Except...

...one figure. Who rises now. Somewhere near the back.

Of course, it is Michael. And if we suspected he'd come, she did not. That is clearly on her face, as...

...people begin to shout him down. She hasn't finished. Let her go on. And then, another man stands. One they know better...with a strong voice...

DANA

Take it easy, everybody. Slow down, here...

And when the noise subsides. A soft, clear...

DANA

...it's an open meeting.

One moment of eye contact between the men. And Dana sits. And Michael is alone.

He knows where to put his eyes. The lady on the stage.

MICHAEL

My name is Michael. And I'm an alcoholic.

EVERYONE

Hi, Michael!

...but amazingly. The woman on the stage. Is laughing through her tears. And as people look wonderingly at her silly, soft laughter. Her tears dry to a sniffle. And...

MICHAEL

I'm not really an alcoholic.
I just...

(softly)

I just...said that.

Some restless murmurings in the crowd. But he just goes on. Nothing in this world could really stop him...

MICHAEL

I'm sorry, if I broke the rules. It's my first A.A. meeting, and...I didn't get here until...

(gestures)

...this lady. Began to speak.

They are quiet now. All looking at him. But he only sees one.

MICHAEL

My own wife. Is an alcoholic.
And she is...

(beat)

...the best person. I ever knew.

He lets that sit for a moment. Then...

MICHAEL
...she tried to teach me. About
growing up.

Yes, she did.

MICHAEL
I mean, you think you grow up.
You've got a wife, a job, kids.
You're six feet tall. But
inside...you never changed.
You still see people...as a
prop...in your life.

He smiles now. For the first time.

MICHAEL
And when you face that. Really
...face it. You realize...
(beat)
...you've been remiss.

A strange word. And stranger still, it has brought silent,
unnoticed tears. To the woman on the stage.

MICHAEL
But this woman. Who just spoke...
taught me something more...

He nods his head at that. Convinced.

MICHAEL
If you hate yourself...if you
can't...forgive yourself. For
what an idiot you've been.
I mean, moron, I mean
head-up-your-ass total fool!
If you can't forgive yourself
for how pathetically you've
screwed everything up...
(beat)
...then you won't. Be any
good. For anyone.

He's got her attention. So here goes...

MICHAEL
You see, my wife and I.
Are separated. And I'd
given up...ever being worth...
her love.

He had. But...

MICHAEL
...if this woman. Can forgive
herself. Can know...she deserves
...a second chance.

There are sounds now. From the woman on the stage. Like a child softly crying. And in respect, he waits. So she can hear...

MICHAEL
...I'd be ashamed to settle.
For anything less.

It's all he had to say. All she had to hear. In the silence...

...Alice steps down off her stage. And...

...walks. Like a queen. Through the people, through everything, and...

She's there. They look only at each other. He's the one who can't quite stop the tears now. Somehow, they find that funny, alone in the world as they are. She opens her hand...

...a crumpled Kleenex she'd used on stage. She holds it up, he leans forward and...

...BLOWS his nose. In her hand. She starts to giggle. But he can't stop crying. She takes his hand now...

...and they head off. As we...

FADE TO BLACK. ROLL END CREDITS.