COLD OPEN

FADE IN:

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- EARLY MORNING

WE OPEN ON WINIFRED "FRED" HARRIS, ASLEEP IN BED. HER NATURAL BEAUTY IS BETRAYED BY THE SMEARED EYE LINER, BOOZY SNORE AND EMPTY PLASTIC JELLO-SHOT CUP STUCK TO HER FACE. THE CELL PHONE ON THE NIGHT STAND RINGS. FRED SLOWLY REACHES FOR IT.

FRED

(INTO PHONE) Hello...

LORETTA (O.S.)

Fred? Fred, is that you?

FRED

Was it my number you dialed, Mother?

LORETTA (O.S.)

Well... yes.

FRED

Then it's me. (YAWNS) What time is it?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. LORETTA'S KITCHEN -- CONTINUOUS

LORETTA HARRIS, WEARING A REALLY OLD HOUSE COAT AND EVEN-OLDER HAIR STYLE, IRONS A PAIR OF JEANS, NERVOUSLY SMOKING.

LORETTA

Five-thirty.

FRED

Seriously? You're checking on me at

five-thirty in the morning?

LORETTA

Now, Fred, I wasn't checking on you.

I was dropping off your laundry.

FRED

At five-thirty in the morning.

LORETTA

Well, I was up.

LORETTA SPRAYS THE JEANS WITH STARCH, TAKES A DRAG ON HER CIGARETTE, THEN COATS THE JEANS A SECOND TIME WITH HER EXHALE.

LORETTA (CONT'D)

Now while I was in your apartment I

did happen to notice that you hadn't

come home from your sorority party.

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

ONE OF FRED'S EYES POPS OPEN. THIS IS CLEARLY NEWS TO HER.

FRED

No... no, I did not.

LORETTA

I suppose you stayed with one of your

friends. Anyone I know?

A SLEEPING MAN ROLLS OUT FROM UNDER THE SHEETS. FRED'S STUNNED REACTION TELL US SHE DOESN'T KNOW HIM.

FRED

Oh, it's a relatively new friend.

INT. LORETTA'S KITCHEN -- CONTINUOUS

BEHIND LORETTA, FRED'S FATHER, HARRY HARRIS, CROSSES THROUGH WEARING A T-SHIRT, TIGHTY-WHITEYS AND SOCKS. HE POURS A CUP OF COFFEE, WAITING FOR LORETTA TO FINISH IRONING HIS JEANS.

LORETTA

(COVERS PHONE) She's okay, Harry.

She stayed with a friend.

HARRY

Tell her I know she took four dollars from my wallet. And my Taco Bell coupon.

LORETTA

(INTO PHONE) Your father wants his coupon back.

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

FRED

You tell him that coupon was mine!

THE MAN IN THE BED STIRS. FRED TIP TOES INTO THE BATHROOM.

RESET TO:

INT. HOTEL BATHROOM -- CONTINOUS

FRED CLOSES THE DOOR AND REACTS TO HER IMAGE IN THE MIRROR. SHE LOOKS THROUGH THE MAN'S TOILETRIES BAG, FINDS TOOTHPASTE, SQUIRTS SOME ON HER FINGER AND STARTS BRUSHING HER TEETH.

LORETTA

Hey, you know what my cat did? Well, you know how he thinks he's people. Well, this morning he jumped up on my ironing board like the cock of the walk sayin', "look at me, look at me..."

FRED

Yes, 'cause that's what people do.

LORETTA

You know, since you're up, you should stop by the restaurant. Ben and Jennifer will be in pretty soon.

FRED STOPS BRUSHING HER TEETH, HER MOUTH LINED WITH FOAM.

FRED

Ben's coming into town? Since when?

LORETTA

Did I not tell you? Since my stroke I don't always remember everything.

FRED

(NOT BUYING IT) Really. Last week you called because the water filter in my fridge needed to be changed.

LORETTA

Now, Fred, that's not me. That's a factory recommendation.

FRED LOOKS IN THE BAG AND FINDS FLOSS. SHE STARTS FLOSSING.

FRED

So, why's Ben coming into town anyway?

LORETTA

For your graduation party, of course.

FRED

Oh, I see. So he can make the party but he can't make my graduation.

LORETTA

Baby, you didn't make your graduation.

FRED

Yeah, well... something came up.

LORETTA

And you know how busy he is with his career. He has to always be on call.

FRED

He's an actor, Mom. Not a doctor.

LORETTA

He played one on that "Grey's Anatomy".

FRED

He played a paramedic and he didn't even have a line! (THEN) You know, I'm sorta in the middle of something, so if you're done checking up on me--

LORETTA

Now, Fred, I told you. I was just dropping off your laundry.

FRED

Be that as it may, I feel it's worth reminding you that, in addition to raising an incredibly talented son, as well as very "people-like" cat, you've also raised a strong and confident woman who can take care of--

SFX: KNOCK ON THE DOOR

FRED WHISPERS "GOTTA GO" AND QUICKLY HANGS UP. SHE OPENS THE DOOR, REVEALING THE MAN HOLDING TWO CUPS OF COFFEE.

FRED (CONT'D)

(AWKWARD) Hey.... okay... bye.

FRED QUICKLY BLOWS BY HIM. AFTER A BEAT, SHE RETURNS, TAKES ONE OF THE COFFEES, MOUTHS "THANK YOU", AND IS GONE, AS WE:

END COLD OPEN

ACT ONE

SCENE A

FADE IN:

INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN -- LATER THAT MORNING

WE ARE IN "HARRY'S PLACE", THE GREASY SPOON DINER OWNED BY FRED'S DAD, WHO IS AT THE GRILL EXPERTLY PREPARING SEVERAL ORDERS. HIS BEST FRIEND AND DISHWASHER, JIMMY JONES, AFRICAN-AMERICAN, SITS ON A STOOL READING A NEWSPAPER. HARRY'S SON AND FRED'S OLDER BROTHER, BEN, IS SCRUBBING A GRILL.

