THE FAMILY COP

Written By

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3/10/14 DRAFT

EXT. MARINA DOCK - DAY - 1993

BENNY LaROCHE (14), troubled and mischievous, unties the *Camelot*, a SMALL WOODEN SLOOP, and pushes away from the dock.

ON THE OPEN WATER

Keeping the boat on course, Benny opens his backpack, removing a small BOUQUET OF FLOWERS and a FRAMED PHOTO OF HIS MOM -- a kind, cheerful woman. He stares at the photo sadly.

BACK AT THE DOCK

CHUCK LaROCHE (40's), rough-hewn but well off, is downcast as he walks down the dock carrying a bottle of whiskey. He looks around confused, and sees a MARINA WORKER nearby.

CHUCK
Hey Jimmy! Where's the Camelot?

JIMMY
Benny took her out, Mr. LaRoche. He said you gave him permission.

CHUCK
The hell I did! He's 14 years old!

Chuck looks out in the distance to see the boat out past a large BOULDER BREAKWATER.

CHUCK (cont'd)
Unbelievable!

BACK ON THE BOAT

Benny looks out at the water. With tears in his eyes, he throws the bouquet overboard. He watches as it floats away in the boat's wake, then looks back down at the photo.

BENNY
Happy birthday, Mom. I know how much you loved this boat, so I thought we could take her for a sail together... I miss you. Everybody keeps saying it'll get easier, but it never does.

BACK AT THE DOCK

Chuck's anger is replaced with worry as he sees *Camelot* HEADED FOR THE BREAKWATER. He waves his arms frantically.

CHUCK
No. No!... Turn left, Son! Left! LEFT!

BACK ON THE BOAT

Benny wipes away tears and looks up to see THE BREAKWATER AHEAD. With no time to change course, he DIVES OFF THE BOAT.

BACK ON THE DOCK

Seeing his boat SPLINTER AGAINST THE ROCKS, Chuck drops his whiskey bottle, which smashes on the dock. Chuck anxiously eyes the water, searching for Benny. Seeing him climb up onto the rocks, Chuck looks relieved. And angry.

CHUCK
Jimmy, get me a boat. I have to go save my son... So I can kill him.

EXT. SUBURBS - DAY - <u>20 YEARS LATER</u>

Benny (now in his 30's, casual and shaggy), drives a beat-up 1980's Mercedes -- everything he owns stuffed inside. He double-parks at a house surrounded by parked cars.

INT. LAROCHE HOUSE - FRONT HALLWAY - DAY

Benny enters without knocking, stopping to look at --

BLACK & WHITE PHOTOS depicting himself as a boy, along with his brother PATRICK, Chuck, and their Mother in the *Camelot*. We see it's identical to JFK's iconic boat, *Victura*, featured in a framed *Life* pictorial alongside.

Benny stares at his Mother's face sadly. He's spotted by PATRICK (now 40ish), Benny's polar opposite, a balding, straight-laced wallflower, who enters from the back yard.

PATRICK
Ben?! What are you doing here?... Don't tell me, you need money.

Patrick pulls out some bills, holding them out to Benny.

BENNY
Pfft. I don't need your money, Patrick.
(takes the cash, pockets it)
What's with all the cars? Dad throwing another B.S. shmooze-fest for work?

PATRICK
Not exactly.

BENNY
(looks out window)
Is that Uncle Jerry in the back yard? And the twins? Why are they here?

PATRICK
Yeah. About that...

EXT. BACK YARD - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Benny and Patrick walk out to see PEOPLE eating and playing games. WAITERS serve hors d'oevuers and cocktails. A MAGICIAN entertains KIDS. A BANNER reads: "LaROCHE FAMILY REUNION". GUESTS see Benny and murmur awkwardly to each other.

BENNY
Family reunion? No one told me. Not cool, bro!

PATRICK
So we forgot to tell you this year.

BENNY
Wait. *This* year? You mean you've had these before?

PATRICK
You know Dad -- probably afraid you'd make a scene... Like when you called him out during the toast at my wedding.

BENNY
Hey, I had some stuff I needed to get off my chest. It's not my fault someone put a microphone in my hand.

