GATES

"Pilot"

by

Josh Goldsmith & Cathy Yuspa

Based on the British show "Gates"

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ACT ONE

BLACKNESS.

Suddenly, HELEN'S FACE fills the screen. She speaks intensely -- a sergeant giving orders.

HELEN
Okay, it's go time. I want you to get in there. I want you to make the drop. And I want you to keep it clean 'cause here's what I don't need: trouble.

POP WIDE: She's with her husband, MARK, in a parked Subaru wagon, outside a busy ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.

MARK
Who's gonna give me trouble? The chubby boy on the slide?

We are...

EXT. SCHOOL GATES - DAY

A nice, sweet public school, with a real cross-section of families. All SHOT hand-held -- we're a fly on the wall of this world. In the car -- HELEN and MARK BAXLEY, and their eight year-old daughter, CHLOE (in the backseat, wearing headphones, oblivious). Helen's at the wheel. She's a cute, type-A ball of energy in a business suit. Mark's a lovable, well-meaning, puppy-dog of a guy in a flannel shirt. If his wife is type-A, Mark's more type-B, or C, maybe even D.

HELEN
I'm talking about the parents. You haven't done drop-off before, you don't get it. The politics, the social minefields. It might look cute and cuddly, but these gates are a jungle.

MARK
Honey, sweetie, love of my life? I mean this in the nicest possible way.
(bleeped)
You sound bat-shit crazy.

There's a KNOCK on the car window. It's LINDSAY MARCH. A yoga-pants-wearing mom who's the self-appointed ambassador of the school. She seems really nice and like she has absolutely no dark side at all -- for now.

LINDSAY
Hey there! You're the new family, right?

HELEN
Yes, hey -- I'm Helen. This is Mark.

They all ad-lib hellos and shake.

LINDSAY
I think you just moved in around the corner from me, on Sycamore. I'm Lindsay. President of the PTA, so-
(wanted the job more than life)
-I'm the sucker they got to do that. Big first PTA meeting today.
(holds up tray)
I made my scones for it. And you can work them off after -- we're all going on a hike. Wanna join?

HELEN
Wish I could, but I gotta get to work.

LINDSAY
Well, maybe tomorrow. We're gonna hike then, too.

HELEN
Actually, it's one of those things where I have to go back tomorrow.

LINDSAY
Ohhh.

HELEN
Yeah, Mark's in construction, he's got a more flexible schedule, so he's gonna be doing drop-off most days. I used to, but I just started a new job.

LINDSAY
Well, good for you. You look so powerful in your suit. Like Hillary Clinton, but less bulky. I wanna be you when I grow up! Okay, well, see you later!

Lindsay heads off. Helen now feels a little self-conscious.

HELEN
I knew I shouldn't have worn the suit to drop-off.

MARK
What were your other options?

Helen looks in the back seat, where SEVERAL OTHER OUTFITS are spilling out of bags next to Chloe.

HELEN
I brought “Going To The Gym Lady” and “Casual Mom In Jeans Buying Fish At The Market.”

MARK
Do we belong to a gym?

HELEN
We do not.

MARK
Well, I think you look adorable in your suit. It makes me want to kiss your powerful little face. Let’s do this.

They all get out of the car. Helen hugs Chloe big, and whispers over her head to Mark.

HELEN
Remember -- I need you to make us look good in there. We’re gonna be with these people for <u>years</u> -- love them or hate them, they’re our new best friends now, so bring your A game, ‘kay?

MARK
Come on, I got this. I’m a friggin’ charm machine. You feel me? I know you’re feelin’ me.

Mark does a slightly awkward “charming” man-dance.

HELEN
Okay, that’s gotta stop in three...two... <u>thank</u> <u>you</u>.

SMASH CUT TO:

<u>MAIN TITLES</u>

EXT. SCHOOL GATES - DAY

We’re on the blacktop/playground. First day excitement is in the air. Parents and kids mingle. NAT TATE, the young-ish, progressive school PRINCIPAL, greets everyone with more enthusiasm than they greet him. He thinks he’s beloved, but is not.

MR. TATE
(to various kids)
Welcome back. Hello, hello. Nice backpack -- Spiderman.
(with a sly smile)
(MORE)

MR. TATE (CONT'D)
I hope we ensnare you in a web of learning this year.

A dad, TREVOR PALMER, approaches. Trevor's super-driven, successful, and wears those really polished dress shoes that Mark doesn't own and wouldn't even know where to buy. Behind him -- his wife, SARAH, and their two BOYS.

TREVOR
Principal Tate, what's with the new sign?

Trevor indicates a new sign hanging in the courtyard, which says, "Parkview Elementary: Putting Everyone First."

MR. TATE
"Putting Everyone First." Isn't that a great message?

TREVOR
It's literally impossible. Not everyone can be first.

MR. TATE
(flustered)
Well, I....huh.

ANGLE ON: Mark and Chloe entering the yard. Mark's fully confident he's gonna nail this drop-off. He kneels down.

MARK
Okay, Chloe-licious. I know it's your first day in a new school, and that can feel kinda strange, but second grade is-

Another GIRL approaches Chloe.

GIRL
You're in second? Wanna go in with me?

CHLOE
Sure. Bye, Dad.

The girls take off, chatting. Mark whips out a video camera. As he tries to capture some footage of her, he calls out...

MARK
Wait! I wanna get some video, turn around! Okay, the back of your head's cool! That's a cherished memory. It's out of battery anyway, so the joke's on you, lady!

RAV (O.C.)
You're new here, huh?

Mark turns to see RAV MUKHERJEE, a twentysomething guy wearing a baby in a Björn.