HARRY

...I'm just sayin' it wouldn't make you sick.

JIMMY JONES

That don't matter. I'm not gonna drink a glass full of raw eggs!

HARRY

Didn't say you would. I said, "if you did." You never listen.

JIMMY JONES

I listen, you old fool.

HARRY

Yeah, but you never hear me!

BEN

Any chance you two could save this for couples therapy? I could use a hand scrubbing these grills, Jimmy. I believe it is your job, after all.

JIMMY JONES

(CONTINUES READING) It is, Ben. It is. But the way I figure, it was your job first.

BEN

When I was seventeen!

JIMMY JONES

And when I get the chance to watch the master I take it. You've changed the way I look at my life's work. (RE: GRILL) Now don't be afraid to put your shoulder into it.

JIMMY JONES GOES BACK TO READING, AS HARRY LAUGHS.

HARRY

What, is "Mr. Hollywood" too big to get his hands dirty? Who do you have clean your grease traps at home?

BEN

Well, that's the thing. The difference between LA and Southern cuisine is we try to not use so much grease we have to trap it.

BEN EXITS INTO THE BACK ALLEY WITH A BAG OF TRASH, JUST AS FRED POKES HER HEAD THROUGH THE PICK-UP WINDOW.

FRED

Order up, Dad. Biscuits and gravy. Got any aspirin, toss 'em in too.

HARRY

Ain't got no aspirin. Take some Tums.

They're the same thing. Order up!

HARRY HANDS A PLATE OF FOOD TO JIMMY JONES, WHO DINGS THE PICK-UP BELL NEXT TO FRED'S FACE. FRED QUIETS THE BELL WITH HER HAND, CLEARLY SUFFERING FROM HER HANGOVER.

FRED

Why do you always have to ding the

bell, Jimmy Jones?

JIMMY JONES

Because it's there, sweetie pie.

Because it's there.

BEN RE-ENTERS AND NOTICES FRED.

BEN

Hey, sis!

FRED

Hey, bubba!

BEN CROSSES INTO THE RESTAURANT AND GIVES HER A BEAR HUG.

FRED (CONT'D)

What brought you home? I know it's not

for my graduation. (THEN) It's not an

intervention is it?

BEN

No, we're saving that for a long

weekend. Keep Labor Day open.

THEY FIND A SEAT AT AN EMPTY TABLE, AS A WAITRESS DELIVERS FRED'S BREAKFAST.

BEN (CONT'D)

I don't know... LA's kinda dead right now, so I figured go back home. Clear the head. (INDICATES FRED'S MEAL) Clog the arteries. If anything worthwhile comes up my agent will call.

FRED

So, where's your lovely wife?

BEN

At home with Mom.

FRED

You left Jen with our mother?

BEN

Hey, I lived with the woman for seventeen years. I've done my time.

BEN TRIES TO TAKE A PIECE OF BACON OFF FRED'S PLATE, BUT SHE SLAPS HIS HAND AWAY.

BEN (CONT'D)

So, how does it feel to finally graduate? Nine majors in seven years. That's gotta be a record.

FRED

Excuse me, but anthropology was a minor -- which I only took to keep an eye on an ex-boyfriend of mine I thought was cheating on me.

BEN

How does an <u>ex</u>-boyfriend cheat on you?

FRED

Exactly!

AGAIN BEN TRIES TO GRAB SOME BACON AND FRED SLAPS HIS HAND.

FRED (CONT'D)

The point is, I did graduate. So choke on it! Because for one brief, shining moment, the spotlight is not on my "golden child" brother, but instead on --

LORETTA RUSHES IN EXCITED, FOLLOWED BY BEN'S WIFE, JENNIFER.

LORETTA

Oh, my God! My baby's having a baby!

LORETTA CROSSES OVER AND GIVES BEN A SUFFOCATING HUG.

FRED

(TO JEN) What? You're pregnant?

FRED HUGS JENNIFER, THEN TURNS AND PUNCHES BEN IN THE ARM.

BEN

Ow!

FRED

No one tells me anything!

BEN

(POINTED; TO JEN) That's because I thought we were waiting to tell people.

JENNIFER

(SOTTO) I'm sorry. I had to change the subject. Once she starts talking about that cat the woman doesn't stop.

LORETTA

Well, this is just wonderful news. You know what we're gonna do? We're gonna have a party. Tonight.

FRED

One problem. We're already having a party tonight. Remember? In honor of my wonderful news. The fact that I graduated from college. It's why we rented a Margarita maker.

LORETTA

Winifred Diane Harris, not everything has to be about you, you know. (TEARS WELLING) ... I'm gonna be a grandma.

FRED

(RESIGNED) Fine. Stop the tears. Plug 'em up, lady. I'll share the party. (THEN) But for the record, it's mostly about me.

HARRY ENTERS FROM THE KITCHEN AND JOINS THEM.

LORETTA

Harry, did you hear? You're gonna be a grandpa.

HARRY

Well, I suppose it was just a matter of time. (TO FRED) What's the deadbeat's name?

FRED

Not me! Ben and Jennifer. God!

HARRY

Oh, well... happy for you, son. (THEN) You know, that grill could still use a rinse.

LORETTA

I almost forgot. Fred, when I was in your apartment you got a call from the school district. (HANDS HER A NOTE) A substitute position opened up.

FRED

What?

LORETTA

The teacher you're filling in for took a spill down some stairs and broke her arm. It's just the kind of thing I've been prayin' would happen, baby!

FRED

Wait... you told them I'd do it?

LORETTA

Well, what was I suppose to say, Fred? You weren't there.