Benny spots Chuck (now in his 60's), standing at the bar as a BARTENDER mixes him a drink. Seeing Benny, he sighs heavily.

CHUCK
Better make that a double.

BENNY
Dad! I guess my invitation to the family reunion got lost in the mail... Several years in a row!

CHUCK
Please Benjamin, how can we even know where to send them?
(MORE)

CHUCK (cont'd)
If you're not touring Eastern Europe as a "roadie", you're on some "eco-commune" in Oregon.

BENNY
That was years ago. I've settled down.

CHUCK
I don't know what world you live in, Son, but in this one, founding your own nudist colony is not "settling down".

BENNY
I was just looking for my calling. Something I could get passionate about.

CHUCK
You're always passionate about things, Benjamin. Until you quit. Or get fired. Or deported.

BENNY
I told you, I was innocent of those charges. It was all political.

CHUCK
The point is, you're always excited when you start something new, but then you find some way to screw it up. That's your charm. Such as it is.

BENNY
Jeez, Dad! Why do you insist on treating me like I'm a kid?!

CHUCK
When you start acting like an adult, I'll start treating you like one. To me, you're still the snot-nosed little shit who sunk the Camelot.

BENNY
Again with the Camelot? I swear you cared more about that boat than me.

CHUCK
You have no idea what it's like to lose something you've worked so hard for.

BENNY
Whatever. I know where I'm not wanted... Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm gonna go move my stuff into the guest room.

(MORE)

BENNY (cont'd)
I need to crash here until I can find a new place. The Benz is starting to get a little ripe.

CHUCK
Sorry Benjamin, I can't let you do that. You're too old to still be adrift like some rudderless ship. If I don't tighten the line, and set you on the right course, you'll never grow up.

BENNY
Seriously, Dad? Ever met a situation you *didn't* think you could sum up with a nautical term?... Whatever. This party's lame anyway, I'm outta here.

Turning to go, Benny spots a chest full of ICED BEERS. He loads several bottles into his t-shirt before going.

INT./EXT. BENNY'S CAR - CITY STREET - MORNING

Benny snores, stretched out in the driver's seat. He's awoken by a noisy STREET CLEANING TRUCK which beeps loudly as it sweeps dirt in through his open window. He spits out dirt.

EXT. STARBUCKS - PATIO - DAY

Benny sits with a laptop, scanning online JOB CLASSIFIEDS.

BENNY
Pool cleaner? Nah, way too hard... Accountant? I'm not *that* desperate... Family Monitor? Hmmm... "Licensed marriage and family therapists evaluate and aid dysfunctional families." I'd be great at that! Who knows more about family dysfunction than me?

A Man at the next table appears confused.

MAN
Are you talking to me?

Before Benny can answer, a BUSINESSWOMAN comes from inside with a steaming coffee to see Benny at her table.

BUSINESSWOMAN
Hey! That's my laptop!

INT. DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES - OUTER OFFICE - DAY

In an ill-fitting suit and tie, Benny sits with another JOB CANDIDATE and a SECRETARY. The Job Candidate sniffs as if something stinks, and looks at Benny, who shrugs. The guy's cell rings and he answers.

JOB CANDIDATE
Hello... Yes... I did? Fantastic! I'll come right now. Thank you so much.
(hangs up, to Benny)
Screw this civil service crap, I just got a *real* job! See ya, sucker!

The guy leaves, and Benny notices he's left a RESUME on the chair next to him. Benny reads it, impressed by what he sees.

Getting an idea, he folds the top of the resume so you can no longer see the other guy's name. Sliding his resume behind it, only Benny's name is visible.

INT. DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES OFFICE - DAY

Benny sits across from a FEMALE BUREAUCRAT in a skirt-suit. She examines Benny's (new) resume.

FEMALE BUREAUCRAT
Very impressive resume, Mr. LaRoche. You'd be surprised how many unqualified candidates we've seen. A couple didn't even have a Masters in Family Therapy.

BENNY
The gall of some people. Not me -- MFT, OMG, B&D, I'm into all that stuff.

She's looks a bit confused by that, but laughs it off. Benny loses the B.S. a moment, getting serious.