MARK
Yeah. Yours already go in?

RAV
Oh, I don't have any. I'm a manny. The big kids I watch are inside, and I'm just hanging around to see if any hot moms got divorced over the summer. I'm Rav. And-
(re: the baby in the Björn)
-this is Elliot. I just spilled some smoothie on his head. Shhh.

MARK
Mark. We just moved here.

RAV
So you don't know the drill yet, do you? I got all the dirt. I'm invisible, but I see everything. Like, see that guy?

Rav points to Trevor, who's cornering Mr. Tate over the sign.

RAV (CONT'D)
That's Trevor. Yale undergrad, Yale law. He's so intense, his eight year-old showed an interest in the news, and he tried to get him an internship.

MARK
(eyeing Trevor's footwear)
And look at his shiny "man" shoes. I feel like he's about to fire all of us.

Rav points to Trevor's wife SARAH, a hot, neglected, needy, insecure stay-at-home mom, who's just a bit unstable. She often spouts off deep, morbid thoughts that are total conversation stoppers.

RAV
Sarah, his wife. He ignores her and she's insane. You'll see.

Mark points to an earthy, bohemian-looking couple, JENNA and ANGUS. She's skinny in a long dress. He's red-headed and pudgy in a happy way.

MARK
What about those guys? They seem nice.

RAV
Yeah, they're totally high, they smoke pot all the time. They're delightful.

JENNA
(clueless, to another parent)
Was there some sort of form we had to fill out, or...

MR. TATE
(shouting to beckon the crowd over)
Hi, everyone! If you could gather!

Some of the group gathers around him. Others glance over, then go back to their conversations.

MR. TATE (CONT'D)
Just an informal announcement -- email "blast" to follow. Hope everyone had a great summer. I know I did. I took calligraphy. I am refreshed and happy to see all of your faces. Brief reminder -- to respect our friends with allergies, please don't pack peanuts, flax seeds, gluten, soy, melon, egg, raw red pepper, seaweed, yucca, or cinnamon products in the children's lunches. I hope everyone comes to the Back to School Fair on Saturday. Oh, and we're banning "best friends" this year, because it might make children without a best friend feel sad. So...welcome back!

A smattering of applause. Trevor powers out of the schoolyard. After a moment, Sarah approaches Mark.

SARAH
Hi, I'm Sarah. You're new, right?

MARK
(shakes her hand)
Yeah. Mark.

SARAH
Wow, strong grip.

MARK
Oh, sorry. Builder's handshake.

SARAH
No, I like it, actually. It's reassuring.
(MORE)

SARAH (CONT'D)
Sometimes you need that kind of solidity, don't you, when everything around you is changing.

MARK
(beat...beat)
Okay, well, I gotta bounce.

We ANGLE ON a CLUSTER OF PARENTS AROUND PRINCIPAL TATE -- Lindsay, her sidekick BRETT (a gay dad who wears yoga pants just like Lindsay), and a few other MOMS. Lindsay's still got her tray of scones, as well as some folders and artwork.

LINDSAY
So after a lot of thought, we came up with a theme for the Back to School Fair that we're all super excited about.

BRETT
Think we nailed it.

LINDSAY
Okay. It's... "Go Bananas for School."

She holds up a poster featuring a cartoon monkey holding a banana. Mr. Tate nods, not too excited. Mark wanders over, unaware that any "official" meeting is taking place.

LINDSAY (CONT'D)
So we'd hang monkeys and bananas everywhere...

BRETT
And we'd make the entrance look like the rainforest-

MARK
(reaches out his hand)
Principal Tate? Just wanted to say hi. I'm Mark Baxley, we're new to the school.
(trying to turn on the charm)
And "hola" to the rest of you. Not sure why I just went Spanish.

MR. TATE
(shaking his hand)
Nice to meet you. We're just talking about themes for the Back to School Fair.

MARK
(with not much investment)
Oh. How about instead of Back to School, call it "Back to Cool"? Everyone could wear sunglasses and leather jackets.

MR. TATE
(dead serious)
I love it.

LINDSAY
What?

BRETT
(whispering, re: Mark)
Who is he?

MR. TATE
That's what we're gonna do. Not the monkey thing.

MARK
(grins - he's nailing it)
Oh. Great.
(to Lindsay)
Hey, could I have one of those scones? Didn't get breakfast.

LINDSAY
(not okay)
Okay.

MARK
Thanks. These are delish.
(obliviously munching, to Tate)
Hey, we could also have a popsicle stand and call it the "Cool Bar."

MR. TATE
We could and we <u>will</u>. Thank you for this.

Tate goes. Lindsay turns to her posse.

LINDSAY
(barely hiding annoyance)
Well, guess we need to get to work re-doing this stuff.

They head off. Mark stands there, happily chewing.

MARK
Nice to meet all of you!

He looks up and notices Rav watching and shaking his head.

RAV
Well, that was a trainwreck.

MARK
Hm?

RAV
They've been working on that theme all summer, and you just waltz in and go over their heads? Do you know how many e-mails have been exchanged about that theme? How many phone calls? That theme is all they have.

Mark's starting to get a little nervous.

MARK
Wait -- they've been working all summer and all they came up with is "Go Bananas For School"? How is that possible?

RAV
They're just highly mediocre people. I call them The Lululemons.
(off Mark's clueless look)
It's a store that sells the fanciest yoga pants in the world... never mind.

MARK
But I met that mom. She was very friendly.

RAV
Lindsay? She is very friendly -- if you're on her good side. But if you break protocol, or don't do something the "right way," she'll make you wish you'd never been born.
(beat)
And she's super pissed that you ate her scone. They were for the PTA meeting.