FRED

But... I just graduated. Don't I get a little time to relax before I have to join the work force?

BEN

You spent the six years practically majoring in relaxation. Why become a teacher if not to teach?

FRED

Let's be honest, summer vacation. Which, by the way, only four months away. Is now really the time to jump into something new?

JENNIFER

You're just nervous. You're gonna be great.

FRED

You're right. I can do this.

BEN

And it's not like you'll be doing it alone. (RE: BREATH) Smells like Captain Morgan is gonna be there with you the whole time.

BEN SUCCESSFULLY GRABS A PIECE OF BACON FROM HER PLATE. FRED PUNCHES HIM IN THE ARM, TAKES BACK THE BACON AND EATS IT AS SHE EXITS.

DISSOLVE TO:

ACT ONE

SCENE B

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY -- LATER THAT MORNING

FRED WALKS DOWN THE HALL WITH THE SCHOOL'S PRINCIPAL, ABIGAIL FRANKLIN, AFRICAN-AMERICAN. FRED CHEWS GUM, TRYING TO MASK HER BOOZY BREATH.

FRED

I can't tell you how sorry I am that I'm late, Ms. Franklin.

MS. FRANKLIN

I do not tolerate tardiness from my students, Miss Harris. Nor do I from my substitu-- are you chewing gum?

FRED STOPS CHEWING, SWALLOWS.

FRED

No.

MS. FRANKLIN CONTINUES ON, AS FRED SCRAMBLES TO CATCH UP.

FRED (CONT'D)

The thing is I went to George Washington Elementary by mistake. It wasn't until I got there that I realized I was supposed to go to George Washington Carver. Obviously when my mother wrote down the message she left out the Carver.

MAX ROBERTS, A CHILDHOOD FRIEND OF BEN AND FRED, CROSSES BY CARRYING A FIFTH GRADER UNDER HIS ARM LIKE A FILE FOLDER.

MAX

Hey, Fred. Heard you were called up to the show.

FRED

Hey, Max!

MAX GIVES HER A SIDE-HUG, WITHOUT PUTTING THE KID DOWN.

MS. FRANKLIN

I take it you know one another.

MAX

I'm her brother's best friend.

FRED

First guy I ever kissed just to annoy my dad. (RE: KID) Who's your friend?

MAX

Oh, this is Thomas. We were just on our way to your office, Ms. Franklin.

MS. FRANKLIN AND THOMAS GREET ONE ANOTHER AS OLD ADVERSARIES.

MS. FRANKLIN

Thomas.

THOMAS

Ma'am.

MS. FRANKLIN

Mr. Roberts, escort our friend to my office. I'll deal with him after I show Miss Harris to her classroom.

MAX NODS AND HEADS DOWN THE HALL WITH THOMAS UNDER HIS ARM.

MAX

Good luck in the trenches, Fred. I'll see you at the party for Ben and Jen. I can't believe they're pregnant!

FRED

Yeah, yeah, it's great! But for the record, the party's mostly for me!

FRED SCURRIES TO CATCH UP, AS MS. FRANKLIN CONTINUES ON.

FRED (CONT'D)

So, is there some kind of lesson plan I'm supposed to follow, or is this a run-out-the-clock kind of thing?

MS. FRANKLIN

I'm going to be blunt. This class has all my problem students. Learning problems, attitude problems, family problems... you name it, it's a problem. Your main goal while you're here is simply to control them.

THEY APPROACH A VERY NOISY CLASSROOM.

FRED

Wait. They have to be controlled?

MS. FRANKLIN

"Control" is not right. "Contain" is word I'm looking for.

SHE OPENS THE DOOR AND STEPS INSIDE, FOLLOWED BY A NERVOUS FRED.

CUT TO:

ACT ONE

SCENE C

INT. CLASSROOM -- CONTINUOUS

FRED AND MS. FRANKLIN ENTER PURE PANDEMONIUM: FIFTH-GRADERS RUN AROUND, LAUGHING, THROWING PENCILS AT EACH OTHER, ETC. VERN, THE SCHOOL CUSTODIAN, SITS WITH HIS FEET UP ON THE DESK READING A MAGAZINE, SEEMINGLY UNAWARE OF THE CHAOS. MS. FRANKLIN SNAPS HER YARD STICK ON THE DESK. THE STUDENTS IMMEDIATELY FIND THEIR SEATS UNDER HER STERN GLARE.

MS. FRANKLIN

(TO VERN) I said keep an eye on them.

VERN

(SHRUGS) You don't see any cops.

VERN GRABS HIS BROOM AND EXITS.

MS. FRANKLIN

(STERNLY) Good morning, students.

STUDENTS

Good morning, Ms. Franklin.

MS. FRANKLIN

I'd like to introduce you to Miss

Harris. Today's substitute teacher.

FRED GIVES AN AWKWARD WAVE.

FRED

Hey, ya'll.

THE CHILDREN JUST STARE. SO DOES MS. FRANKLIN. THIS CUTE LITTLE WHITE GIRL DOES SEEM A LITTLE OUT OF PLACE.

MS. FRANKLIN

Well, I'll leave you to it.

MS. FRANKLIN EXITS. FRED TURNS AND EYES THE STUDENTS, NOT SURE HOW TO BEGIN.

FRED

So...

THE KIDS SMELL WEAKNESS AND THE CLASS ERUPTS INTO CHAOS AGAIN.

FRED (CONT'D)

Excuse me! Hey! If everyone could

just find their seats! C'mon, ya'll,

find your seats!

FRED GRABS A NEARBY YARD STICK AND SNAPS IT ON THE DESK AS MS. FRANKLIN DID. IT HAS NO EFFECT ON QUIETING THE KIDS.

FRED (CONT'D)

Okay, I've got a dollar for everyone

who shuts up!