BENNY (cont'd)
I'll be honest, my family life growing up wasn't the best. And if I can just help one family avoid the pain and long-term psychological damage it's caused me, then any sacrifice or amount of work I put into it will have been worth it. I truly believe this is my calling.

She nods, appreciating the heart-on-his-sleeve sentiment.

INT. SOCIAL SERVICES - SUPERVISOR'S OFFICE - DAY

A drab office filled with CIVIL SERVANTS. Benny sits across the desk from SUPERVISOR McGUCKIN (50ish), a gruff, grizzled, seen-it-all, police lieutenant-type.

BENNY
I plan on shaking up the status quo. My methods might be unorthodox, but I'll get results. Like the Dirty Harry of Social Services -- only I leave behind happy families instead of dead bad guys... Pretty different, I'll admit.

SUPERVISOR MCGUCKIN
Easy, tiger. We don't need any cockamamie theories from rookies. Just stick to the The Manual, LaRoche.

He tosses a THICK MANUAL to Benny -- it's straight out of the 70's, and titled 'THE HAPPY FAMILY'. Benny grimaces.

BENNY
But boss, why rob families of the wisdom of my vast life experience? I bring valuable things to the table from many different walks of life -- Eastern religion, philosophy, 80's movies. I'm like a human mix tape.

SUPERVISOR MCGUCKIN
Where do they find these people?... Just look in on your assigned families every couple of days, evaluate them, and clear your cases if you wanna keep this job, LaRoche. Understood? Good. Now get out of my office.

McGuckin watches as Benny leaves, shaking his head.

SUPERVISOR MCGUCKIN (cont'd)
God help whatever family gets him.

INT. BAXTER HOME - MASTER BEDROOM

FRED BAXTER (40's), smart and sensitive, wakes up to see his pretty, sharp-as-a-tack wife, CONNIE (40ish), multi-tasking in bed -- e-mailing, talking on a Bluetooth, drinking coffee.

Realizing she's woken him, Connie mouths "Sorry" to Fred, who just rolls his eyes and gets out of bed.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING - LATER

Fred wolfs down burnt toast. Connie loads her laptop into her attache. EMILY (17) cute, but book-ish, enters texting away.

CONNIE
Emily! Time for school!

EMILY
Uh. Stop shouting, Mom. I'm right here.

CONNIE
Good. Grab some fruit for breakfast and go get your brother down here.

EMILY
HEY DORK! MOM WANTS YOU STOP PLAYING WITH YOURSELF AND GET DOWN HERE NOW!

CONNIE
I could've done that.

EMILY
Then why didn't you?

Emily smiles smugly as a CAR HORN sounds outside. She hurries out as PHILLIP (12), a precocious know-it-all, enters with an armful of dress Oxford shirts, just like the one he wears.

PHILLIP
Mom, can we stop by the dry cleaners on the way to school?

CONNIE
I have an important meeting, Phillip. Your dad is going to have to take you.

PHILLIP
Dad's car? Great. Nothing like listening to whiny liberals on NPR.

FRED
I'm running late. You can't drop him?

CONNIE
I told you, Fred, today is my meeting with the Starbucks people. Remember? You know how nervous I get before meetings. I already feel like vomiting.

Fred sighs, resigned. Connie kisses him awkwardly on the cheek and heads for the door. Fred turns to a dour Phillip.

FRED
Come on, Champ, it's not that bad.

PHILLIP
"Champ"? Really, Dad? I know you're just trying to connect with me on some level, but you're trying a little too hard. It smacks of desperation.

INT. RANGE ROVER - MORNING - SAME

JARED BRYANT (17), handsome B.M.O.C., sits behind the wheel checking himself out in the mirror when Emily gets in.

JARED
Hey, babe. What's crackin'?

Jared immediately starts necking on Emily, who just sighs.

EMILY
Momzilla was totally on the Princeton warpath again last night. I've been saying I haven't been accepted yet, but I can't keep putting her off forever.

JARED
Whatevs.

EMILY
(pushes him off)
Jared! She's trying to keep us apart! She wants me to be another total psycho robot businesswoman just like her!

Just then, they see Connie walking out, towards her SUV.

JARED
She's smokin' though -- gotta give her that. 100 percent, Grade-A, M-I-L--

EMILY
One more letter and you'll *never* get what you've been begging for.