Mark pauses mid-chew.

RAV (CONT'D)
Don't mess with the Lemons, dude. They will f you up good.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

We're in WILLIAMS-SONOMA's corporate offices. The table is covered with product samples for the Fall Launch. A BUNCH OF EXECUTIVES with creative flair sit around, including HELEN.

HELEN
Here's what I'm thinking. Williams Sonoma's "Feelings of Fall" gift package.
(MORE)

HELEN (CONT'D)
Ceramic pie dish, leaf-shaped cookie cutters, and mulling spices for cider. Wrap it in burnt orange cellophane, and throw in a mellow jazz CD, with a picture of a dog looking out of a rain-streaked window on the cover.

The group reacts positively. KATE, her boss, speaks up.

KATE
Great. I'd love to get this to marketing tomorrow, so tonight, let's order dinner and get started on the artwork.

Helen blinks -- this woman is tough. Helen's cell RINGS. She glances down to see Mark's face.

HELEN
Sorry, it's my daughter's first day of-
(into phone)
Hello?

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. SCHOOL GATES - DAY

Mark's on his cell phone, looking concerned. The courtyard has mostly cleared out. Behind him in the distance, we see Lindsay rolling up her monkey poster and sliding it into a tube with more than a little annoyance.

MARK
(into phone)
Heyyyyyy...

HELEN
I'm in a meeting, what's up?

WE STAY WITH HELEN as we hear Mark's MUFFLED VOICE through the phone. We can make out words like "school fair theme" and "scone." Helen reacts, horrified.

HELEN (CONT'D)
(whispering)
You ate the scone?! Why'd you eat the friggin' scone?!

BACK ON MARK at school.

MARK
I didn't get any breakfast... What's the big deal? It's just a scone! It's a triangle made of flour!

HELEN
It's not just a scone! You offend <u>one mom</u> who's "in," then it's all over school. No one'll do play-dates with us, Chloe won't have any friends, she won't develop social skills, and she'll end up a weird, unemployed adult who's still into Harry Potter and wears the scarf around.
(then)
Just get the hell out of there. I'll pick up Chloe today somehow.

MARK
No, I can do it, I just have that meeting with the architect for the-

HELEN
Stay away from school. I'll do pick-up, and I'll try to clean up your mess.

MARK
I don't know what happened. I was a charm machi- hell-o?

But Helen has hung up. We stay with Mark. He turns his phone off and runs his hands through his hair, not quite sure what to do. After a moment, Sarah comes over again.

SARAH
Everything okay?

MARK
Oh. Yeah.

SARAH
Feelings can be tricky things, can't they. Do you ever cry, Mark? Just for no reason? Not about your marriage or the death of hope, but just cry?

MARK
Um, usually I don't do that, no.

After a beat, she pulls him into a HUG. As Mark looks around for help, he spots Rav, who is watching and shaking his head at this disaster, and we...

FADE OUT.

<u>END OF ACT ONE</u>

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

EXT. FREEWAY/INT. CAR - DAY

Helen merges onto the freeway to discover a ton of traffic. She glances at the clock which reads 2:57 PM.

HELEN
Oh, come on. I gotta get my daughter!

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)
(from the car radio)
I'm here with former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton...

This triggers a thought. Helen glances into the rearview mirror and fingers her buttoned-up work suit. In the backseat, she spies the "GYM LADY" outfit. With one eye on the road, Helen awkwardly contorts herself and reaches back.

HELEN
Gggbggkk-

She finally grabs the clothes, as another car angrily honks at her for a near miss. She reaches down and pulls off her heels, and starts unbuttoning her blouse.

We CUT TO...

EXT. FREEWAY/INT. CAR - DAY

A few minutes later. Helen is now wearing only panty hose and is putting on a jog bra. She hears a SIREN.

HELEN
Crap.

She glances into the rearview mirror again to see flashing lights. She sighs, pulls over to the shoulder, and lowers her window. As the COP saunters over to her, she quickly drapes a gym towel over herself.

OFFICER TOM
Ma'am -- were you changing your clothes on the freeway?

HELEN
Yes. And clearly you have to give me a ticket.
(then)
(MORE)

HELEN (CONT'D)
But here's the thing: I just had to bail out of a big work meeting, and I'm totally late to pick my daughter up at school, because I took this new job at Williams-Sonoma, and I'm doing this whole thing with mulled cider, but of course I've never actually "mulled" cider for my family, I don't even know what "mulling" is exactly. The irony is, I'm selling this perfect vision of domesticity, but my real life is much more-

Helen notices a ticket in her face and reads it.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Wow, that's really high. Would it help if I showed you what's under this towel? I am a mom, but they're still pretty great. No? Didn't think so.

EXT. SCHOOL GATES - DAY

A few parents still mill around, but most have left. Helen, now dressed in full gym wear, is locking her car and running to the gates, clearly late. She sees Chloe on the ground, the contents of her backpack scattered at her feet, and she's talking to Sarah. Sarah's son AIDEN is kicking a wall.

HELEN
Oh no.
(to Sarah)
Hi, sorry I'm late. I was racing out of work, and I got pulled over. I'm Helen.

SARAH
Sarah. Just a second.
(to Chloe)
So if you provoke him, he will lash out. It really is as simple as that, sweetie.

HELEN
I'm sorry. What did I miss?

She starts picking up the contents of Chloe's backpack.

CHLOE
Aiden just pushed me over.

HELEN
Well, I'm sure he apologized, right?

Chloe doesn't answer.