THIS HAS THEIR ATTENTION. THEY ALL QUIETLY FIND THEIR SEATS.

FRED (CONT'D)

Great. Okay. Let's see... (GETS AN

IDEA) I know. Let's take attendance.

Seems like the thing one does.

FRED STARTS LOOKING THROUGH THE DESK FOR A SEATING CHART.

JEROME

What about our dollar?

FRED

What?

JEROME

You promised us a dollar.

FRED

I was lying.

THE KIDS IMMEDIATELY RESUME THEIR CHAOS.

FRED (CONT'D)

Hey! Hey!! Okay, fine. Fine! You all get a dollar. Now sit!

THE KIDS FIND THEIR SEATS, AS FRED TAKES A WAD OF CRUMPLED DOLLARS FROM HER PURSE.

FRED (CONT'D)

You're just lucky Miss Harris has a knack for dollar poker. Okay, let's find out who you extortionists are. (READS OFF LIST) Latasha Amberson.

LATASHA RAISES HER HAND AND FRED HANDS HER A DOLLAR.

FRED (CONT'D)

Reginald Caruthers?

R.Z.

R.Z.

FRED

What?

R.Z.

R.Z. Nobody calls me Reginald.

FRED

Rock on, R.Z. Nobody calls me Winifred.

FRED DAPS FIST WITH HIM AND HANDS HIM A DOLLAR.

FRED (CONT'D)

(OFF LIST) Aisha Doakes.

AISHA

Here.

FRED HANDS HER A DOLLAR.

FRED

(OFF LIST) Jerome Wallace.

JEROME SMUGLY RAISES HIS HAND, ALL SMILES.

JEROME

That's what I'm talkin' about!

AS FRED HANDS HIM A DOLLAR, SHE COUGHS TO COVER.

FRED

Choke on it! (NOTICES) Okay, guys, don't freak, but I'm out of cash.

THE KIDS FREAK ANYWAY.

FRED (CONT'D)

I have a Taco Bell coupon! Come on, guys! Mellow! I really can't handle the loud noises right now.

FRED RUBS HER HEAD, AS THE KIDS SETTLE DOWN.

FRED (CONT'D)

What say we work together? You don't yell, I don't make you do math.

R.Z.

Lady, you can't <u>make</u> us do anything.

FRED

You're right. It was an empty threat. You'll see I'm full of 'em. (THEN) But cut me some slack. You've been doing this longer than me. What am I supposed to do?

AISHA

Well, we sometimes use this hour for classroom discussion.

FRED

Classroom discussion, huh? Sounds low key. What've you been discussing?

AISHA NODS TOWARD THE BULLETIN BOARD, WHICH READS "FEBRUARY IS BLACK HISTORY MONTH."

FRED (CONT'D)

Huh. Forgot it was Black History Month. (OFF LOOKS) I mean, I didn't forget. I just bought stamps. I guess I just didn't... so, Black History Month! Let's talk about it!

R.Z.

You're going to lead us in a discussion on Black History?

FRED

Just 'cause I'm white I don't know Black History? Martin Luther King happens to be one of my heroes.

AISHA

So you've been to the museum?

FRED

Hmmm?

AISHA

The National Civil Rights Museum. It's right downtown. You've been?

FRED

No, but I really should. I go roller blading down there all the time.

THE KIDS SHOOT EACH OTHER LOOKS.

R.Z.

So what do you think of Malcolm X?

FRED

Also a great leader. But I'm kind of a sucker for the non-violent protest.

R.Z.

Most white people are.

FRED

Could also be that I'm more of a sitter in general. Who's to say? (THEN) And really? Malcolm X? You do know a black man has been elected president, right?

R.Z.

Oh, I'm sorry. My history book is thirty years old.

FRED

Fine, I'll go to the museum this weekend!

THE KIDS SMILE. THEY GET FRED AND HER SENSE OF SARCASM. FRED SMILES TOO, SETTLING IN AS WE:

DISSOLVE TO:

ACT ONE

SCENE D

INT. CLASSROOM -- LATER

FRED AND THE KIDS APPLAUD MARCUS, WHO'S JUST FINISHED SOME KIND OF CLASS PRESENTATION.

FRED

And that was rap master Marcus! Give it up! (THEN) Marcus, can I presume most of what you said was hyperbole and that you mean no real harm to the people of my race or the police?

MARCUS

Yes, ma'am.

FRED

Good enough for me. Okay, who's next? No one? Okay... I guess we could always do some actual school work.

JEROME

Hold on, Miss Harris. Let's not get drastic! We'll come up with something. R.Z., give me a beat!

R.Z. LAYS DOWN A BEAT, AS JEROME DESPERATELY TRIES TO COME UP WITH A RAP. IT'S NOT EASY FOR HIM UNDER THE PRESSURE.

JEROME (CONT'D)

My name's Jerome. I'm far from home. 'Cuz I'm in school. Which ain't--

FRED

"Cool"? Really, Jerome? That's the rhyme you're serving up? Come on, man, it's Black History Month. Have some pride.

HER CELL PHONE RINGS.

FRED (CONT'D)

Okay, I'm going to take this. You guys work on your acts. Remember what got you here.

THE KIDS HUDDLE IN SMALL GROUPS, AS FRED TAKES THE CALL.

FRED (CONT'D)

Hello?

LORETTA (O.S.)

Fred? Fred, is that you?

FRED

Yes, Mother. Once again you call my phone and I answer. What are the odds?

INTERCUT WITH:

<u>INT. LORETTA'S KITCHEN -- CONTINUOUS</u>

LORETTA IS AGAIN IRONING AND SMOKING.

LORETTA

I know you're busy, so I won't keep you a minute...

FRED

I'd hope not. I'm not sure you understand how important my job is.