Sheepish, Jared quickly shuts up and starts the car.

INT. PALMER PUBLISHING - CONFERENCE ROOM - MORNING

Fred rushes into a meeting already underway. TODD BLACKSTONE (30), smarmy and arrogant, stops the meeting as Fred sits.

TODD
Look who's decided to join us -- our resident 90's wunderkind.

FRED
Sorry, Todd. My wife had--

TODD
I move we skip the part where Baxter bores us all with the minutia of his personal life. All opposed say "nay".
(beat)
Sorry, Baxter. You missed your turn, so why don't you tell us where the hell that Duncan Smiley manuscript is? It's well past deadline.

FRED
Umm... Yes, well, I've had a hard time getting him to return my calls, so--

TODD
So you've got nothing. How inspiring. Here's an idea: why don't you show some initiative and actually go over there to demand the manuscript from him?

Fred nods, but Todd keeps staring at him, waiting.

FRED
You mean right now?

TODD
Is there any other reason for you to be here? He *is* your only author, isn't he?

INT. COUNTRY DAY ACADEMY - GIRL'S BATHROOM STALL - MORNING

Emily's in the stall doing her business when BRIDGET (17), the school "It" girl, and two MEAN GIRLS enter.

BRIDGET
I mean, if he wants to be with some stanky hippy-chick from his dorm, then whatever, no hard feelings... I just hope he gets ass cancer and dies.

MEAN GIRL #1
For realz. He doesn't even deserve you. Like, hello? You're Bridget Swann. He's just some loser freshman in college.

BRIDGET
Exactly. I can have any guy I want in high school. The only question is who?
(thinks a moment)
I've got it! Jared. Bryant. He's *so* always wanted to get with me.

MEAN GIRL #2
Isn't he dating that sorta cute girl who was in the nerd herd, but crossed over to being cool last year?

MEAN GIRL #1
Emily Baxter. I heard she's all like, "pure", and won't let him get any.

BRIDGET
I could totally steal Jared from her. He knows what I have to offer.

Bridget shakes her ass for the mirror and the Mean Girls laugh. Meanwhile, Emily looks like she's about to vomit.

INT. COUNTRY DAY ACADEMY - CLASSROOM - MORNING

Students silently take a test when a WHIMPER is heard from the back. As it grows louder, students turn to look at --

Emily, sitting at her desk, crying. Seeing the other students staring at her, she loses it, BAWLING uncontrollably.

INT. DUNCAN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Fred sits on a couch surrounded by stacks of books in a messy house. Across from him is DUNCAN SMILEY (60's), a disheveled recluse in a robe, pouring two glasses of Cutty Sark.

DUNCAN
I'm telling you, my boy, this is the best work I've produced in 30 years! And that includes the Pulitzer in '92!

FRED
That's great, Duncan. I knew this novel would be your big comeback. It's just, I can't put my bosses off any longer.

DUNCAN
Relax, Frederick. I've got your book. Now, have a drink with me to celebrate.

FRED
Duncan, it's 10 o'clock in the morning.

DUNCAN
It's midnight in Calcutta. You're not gonna make me drink alone, are you?

Duncan holds out a glass to Fred, who caves, taking it.

INT. COUNTRY DAY ACADEMY - THEATER - MORNING

BASIL DOBNEY (40's), an overly-dramatic British thespian, stands on stage, dressed as WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE. He speaks to the audience -- a group of YOUNG TEENS, Phillip among them.

MR. DOBNEY
Today you're auditioning for my adaptation of 'Hamlet', so I'm dressed as "The Bard", Sir William Shakespeare.
(bows)
Without further ado, we'll proceed alphabetically, commencing with Phillip Baxter. Mr. Baxter, the stage is yours.

Phillip makes his way on stage, swaggering confidently, then suddenly points at a BOY in the front row drinking a soda.

PHILLIP
(a la Alec Baldwin)
Put that coffee down! Coffee's for closers, only!

Stunned, the boy puts down his soda.

PHILLIP (cont'd)
We're adding a little something to this month's sales contest. As you all know, first prize is a Cadillac El Dorado. Anyone wanna see second prize?... Second prize is a set of steak knives. Third prize is, you're fired!
(super intense)
You think I'm fuckin' with you? I am *not* fuckin' with you!