HELEN (CONT'D)
(to Sarah, just trying to get information)
Didn't he?

SARAH
There are two sides to every story. She did enter his personal space.

HELEN
Look, it's no big deal, kids do stuff. I think if Aiden just says I'm sorry, everything'll be fine.

SARAH
And I think that maybe if you had been here on time, it wouldn't have happened at all. Hm? What do we think? Do we want Mommy to be on time?
(doing Chloe's "voice")
"Yes, please, Mommy!"

HELEN
Again, I was coming from work.

SARAH
(kind of cracking)
There's really no need to shout at me!

HELEN
I'm not shouting.

SARAH
I don't think I can do this. I... I'm finding this situation very stressful.

Sarah has made herself the victim, and Helen is now backed into the corner as the bad one. A few other parents look over, as Sarah is now clearly crying.

HELEN
Are you crying? This is getting silly. I was not shouting, okay?
(to the other parents)
I wasn't!

SARAH
(very emotional)
Please! Just leave me ALONE!

Mr. Tate, the Principal, approaches.

MR. TATE
Is there a problem here?

SARAH
No Mr. Tate.

HELEN
No Principal Tate.

MR. TATE (CONT'D)
My office. Both of you.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Chloe and Aiden sit on seats outside the Principal's office. Aiden whispers something to Chloe and they both erupt with laughter. Whatever problem they had with each other is over.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Inside the office, Helen and Sarah sit facing Principal Tate.

MR. TATE
So. When the kids are having a conflict, I ask them to deliver their criticism in a "praise sandwich," which means, say a nice thing about the other person, say the critique, then finish it off with another nice thing. I think we should try that now. Helen, you start.

HELEN
(deep breath)
Alright. Sarah, I like your pretty, long hair.

Sarah puts her hand to her heart, and reacts as if this compliment was real, not enforced.

SARAH
Thank you.

HELEN
But I wish you had encouraged your child to apologize when he pushed my daughter. Seems like the right thing to do.

Sarah rolls her eyes.

MR. TATE
And I think you have one more piece of "bread" to add to your praise sandwich?

HELEN
(picking anything)
And I like your bag.

SARAH
(again sincere)
Thank you. I just got it.

MR. TATE
Okay. Now it's Sarah's turn.

SARAH
'Kay. Helen, I like how your gym clothes look so clean, like you haven't even been to the gym.

Helen swallows hard and tries not to react.

MR. TATE
Good. Now the critique.

SARAH
Okay, here's the thing. I choose to stay home and nurture my children.

HELEN
Really? You're gonna go there?

SARAH
And Helen has her busy career. But is it fair that if she's late, other mothers are forced to pick up the pieces on the playground?

HELEN
(can't contain it anymore)
You know what? Suck it.

SARAH
You heard her. She's the aggressor!

MR. TATE
Ladies, please! And your final praise?

SARAH
(to Helen, sweetly)
You're totally right about my hair.

MR. TATE
Great job, guys! I hope you're both feeling better as you digest your praise sandwiches. You know, I've got an idea. Both of you volunteered for the Back to Cool Fair. I'm gonna put you at the same booth. And I'm sure by the end of the day you'll be best friends, sharing corn dogs and memories.

The women just don't have the will to protest Mr. Tate's completely tone-deaf solution.

MR. TATE (CONT'D)
"Back to Cool." It's funny, 'cause you think it's gonna be "Back to School."
(beat)
You can go.

INT. BAXLEY HOUSE - AFTERNOON

A mid-century split level with a recently-moved-in look. Pictures leaning against walls. Renovations in progress. We see Chloe in the background eating pretzel sticks and watching TV at the kitchen table. Mark and Helen are in a heated conversation.

MARK
You made a mom cry?

HELEN
And I got sent to the Principal's office. Don't forget that part.

MARK
Wow, you really cleaned up my mess.

HELEN
I know, I'm sorry! But I was so in the right! But then she's breaking down, people are looking, now I'm the bad guy!

MARK
How do you think I feel? I'm a simple man. I like blueprints, and lumber -- you know, stuff that's real. But school is this bizarro world where you eat a scone and you pay with your soul!

HELEN
(collapsing on the couch)
I can't believe this is happening. Why'd we move, maybe I shouldn't've taken this job -- am I a horrible mother?

MARK
The problem isn't you, it's these parents. We've known them for one day, and it's as emotional and weird as Thanksgiving with your step-mom.

HELEN
Well, what are we gonna do?

MARK
(trying to calm down)
Okay. I think we can fix this.
(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)
I'll try to make nice with this Lindsay chick, and you're gonna have to somehow eat it and calm Sarah down.

HELEN
Okay. Think it'll work?

MARK
I do. And if not, we can always pull Chloe out and home-school her. The only problem I can see is that we don't know a lot of "information" or "facts," so she could turn out pretty dumb.

EXT. SCHOOL GATES - DAY

The next morning. Mr. Tate is leaning against a wall, flirting with KAYE HERTFELDER, a willowy, pale-as-a-ghost CHOIR TEACHER who seems about ten years older than him.

MR. TATE
Oh my god, your wrists are so small...

Kaye blushes. Tate spots Trevor (scrolling through his Blackberry) and Sarah exiting the school. Tate approaches.

MR. TATE (CONT'D)
Hey, you guys.
(off a clipboard)
Just want to confirm, I have you both working at the fair on Saturday?

SARAH
(to Trevor)
Oh, I forgot to tell you I signed you up.

TREVOR
But the kids have travel soccer on Saturday. Aiden is the only decent forward the Purple Sea Turtles have. If he's not there, they're <u>going</u> to lose.