FRED NOTICES JEROME WORKING ON A DANCE MOVE. SHE CORRECTS HIS FORM, DEMONSTRATES THE PROPER WAY TO DO THE "RUNNING MAN."

LORETTA

Well, I've been thinking with Jennifer pregnant and all she's got no business staying in my house. Second-hand smoke isn't healthy for a baby. It's not like it was when you were young.

FRED

Yes, when it was recommended for baby lungs. I know I enjoyed spending my first two weeks in an incubator.

LORETTA

Oh, Fred, everyone needed incubation back then. It's just what we did. (THEN) Anyway, I thought it might be better if they stay in your apartment.

FRED

Oh, uh... I'm not sure that would be a good idea. My place isn't really all that big.

LORETTA

That's why I was thinking you'd move across the hall.

FRED

Into the storage room?!

LORETTA

If we got rid of the mouse traps and moved your dad's jars of peppers it'd look real nice in there.

HARRY WALKS BY, AGAIN WEARING A T-SHIRT AND TIGHTY-WHITEYS.

HARRY

What?! Now where the hell am I gonna put my peppers?

LORETTA

Fine, Harry! I will make curtains to hide them. Now hush! (INTO PHONE) Anyway, it's just something we've been talking about. We'll see...

FRED

We'll see? I know what "we'll see" means, Mom! Don't you dare start making curtains!

LORETTA HANGS UP ON HER END. FRED HANGS UP TOO, RESIGNED.

FRED (CONT'D)

She's making curtains.

SFX: SCHOOL BELL

FRED (CONT'D)

Okay, that... hurts. What was that?

JEROME

That's the lunch bell.

FRED

And what does that mean?

JEROME

It means we go to lunch. You do have a degree in this, don't you?

FRED

I'll have you know I have varying credits in five majors, three minors, and multiple accredited traffic schools. (THEN) I mean what am I supposed to do while you guys are at lunch?

AISHA

Actually --

JEROME

You get to do whatever you want.

AISHA SHOOTS JEROME A LOOK, BUT HE WAVES HER OFF.

JEROME (CONT'D)

It's your free hour. Some teachers stay in the classroom. Some go to the teachers lounge. Mr. Rakes used to drink peach schnapps in his car.

FRED CLUTCHES HER STOMACH, NAUSEATED.

FRED

Let's not talk about me drinking in my car for at least another day.

THE STUDENTS FILE OUT, FOLLOWED BY FRED, AS WE:

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

SCENE E

FADE IN:

INT. FRED'S APARTMENT - LATER

IT'S A COOL PLACE: EXPOSED BRICK AND A STYLISH MIX OF FUNKY LAMPS AND USED FURNITURE. FRED ENTERS TO FIND BEN UNPACKING.

BEN

What are you doing here? Shouldn't you be off molding young minds?

FRED

It's lunchtime. Not my issue.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA -- CONTINUOUS

A MASSIVE FOOD FIGHT IS IN PROGRESS. JEROME STANDS ON A TABLE THROWING FOOD IN EVERY DIRECTION LIKE A TANK GUNNER.

JEROME

Yeaaaaaaaaaaah!!

CUT TO:

INT. FRED'S APARTMENT -- CONTINOUS

FRED

So... moving in, are we?

BEN

Yeah. I can't believe what you've done with this place. You know, when we were kids this was where I hid the dirty magazines I found in the alley.

FRED

Yeah, found those. You were into big girls back then.

BEN

You can't dictate what you're going to find in an alley. You just accept what the "alley gods" give you.

JENNIFER (O.S.)

Your bathroom's awesome, Fred.

FRED REACTS TO JENNIFER'S VOICE COMING FROM THE BATHROOM.

BEN

The pregnancy books have got her drinking a gallon of water a day. She spends a lot of time in bathrooms.

JENNIFER ENTERS.

JENNIFER

Love the tile. Do it yourself?

FRED

Nah, a guy at the bar did it in trade for body shots.

BEN AND JENNIFER SHARE A LOOK. THEY OBVIOUSLY HAVE AN OPINION ABOUT FRED AND MEN, BUT AREN'T GOING THERE NOW.

FRED (CONT'D)

Would somebody please tell me what is happening here. Are you seriously going to just take my apartment?

BEN

What are you talking about? It was your idea.

FRED

Who told you that? A passive-aggressive little bird who smokes two packs a day and loves Nancy Grace?

BEN

(REALIZING) I'm sure she thought she was helping. I'll talk to her.

FRED

What's the point? She'll just say she gets confused because of the stroke. I know she lost her peripheral vision, but I swear she's happier because it gives her an alibi!

BEN

Okay... I guess we'll go to a hotel.

FRED

It's not that I don't want to help. But it's also not like when we were kids and you got everything you wanted.

BEN

(IRRITATED) Look, I said I'll figure something out. We don't need to get into how you think I was the favorite.

FRED

Because it's not even debatable. Her house is practically a shrine to you. Even the cat has more photos on the wall than me!

JENNIFER

(SENSES TENSION) I should probably go... to the bathroom. (OFF LOOKS) I'll need to soon enough anyway.

JENNIFER QUICKLY EXITS.

BEN

If I was the favorite maybe it was because I worked my ass off! But you, it's like you're still eighteen. Your rent's covered, your laundry's washed and your drinks are free. Not sure I can say the same about your tile work!

FRED

Go to hell, Ben! You don't know me.

BEN

Obviously. The mistake was me thinking you might do something that's not completely selfish for once.

BEN EXITS ANGRILY. WOUNDED, FRED CALLS AFTER HIM.

FRED

You can forget about sharing my party!

DISSOLVE TO:

ACT TWO

SCENE H

INT. CLASSROOM -- LATER

THE STUDENTS SIT QUIETLY UNDER MS. FRANKLIN'S STERN GLARE, AS FRED ENTERS IN A RUSH HOLDING A BOX OF MINTS.

FRED

I know I'm late, but I've got mints for everyone who doesn't tell -- (NOTICES) Ms. Franklin? (OFFERING) Tic tac?

MS. FRANKLIN

Miss Harris, may I ask where you've been?

FRED

I had something I needed to take care of. (POINTED; TO JEROME) I was told I was free during lunch.

MS. FRANKLIN

Teachers supervise their classes. We find it's a good way to keep them from inciting food fights.

FRED

(BUMMED) I missed a food fight?

MS. FRANKLIN

One I'm told initiated from your class's table. (TO KIDS) Which is I'm assigning you all one week's detention.

THE KIDS GROAN. MS. FRANKLIN QUIETS THEM WITH A GLARE.

MS. FRANKLIN (CONT'D)

(TO FRED) May I speak to you in the hallway?

THE KIDS REACT, HOOTING LIKE A JERRY SPRINGER AUDIENCE. MS. FRANKLIN GLARES AGAIN AND THEY IMMEDIATELY QUIET.

FRED

Seriously, how do you do that?

THEY EXIT INTO THE HALLWAY, AS WE:

RESET TO:

INT. HALLWAY -- CONTINOUS

FRED

First of all, I want to say how unbelievably sorry--

MS. FRANKLIN

Ms. Harris, the only reason I'm letting you finish the day is our custodian is busy hosing Salisbury steak sauce off the cafeteria walls. But if the job is beyond your capabilities--

FRED

(IRRITATED) I can handle the job, Ms. Franklin.

MS. FRANKLIN

Then show it.

MS. FRANKLIN CROSSES OFF, LEAVING A STUNNED FRED.

RESET TO:

INT. CLASSROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

FRED ENTERS, FLUSH WITH EMBARRASSMENT.

FRED

Well thanks, guys, for making me look like a real idiot. Appreciate it.

JEROME

We're sorry, Miss Harris. But we didn't start any food fight. We responded to a food fight.

AISHA

Shut up, Jerome. You threw pizza at Rodney Simpson. I saw it myself.

JEROME

Yeah. After he threw a french fry at me. Malcolm X was right. A fry for a fry. A man can only take so much.

FRED

Jerome, I can only take so much. So sit down and shut up. All of you!

THE KIDS REACT TO FRED'S HARSH TONE.

FRED (CONT'D)

Look, for the rest of the day just... keep yourselves busy, okay?

R.Z.

Awwwww, does that mean we're not gonna get any more of your insight into the oppression of the black man?

FRED SHOOTS HIM A LOOK, ANGRY AND HURT.

FRED

You want to talk oppression, Reginald. Fine. Let's talk oppression. The kind that comes when people only see you a certain way. And you can try to change the way they think about you. Get a degree. Get a job. But even if you do try, in the end if it's not going to make a difference why bother? Might as well give 'em what they expect. (THEN) So for the rest of the day, do whatever you want. I don't care. It's not like anybody expects much from us anyway.

FRED SITS IN HER CHAIR AND SWIVELS AWAY FROM THE KIDS' LINE OF SIGHT. THE CHILDREN SHARE UNSURE LOOKS, AS WE:

DISSOLVE TO:

ACT TWO

SCENE J

INT. CLASSROOM -- LATER

WE FIND FRED ASLEEP IN HER CHAIR. WE PULL BACK TO REVEAL THE STUDENTS QUIETLY READING AND DOING SCHOOL WORK, EXCEPT FOR AISHA WHO'S BRAIDING FRED'S HAIR INTO CORN ROWS. MS. FRANKLIN ENTERS WITH A WORRIED ENERGY. SHE TAKES IN THE SCENE BEFORE SNAPPING HER YARD STICK LOUDLY ON THE DESK, WAKING FRED WITH A START. FRED COVERS POORLY, CASUALLY WIPING AWAY SLEEP DROOL.

FRED

And that's... history. Any questions?

MS. FRANKLIN

Just one. Why are these children here?

FRED

They're too young for prison?

MS. FRANKLIN

School let out an hour ago. I'm getting calls from worried parents--

JEROME

We've just been reading, Ms. Franklin.

R.Z.

(RE: BOOK) Yeah. I can at least assume what's been written about the Louisiana Purchase is fairly accurate, right?

MS. FRANKLIN

(AMAZED) Children, you're dismissed.

THE KIDS FILE OUT OBEDIENTLY. AS THEY GO, THEY HAND BACK THE DOLLAR FRED GAVE THEM. SHE IS TOUCHED, THEN INDICATES THEY HURRY BEFORE MS. FRANKLIN NOTICES.

MS. FRANKLIN (CONT'D)

Miss Harris, somehow you managed to get this class to put their energy into schoolwork. Any idea why they did that?

FRED

(SHRUGS) Probably because I cried.

MS. FRANKLIN

Didn't work for Mr. Rakes. (THEN) No, I think it's because they respect you.

A BEAT, AS FRED TAKES THIS IN.

FRED

Oh, that's just ridiculous.

MS. FRANKLIN

Report tomorrow and let's see what happens when you spend the entire day on school grounds and awake.

FRED

You mean, you're not firing me?

MS. FRANKLIN

You didn't think you'd get off that easy, did you?

FRED

Kinda hoping.

AS MS. FRANKLIN CROSSES OFF, FRED CAN'T HELP BUT SMILE, PROUD OF HERSELF.

DISSOLVE TO:

ACT TWO

SCENE K

INT. FRED'S APARTMENT -- LATER

JENNIFER IS ON THE COUCH LEAFING THROUGH A MAGAZINE, AS FRED ENTERS. HALF HER HEAD IS STILL CORN-ROWED.