SARAH
We are going to Back to Cool!

TREVOR
(beat, sighs deeply)
Fine.

MR. TATE
Great. Sarah's at a booth with Helen. And Trevor, I have you on musical chairs.

TREVOR
(in hell)
Oh my God. I went to Yale.

MR. TATE
Come on, it's fun. We already have Angus and Jenna over there starting and stopping the music.

He points to the "ON POT" COUPLE, who are hanging out on a half-wall. He's barefoot and she's massaging his feet.

MR. TATE (CONT'D)
All you have to do is set up the chairs, and give each child a medal when they're eliminated.

TREVOR
Wait -- we're giving kids medals when they get <u>out</u>?

MR. TATE
Yeah. So everyone can feel like a winner. The actual winner gets one too, of course.

TREVOR
Yeah, but in <u>life</u>, there aren't enough chairs for everyone. The winners get to sit down, the losers have to go home. Call me crazy, but at a certain point, I think kids need to learn that winning and losing aren't EXACTLY THE SAME THING!

MR. TATE
Well, that may be the way they play musical chairs at Yale, but here at Parkview, we're doing it my way.

Trevor exhales, resigned, and goes. Sarah calls after him.

SARAH
Have a nice day at work!

TREVOR
You go change the world at hot yoga.

ANGLE ON: MARK, holding a box of donuts. He approaches Lindsay and her posse, including Brett, who all give Mark the stink-eye. Mark smiles big and pushes through.

MARK
Lindsay, hi.

LINDSAY
(cooly)
Hello.

MARK
Listen, I realized after I ate that scone that I was way out of line. I mean, they were for the PTA meeting for God's sake. Anyway, I brought you a box of donuts, just to say I'm sorry.

LINDSAY
Oh, yeah, we don't eat donuts. They're all sugar and carbs.

MARK
Oh. Um...
(delicately)
Aren't scones kinda the same thing?

LINDSAY
Yeah, nobody eats those either. Do I look like someone who eats donuts and scones all day?

BRETT
(quietly)
Is he calling us fat? I think he's calling us fat.

MARK
No! No! Not at all. But, if nobody eats the scones, you weren't upset that I ate one, right?

LINDSAY
Well, they <u>were</u> for the PTA meeting. You don't eat something that's for a meeting.

BRETT
You just don't do that.

MARK
But no one-

Mark sees RAV, standing a ways behind Lindsay listening in.

RAV
(whispering, with hand motions)
Pull the ripcord, dude!

MARK
(realizing there's no way out)
You know what? My bad. Again.

Lindsay turns away from him and back to the group.

LINDSAY
...so anyway, there's early set-up for the fair on Friday morning, and I need to go pick up the new "Back to Cool" banners from Kinko's. Not sure how I'm gonna get Emma here to school...

Lindsay strokes the hair of EMMA, her adorable eight year-old daughter, who's standing next to her. Hearing this, Mark senses an opportunity to get some points.

MARK
Um...if it helps, I think I live right around the corner from you? If Emma wants to walk over, I could drive her to school with Chloe. Hi, Emma!

Lindsay looks him over. He's really trying -- and Lindsay doesn't have another option. Finally...

LINDSAY
Fine.
(then, begrudgingly)
Thanks.

Mark smiles and walks off. On his way, he runs into Sarah.

SARAH
Hey, Mark.

MARK
Oh, hi. Heard you and Helen had a little, uh...

SARAH
Yes, we did. She's quite a handful. Reminds me of my husband. And us, we're just lonely birds, aren't we? You know, sometimes I see a blackbird in my garden. And it watches me for a moment, with an amused, beady eye. And then it flies off over the fence, completely free. And I think, "Why didn't I do that years ago?"

Mark just blinks, not sure how to respond. After a beat, Sarah pulls him into another hug.

MARK
Aaaand we're hugging again.

INT. MARK AND HELEN'S BEDROOM - DAY

Early Friday morning. Mark's in bed sleeping, in tighty-whities. Helen's showered and dressed. She kisses him.

HELEN
Hey. Remember I gotta go in early to help with fair set-up today? I turned off the alarm, are you awake?

MARK
(groggy)
Yeah, totally.

She goes. Mark snuggles into bed and <u>falls back to sleep</u>.

EXT. SCHOOL GATES - DAY

Early morning set-up is underway for the School Fair. We bounce around and hear snippets of conversation.

ANGLE ON: Lindsay and Brett hanging a "Back to Cool" Banner.

LINDSAY
It's just not as good as "Go Bananas." Am I right? It's just not as good.

BRETT
When I think that this whole place could have been a paper maché rainforest...

LINDSAY
I wanna put a bullet in my head.

ANGLE ON: Trevor, who's totally annoyed, lining up chairs. Principal Tate approaches, holding a box.

MR. TATE
Looking good. So here's the medals.
(hands Trevor the box)
I know we have a different philosophy about this, but I think you'll come around once you see how giving a losing child a medal boosts their self-esteem.

Tate pats Trevor on the back and heads off.

TREVOR
Maybe you're right. What's the harm in making every kid feel like a champio-

With Tate out of earshot, Trevor stops mid-word, takes <u>one</u> medal from the box, and DUMPS the rest into a trash can.

ANGLE ON: Rav, who's bouncing a baby in his Björn, and chatting up a NEWLY DIVORCED MOM setting up a snack table.

RAV
Wow, divorce sounds rough. You gotta divide up everything you own, and then one day you're in the kitchen, and you're like, "Where's my spatula?" And then you realize: he got the spatula. And your heart breaks all over again.
(beat)
You wanna grab some wine later?