FRED

(OFF JEN'S LOOK; EXPLAINING) A student of mine. It was kind of a bonding experience... that I now want to brush out of existence.

FRED PUTS DOWN HER KEYS AND GOES THROUGH HER MAIL.

FRED (O.S.) (CONT'D)

What are you doing here? Hiding from my mom?

JENNIFER

I'm not crazy, am I? It's just a freakin' normal cat! Right?

FRED

Not if you read her will. (OFF LOOK) Which I haven't.

FRED CROSSES TO THE COUCH FLOPS DOWN NEXT TO JEN.

JENNIFER

Hey, I wanted to talk to you. Ben feels really bad about what he said.

FRED

You know, it's not like I wouldn't give you my place. It just seems like a lot of hassle if you're only going to be here for a few days.

JENNIFER

(REALIZING) Oh... he hasn't told you. Fred, we're moving here. I don't know for how long, but it's definitely longer than a few days. (THEN) Look, Ben would kill me if he knew I was telling you this, but we're not making it in LA. I can't remember the last time he had a paying job.

FRED

What? But... Mom's always telling me how great he's doing.

JENNIFER

Because that's what he tells her. I was working, but it wasn't enough to cover the condo, the car, credit cards. And now with the baby coming... (THEN) The truth is, we have nothing. Nothing but the clothes on our back.

FRED

You do have nice clothes. (RE: TOP) Can I wear that sometime?

JENNIFER

I... guess.

FRED CROSSES BACK INTO THE BATHROOM.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

I'm worried about him, Fred. It's like he thinks moving home makes him some kind of loser.

FRED (O.S.)

Oh, please. He didn't wake up in bed with a complete stranger.

JENNIFER

You woke up in bed with a stranger?

FRED (O.S.)

It's been an off day for me, too.

INT. BATHROOM -- CONTINUOUS

FRED LOOKS AT HERSELF IN THE MIRROR, BRUSHES HER HAIR.

FRED

What I don't understand is why he couldn't just tell me.

JENNIFER

You know how he is. You're his little sister. He just wants you to be proud of him.

FRED TAKES THIS IN. IT'S OBVIOUSLY SOMETHING SHE'D NEVER CONSIDERED BEFORE. ON HER LOOK, WE:

DISSOLVE TO:

ACT TWO

SCENE L

INT. RESTAURANT -- LATER THAT NIGHT

A PARTY IS IN PROGRESS. A MODEST SIGN READS, "CONGRATS FRED." ABOVE IT, A LARGER SIGN READS, "CONGRATS BEN AND JEN." SOMEHOW THE RESTAURANT FEELS DIFFERENT. MAYBE IT'S THE LIGHTING, THE YOUNGER CROWD, OR THE BLUES MUSIC JIMMY JONES IS PLAYING ON GUITAR, THE PLACE HAS A COOL VIBE. HARRY AND LORETTA SIT AT A TABLE. LORETTA SMOKES WHILE HARRY TASTES A CRAB CAKE CRITICALLY.

HARRY

I don't see why you hired a caterer. I could make this same thing with mayonnaise, Velvetta, and ketchup.

LORETTA EXHALES A DEEP SMOKY DRAG.

LORETTA

We did it for the kids. (THEN) And Vera Pike hired one for her daughter's engagement party, and all anybody could talk about at Bible study was how fun it was eatin' chicken off a stick. Well, next Sunday we better be talkin' about my crab cakes! (TAKES ANOTHER DRAG) But mostly it's for the kids.

WE ANGLE ON:

BEN AND MAX, SITTING IN A BOOTH TAKING IN THE SCENE.

MAX

Man! Look at all these hotties. Why didn't we come here in high school?

BEN

It was a different scene then. But if we'd been into old truck drivers we'd have been set.

JENNIFER CROSSES OVER WITH BEERS FOR THEM AND WATER FOR HER.

JENNIFER

So, Max, you catching Ben up on everything he's missed since he left?

MAX

Told you the Dairy Queen was repainted?

BEN

You did.

MAX

Pretty much covers it. (THEN; NOTICES OFF) Hey, I know her. That's the mother of one of my former students. Wow, she can really slut it up, huh?

MAX CHECKS HIS BREATH.

JENNIFER

I take it there's not a "Mr. Slut"?

MAX

(SERIOUS) Actually, it's one of the reasons Zach has trouble focusing on his studies. (THEN) Pay dirt!

MAX FINISHES HIS DRINK THEN GOES TO HIT ON THE MOM, AS JENNIFER SCOPES THE SCENE.

JENNIFER

Your dad's place is cool. I would want to hang here if I were single... and didn't need to pee so much... or the rest rooms weren't so disgusting.

BEN

Yeah, right...

JENNIFER

I'm serious. Look at this place. With the right lighting, the right music... it could be something. (POINTED) If the right person did something with it.

BEN

I'm going to figure out what it is I'm supposed to do, Jen.

JENNIFER

I know you will.

BEN

(IRRITATED) I'm going to see if Dad needs any help in the kitchen.

JEN WATCHES BEN CROSS OFF, UNABLE TO HELP. A BEAT LATER, MAX RETURNS, WET FROM THE DRINK THE WOMAN POURED ON HIS HEAD.

MAX

And much like her kid, Mommy does <u>not</u> play well with others.

AND WE:

DISSOLVE TO:

ACT TWO

SCENE M

INT. BACK ALLEY -- A LITTLE WHILE LATER

WE HEAR THE SOUNDS OF THE PARTY. BEN SITS AT THE BOTTOM OF THE STAIRS THAT LEAD TO FRED'S PLACE. SHE MAKES HER WAY DOWN.

BEN

Little late for your own party?

FRED

The way I figure it, you're never late when you're the one who makes it a party. You okay?