DIVORCED MOM
Not really.

ANGLE ON: Helen pours a huge bag of RUBBER DUCKS into a little plastic kiddie pool, as Sarah fills it with water from a hose. Tensions are high, but Helen tries to make nice.

HELEN
Look, I know we got off on the wrong foot, but we're gonna be together for a lot of years here, so maybe we can just call a truce.

SARAH
Uh, what a relief. Totally. Let's forget it ever happened.

HELEN
Great.

SARAH
Just be friends.

HELEN
Exactly.

SARAH
Hug it out. Like your husband and I did.

HELEN
Excuse me?

SARAH
Didn't he tell you? Maybe you had a busy day at work. Yeah, he's an amazing man. Very spiritual. And really strong hands.

Helen's mouth drops.

INT. MARK AND HELEN'S BEDROOM/HOUSE - DAY

Later. Mark's still asleep in bed. After a beat, he hears the DOORBELL RINGING repeatedly. Mark wakes up with a start. He looks at the alarm clock, which reads 8:05.

MARK
(calling out)
Chloe, wake up, we're totally late!

In a confused, still-half-asleep panic, he jumps out of bed and runs DOWN THE STAIRS to the front door...

MARK (CONT'D)
Who the hell...?

A tired Chloe calls out weakly from upstairs.

CHLOE (O.S.)
It's the girl!

Mark lands at the bottom of the stairs to see, through a window by the door -- little EMMA, Lindsay's daughter, waiting with her backpack on. Mark looks down and realizes he's still just in his kind of stretched out, very revealing tighty-whities and nothing else. He quickly covers himself and races back upstairs. Through the window, Emma doesn't react, so it's unclear just what she saw.

MARK
Little problem with the alarm. Give me five minutes!
(panicked, to himself as he heads upstairs)
Please tell me you did not just see my stuff!

EXT. SCHOOL GATES - DAY

Helen and Sarah are now setting up a big pop-up tent. Whatever truce Helen tried to make is gone -- it's now pure ice between them.

SARAH
(re: the tent)
You have to squeeze that together and then pull.

HELEN
No, I think it'll click in if you get it past that little metal thingie.

SARAH
(a bit overdramatic)
You don't know what you're talking about!

They struggle with the tent a bit more. After a yank, Sarah's fist flies off the tent pole and "accidentally" (on purpose) whacks Helen right in the face.

HELEN
You hit me! You actually hit me!

SARAH
It was clearly an accident.

HELEN
I'm bleeding!

SARAH
I didn't do anything. Your face just got in the way of my hand.

HELEN
Oh, right, like my daughter got in the way of your son's hand? Now I know where he gets it.

SARAH
Don't talk about my son, he's got A.D.D.!

HELEN
Really? Well, what do <u>you</u> have? Can't-Keep-Your-Hands-Off-Other-People's-Husbands...D.D.?

A CROWD of other parents has noticed the heated argument, and is starting to gather around Sarah and Helen.

SARAH
I never meant for it to get physical, but I should tell you that I feel Mark and I are approaching what you might call an "emotional" affair.

HELEN
You're bonkers, lady.

SARAH
(getting in Helen's face)
You take that back!

HELEN
What's happening, you want a piece of me?

Helen pushes Sarah away. Sarah winds up and PUNCHES HELEN IN THE FACE. Helen staggers back, astonished. She's never been in a real fight before, and can't believe this is happening. But now it's on. Helen regroups and THROWS A PUNCH of her own. It catches Sarah across the chin. They circle, landing a few more solid punches to the face.

The CROWD REACTS, and one MOM starts videoing with her camera-phone. A few PARENTS try to break it up. Sarah grabs Helen. They start to wrestle, and finally fall to the ground, landing squarely in the KIDDIE POOL, SOAKING THEM BOTH.

INT. MARK'S TRUCK/EXT. SCHOOL GATES - DAY (SAME TIME)

The truck says "Baxley Construction." Mark is driving. Chloe and Emma are in back. After a long, awkward silence...

MARK
So. Second grade, huh? Grad-o segundo.
(makes some casual popping sounds, then)
Drivin' to school. Just an ordinary morning, nothing special to report, am I right? Just a bunch of people wearing pants.

He glances in the rearview mirror to see if Emma is reacting, but she's giving nothing. Mark pulls his truck up to school.

MARK (CONT'D)
Okay, well, here we are!

Chloe and Emma hop out.

MARK (CONT'D)
(still in the car, frustrated)
What did you see, girl? What did you see?!

Mark gets out of the truck and sees Emma running over to her mom Lindsay and hugging her. Mark looks concerned.

MARK (CONT'D)
Oh God.

Then he looks to the other side of the playground, where Helen and Sarah are still wet and yelling at each other, each being restrained by a few other parents.

MARK (CONT'D)
Oh GOD.

Rav appears and puts his arm around him.

RAV
It's not going great.

INT. MARK AND HELEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mark and Helen are in bed. She's got an ice-pack on her eye. They're both pretty down. A long beat.

HELEN
So where are we at, here?

MARK
We are at: you punched a mommy, and I may have been branded the town pervert.

HELEN
In my defense, I only started swinging when I heard that you and Sarah "hugged it out." What's that about?

MARK
She hugged me! I just focused on a point on the wall and prayed for it to be over. It was hug-rape!

HELEN
Whatever. We're in an elementary school death-spiral. And we're gonna see everyone at this fair tomorrow... What are we gonna do?

MARK
Okay -- this is a serious suggestion -- from now on, we show up at school in mustaches. No one will know it's us.

HELEN
Not sure a mustache would help your "town pervert" problem.
(a beat)
It's over for us. We're looking at years of being "The Freak Couple Nobody Makes Eye Contact With." Parents are gonna smile and edge around us to get pizza at birthday parties.

MARK
(nods, resigned)
We suck at school.

They just lie there. After a beat, a thought hits Helen.

HELEN
You know, I wonder how Chloe's doing.

MARK
Oh yeah. Our daughter.

HELEN
It was her first week, too.

INT. CHLOE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mark and Helen knock and enter. Chloe's on her bed.

HELEN
Hey, sweetie. We just wanted to check in, see how you're liking the new school.

CHLOE
Um, it's great. My teacher seems totally easy. And the girls all made me cards because I was new, that was really nice.

Helen and Mark just kind of stand there, nodding. Beat. Chloe senses something's wrong.

CHLOE (CONT'D)
How are you guys doing?

The dam breaks and Mark and Helen let go.

HELEN
I got into a fight, and got punched, and everyone was looking, it was just so embarrassing. And the school fair is tomorrow and I'm kinda dreading it.

MARK
I was just trying to be nice this mom, but I keep digging myself deeper and deeper in a hole with her and I can't get out! It's ridiculous! I'm drowning, here!

CHLOE (CONT'D)
Well... it's only the first week. It'll get better.

Another beat. Mark and Helen clearly don't want to leave.

CHLOE (CONT'D)
You guys wanna sleep in here for a while?

HELEN
We'd like that.

MARK (CONT'D)
That'd be amazing.

Mark and Helen both climb into the little twin princess bed with Chloe, get under the covers, and snuggle up close. On this sweet family moment we...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

EXT. SCHOOL GATES - DAY

The "BACK TO COOL" FAIR is on. Bounce house, pony ride, games, food, etc. There are throngs of kids and parents, some in sunglasses and leather jackets. At the MUSICAL CHAIRS area, Trevor kneels down in front of his son AIDEN.

TREVOR
Aiden. Remember. You stop moving out there, you die.
(then, happily to the kids)
Okay, Musical Chairs time! Music please!

He looks over at Angus and Jenna, who are standing by a table with an iPod and some speakers. They're totally baked.

ANGUS
Love it.

JENNA
Yeah...

They make no move to do anything.

TREVOR (CONT'D)
You gotta hit play.

Angus and Jenna crack up laughing.

JENNA
He was like, "you gotta hit play."

ANGUS
I know, shhh, shhh. Okay.

Angus hits a button, MUSIC plays, and the kids start circling the chairs. Mr. Tate, wearing a leather jacket and "cool" Risky Business shades, comes over to Trevor.

MR. TATE
Hello. Where are the medals I gave you?

TREVOR
Ohhh, yeah, I meant to tell you.
(holds one medal up)
This one's for the kid who wins. The rest I seem to have misplaced.

MR. TATE
I think you've done this on purpose!

Trevor covers his mouth and gasps in fake horror, then turns to Angus and Jenna, who are just standing there, smiling.

TREVOR
At a certain point you gotta stop the music, so they can sit down.

ANGUS
Sorry, I was just grooving.

Angus stops the music, and the kids scurry to grab a seat. Trevor's son Aiden is incredibly fast and gets a seat easily.

TREVOR
Nice, Aiden. Yes.

One LITTLE BOY is left standing. He shrugs and walks away, not that upset. Mr. Tate rushes over to him.

MR. TATE
Twelfth place, well done!

ANGLE ON: Mark and Helen walking into the fair with Chloe. Helen looks around nervously, and thinks she sees a MOM across the playground point at her and whisper to a friend.

HELEN
It's happening, Mark. No one's making eye contact. We're that couple. We should've done your mustache thing!

They approach Lindsay, who's manning a ticket table. Mark is overly friendly and tries a bit too hard.

MARK
Hey. I'll start with twenty tickets. I can always get more if I decide I want to ride a pony, too, am I right?

LINDSAY
(humorless)
You wouldn't fit on a pony.

Lindsay hands Mark his tickets. Chloe grabs them.

CHLOE
Come on, Mom!

Chloe drags Helen away, leaving Mark with Lindsay. Not knowing what Lindsay knows about the underwear incident is killing Mark. He decides to dive in to try to figure it out.

MARK
Listen, sorry about what happened with Emma. It's just, Helen turned off the alarm clock, so I woke up kinda late.

LINDSAY
Yeah, I heard.

He peers into her eyes, trying to figure out what she knows. She's a blank slate, so Mark feels he needs to keep trying.

MARK
So, summer's over, huh?
(awkward transition)
You know, some of the bathing suits I saw on guys at the beach this summer were so tiny. It's like seeing a guy in his underwear would be way <u>less</u> revealing, am I right? Underwear would be no big deal.

LINDSAY
Wait -- did my daughter see your underw-?

MARK
(cutting her off)
<u>WHAT</u>?! No! I was just talkin' generally about good times by the sea.

Clearly, Lindsay knew nothing -- until now. Before Lindsay can fully put it all together, Mark walks away quickly.

ANGLE ON: Rav, bouncing the baby in the Björn, and chatting up a CUTE YOUNG FEMALE TEACHER. As he does, the baby's hand comes up and pulls at Rav's lower lip. He fights through.

RAV
...Wow, you're a substitute. Must be so exciting. It's early in the morning. You get the call. A teacher's down. You don't know if you're gonna be subbing for fourth grade...third grade... But you're ready. You're ready for anything.

The baby YANKS Rav's hair. He's in pain, but presses on.