BEN

Me? I'm great. Well, Dad had me try this concoction he made with Velvetta, ketchup and mayo, so my stomach's off. Other than that, fine. Why?

A BEAT AS FRED CONSIDERS TELLING HIM WHAT SHE KNOWS.

FRED

No reason.

SHE SITS DOWN NEXT TO HIM.

FRED (CONT'D)

Hey, I've been thinking. You and Jennifer should stay in the apartment like you and Mom talked about. I'll be fine crashing in the storage room.

BEN

I can't ask you to do that.

FRED

I saw the curtains Mom's making to hide Dad's peppers. They work. Besides, it's only temporary. You'll probably get a call tomorrow telling you that you got a part on CSI.

BEN

I almost booked a CSI once. They decided to go with an Asian corpse.

THEY SHARE A LOOK. A WORDLESS APOLOGY IS EXCHANGED.

BEN (CONT'D)

Thanks. (THEN) And you know, you were right. I <u>don't</u> know you, Fred. Not really. I shouldn't have said what I said. I'm sorry.

FRED

Don't worry about it. You have plenty of time to get to know the real me.

THEY BOTH GET UP AND HEAD INSIDE.

FRED (CONT'D)

Right now, you're about to get to know the part of me that likes Tequila.

AS WE:

DISSOLVE TO:

ACT TWO

SCENE P

INT. RESTAURANT -- MOMENTS LATER

FRED AND BEN ENTER TO FIND THE PARTY IN FULL SWING. EVERYONE IS HAVING FUN, DANCING TO THE BLUES JIMMY JONES IS SUPPLYING.

BEN

(TAKES IT IN) You know, done right this place could be pretty cool.

FRED

(NODS) I can see that.

ON STAGE, JIMMY JONES FINISHES HIS SONG. THE CROWD APPLAUDS.

JIMMY JONES

(INTO MIC) Thank you, thank you. And now, it is my distinct privilege to bring up the lady of the hour, Miss Winifred Harris, in the house!

BEN STARTS THE APPLAUSE FOR HIS SISTER, AS HE PUSHES HER TOWARD THE STAGE. THE CROWD ENCOURAGES WITH YELLS AND WHISTLES.

FRED

Jimmy Jones, why'd you go and do that?

JIMMY JONES

Because it was there, sweetie pie.

Because it was there.

HE HUGS HER AND STEPS ASIDE, AS FRED STEPS UP TO THE MIC.

FRED

Well, I'm not used to giving speeches--

BEN

Except in front of county judges!

FRED

My brother, ladies and gentlemen.

Once laughed so hard that he peed

himself on a family trip to Dollywood.

THE CROWD LAUGHS. FRED THUMPS HER CHEST AT BEN, AS IF TO SAY, "BRING IT ON."

FRED (CONT'D)

We starting something, bro? Because I

have a microphone.

BEN CONCEDES WITH A WAVE AND A LAUGH.

FRED (CONT'D)

Truth is, I wouldn't be who I am if it

weren't for my family. So... blame

them. My hands are clean.

FRED LOOKS AROUND AT ALL OF HER FRIENDS AND FAMILY.

FRED (CONT'D)

Look, we all know I've made my share

of mistakes. But I'm realizing the

trick in life is to learn from the

mistakes, or at least...

SHE NOTICES THE MAN FROM THE HOTEL ROOM ENTER THE BAR.

FRED (CONT'D)

... hope they don't come back to haunt

you. Thanks.

SHE ABRUPTLY HANDS THE MICROPHONE TO JIMMY JONES, WHO SHRUGS AND STARTS PLAYING GUITAR AS FRED CROSSES TO THE GUY.

FRED (CONT'D)

Oh, my God. How'd you find me?

THE GUY LOOKS AT HER QUIZZICALLY, THEN RECOGNIZES HER.

GUY

Hey, it's the girl from last night!

FRED

And you didn't remember me, somehow making something crappy even crappier. Good to see my universe is still functioning properly.

GUY

I'm sorry. I'm just surprised running into you. You left in such a rush.

FRED

Yeah, well... seemed like the thing to do. (AWKWARD BEAT) So, do I owe you anything for the room?

GUY

My company covers it. I'm here on business. Do you remember anything from last night?

FRED

I remember why I don't like jello shots. Fill me in on the rest.

GUY

Well, you spent a lot of time playing pool with my business associate.

FRED

Big guy? Goatee? Leather necklace?

GUY

That's him.

FRED

Yeah, I know how to pick 'em. (THEN; WINCING) Please tell me I didn't make out with him in the parking lot.

GUY

Wish I could. It's also where you sort of passed out. He didn't know what to do with you. The place had cleared out. So I offered to bring you back to my room so you could sleep it off.

FRED

What about Goatee Leathernecklace?

GUY

He went home with the girl passing out the jello shots.

FRED

Damn her!

ANOTHER AWKWARD BEAT.

GUY

You should know nothing happened.

FRED

Thank God! (THEN) I mean... not that it wouldn't be great having sex with you. Not that it would! How could I possibly have an opinion of what sex would be like with--" You know, this would be so humiliating if I actually knew you.

GUY

(HOLDS OUT HIS HAND) I'm Brian.

FRED

And now I do. (SHAKES HIS HAND) Fred.

GUY

Nice to meet you, Fred. (THEN) So, who's the party for?

FRED

Well, actually it's for... my brother. He just moved back home.

GUY

Oh. Cool.

FRED TURNS AND NOTICES BEN AND JENNIFER DANCING. SHE SMILES.

FRED

Yeah. Yeah, it is.

THE MUSIC SWELLS AS LORETTA AND HARRY JOIN THE OTHERS ON THE DANCE FLOOR. AS FRED WATCHES HER FRIENDS AND FAMILY DANCE SHE SMILES, AND WE:

FADE OUT.

END OF SHOW