RAV (CONT'D)
You wanna come over to my condo for some spaghetti later?

CUTE TEACHER
No thanks.

ANGLE ON: Chloe is now at a game booth with some other girls. Helen is chatting with a few MOMS we saw during the brawl with Sarah. They look at Helen a bit skeptically.

HELEN
That fight was <u>so</u> not me. I'm actually a very sweet person.
(MORE)

HELEN (CONT'D)
At my last school I was on the library committee, I read to kids, I did different voices.
(high baby voice)
This was Lamb-y. Baaaaaaa!

She's dying.

ANGLE ON: Mark walks past Trevor, who's intently watching musical chairs -- which is down to his son and three other kids. Mark stops to watch as well.

TREVOR
(yelling, bleeped out)
Get in there, Aiden! Hit that chair, hit it... FUCK YEAH!

MARK
Wow, he's fast. Your kids do a lot of sports?

TREVOR
Basketball, football, karate, ice hockey, lacrosse, baseball, piano, and Mandarin, obviously. What does your kid do?

MARK
She...plays with my iPhone.
(beat)
So, guess our wives kinda got into it.

TREVOR
Yeah. Lady cat-fight, huh? It's like, "Kiss!" Know what I'm saying?

MARK
Um...definitely, definitely.

TREVOR
(genuinely confiding)
Honestly, my wife can be a little nuts sometimes.

MARK
Yeah.

TREVOR
(beat)
Did you just call my wife crazy?

MARK
What? No, I was just... I didn't-

TREVOR
Never call my wife crazy.
(beat)
Yeah, she's insane. Hit that chair, hit it...BAM!

Trevor takes a knee and does a Tiger Woods fist pump. It's now down to Aiden and one other GIRL, with one chair left. But before Angus starts the music again...

ANGLE ON: Principal Tate. He's speaking into a MICROPHONE, as KIDS start lining up on risers behind him.

MR. TATE
If we could all gather, the children have prepared a surprise, with the help of our amazing choir director, Kaye Hertfelder.

He looks at KAYE, who sits at a piano, and he awkwardly massages her shoulders for a moment. Little AIDEN and the other musical chairs GIRL stop playing and head over to the group. It's totally anti-climactic, and Trevor's left just standing there alone, with nowhere to put his competitive energy. Nobody cares but him.

TREVOR
Game's not over!
(beat)
We so had that chick.

Everyone gathers, as Kaye starts to play the piano, doing a vamp, as Mr. Tate speaks to the parents with feeling.

MR. TATE
Hey, everybody. You know, I haven't been principal for that long, but one thing I've learned for sure is how fast it all flies by. In the blink of an eye, I'll be telling you to have a good summer. One more blink, and I'll be wishing these guys good luck in middle school. Now, I know from being in the trenches, sometimes kids can drive you crazy. They tease each other, they torture each other, they get competitive, they fight.

We PAN across the faces of Mark and Helen, Sarah and Trevor, Lindsay and her posse. Even though Tate's not talking about them, he might as well be, and they know it.

MR. TATE (CONT'D)
But years from now, you're not gonna remember any of that stuff. All you'll remember is the love.
(MORE)

MR. TATE (CONT'D)
So just stop, and take a moment to really watch...your incredible kids.

In the crowd, Mark puts his arm around Helen. Lindsay nods, and even Trevor takes Sarah's hand and smiles. The children (including Chloe, Aiden, and Emma) start to sing the very meaningful, vaguely inappropriate "Seasons of Love" from the musical RENT. Mr. Tate provides some rhythm with maracas.

KIDS
Five hundred twenty-five thousand six hundred minutes
Five hundred twenty-five thousand moments so dear
Five hundred twenty-five thousand six hundred minutes
How do you measure, measure a year?

The singing is pretty bad, but all the parents are beaming, smiling from ear to ear. Everybody's videoing. Helen holds up their video camera to film Chloe, but gets a blinking "low battery" symbol, and it GOES BLACK.

HELEN
We're out of battery!

MARK
Oh crap, I totally forgot!

SARAH
(totally genuine)
Don't worry, I got her.

Sarah points her video camera at Chloe.

TREVOR
Yeah, we'll film her, we got it.

LINDSAY
(also pointing a video camera)
I got her, too. She's adorable.

Other parents join with a chorus of "I got her, don't worry, we'll cover you." A huge bonding moment. Despite everything that's happened, the parents finally come together over the one thing they have in common -- they all adore their kids. Mark and Helen are amazed, relieved, and for the first time, feel that they might just fit in at this place. As the kids continue to sing in beautiful, awful non-harmony, we...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

TAG

FADE IN:

EXT. SCHOOL GATES - DAY

The school fair is still going. IN THE BOUNCE HOUSE, Chloe is bouncing with a bunch of boys, having a great time. She calls to Mark, who's standing outside.

CHLOE
Daddy! Bounce with me!

Mark, thrilled that his little girl has requested his presence, kicks off his shoes and climbs in. He bounces as high as he can, finally letting go of all of the stress of the week. Some of the BOYS start jumping on him, wrestling him, and they finally tackle him.

CHLOE (CONT'D)
I have to pee.

She slips out. A beat after she goes, Mark looks out through the opening of the bounce house, and sees Lindsay and her daughter, Emma, staring in at him -- and he's still underneath a pile of young boys. He smiles weakly.

EMMA
Why is that man in the bounce house?

LINDSAY
(disgusted)
I don't know.

Nearby, Helen, who has been watching this moment unfold, buries her face in her hands. And as Mark takes his place as the town pervert, this time for real, we...

FADE OUT.

END OF SHOW