MR. DOBNEY
That's quite enough, Mr. Baxter!

PHILLIP
(to Dobney)
You're name's Levine? You call yourself a salesman, you son of a bitch?!

MR. DOBNEY
I said enough!

PHILLIP
Oh... Have I got your attention now?

The Teens in the audience ERUPT IN CHEERS as an annoyed Mr. Dobney heads up on stage and pulls Phillip out of class.

INT. COUNTRY DAY ACADEMY - MAIN OFFICE - MORNING

A GUIDANCE COUNSELOR exits her office, leaving a weeping Emily inside. She walks over to HEADMASTER JOHNSON (50's).

GUIDANCE COUNSELOR
She's having some kind of emotional breakdown. You ask me, it's drugs.

Just then, Phillip is led into the office by Mr. Dobney.

MR. DOBNEY
Young Mr. Baxter here needs a stern talking to. During his audition, he was swearing like a midshipman.

PHILLIP
It was 'Glengarry Glen Ross' for crying out loud! First, it's censoring free speech -- what's next, burning books? Isn't this how Nazi Germany started?!

GUIDANCE COUNSELOR
Baxter? That's the girl's brother.

HEADMASTER JOHNSON
Hmm... Sounds like I'd better have a word with their mother.

INT. BAXTER BAKED GOODS OFFICE - MORNING

A nervous Connie gives a POWERPOINT PRESENTATION about her muffin business to a group of SUITS. She presses the button in her hand, but nothing happens. She tries again to no avail. Clearly stressed, Connie tries to laugh this off.

CONNIE
Uh-oh, looks like this computer didn't have its Venti latte this morning.

Crickets. Sweat beads up on Connie's forehead as she fiddles with the laptop. Unable to fix it, she looks worried.

CONNIE (cont'd)
Hold on, I'm sure I can fix this in a--

The screen FLICKERS CRAZILY. The computer's melting down, and so is Connie. When her iPhone VIBRATES with a call, it's the last straw --

Light-headed and woozy, she collapses into the lap of CHASE BUTTERFIELD (30's), a handsome exec.

CHASE
Wow. Someone *really* wants this account.

INT. DUNCAN'S HOUSE - MORNING - SAME

Fred and Duncan sit right where we left them -- both are now quite drunk. Duncan pours another round as Fred rants.

FRED
It's crazy. I pick up the kids from school, do the shopping, cook...

DUNCAN
Good God, man! She's practically got you wearing a skirt!

Duncan tries to hand Fred another shot, but he waves it off.

FRED
No, no, I can't. I'm already gonna have to call a cab, and I need to sober up before I hand in your manuscript.

DUNCAN
Right. The manuscript.
(downs both shots)
Now, when I say it's "finished", I don't mean "ready to take with you today, finished". I still need a couple of days to add the finishing touches.

FRED
That's what you said three weeks ago.

DUNCAN
What can I say? Writing is a fickle bitch-goddess. I'm at her mercy.

Fred just sighs. His cell phone RINGS and he answers it.

FRED
Fred Baxter, hollow shell of a man.

EXT./INT. COUNTRY DAY ACADEMY - MAIN OFFICE - DAY

A CAB pulls up outside and a drunk Fred stumbles out. He staggers in, trying (badly) to appear sober. Headmaster Johnson and the Guidance Counselor stand there waiting.

FRED
Somebody called me about my kids?

HEADMASTER
Ah, yes, Mr. Baxter. Thank you for coming in. We tried to reach your wife as well, but there was no answer.

FRED
That's Connie, too busy taking over the world with her goddamn muffins to worry about trivial things like her kids.

Swaying, Fred has to steady himself by grabbing the wall.

GUIDANCE COUNSELOR
(whispers to Headmaster)
My god, he's drunk. Before noon.

HEADMASTER
Get Social Services on the phone.

INT. SOCIAL SERVICES - FAMILY COURT - DAY

Fred, Connie, Emily, and Phillip stand at a table, listening as a JUDGE reviews their case.

JUDGE
Hmmm... There's no past history of neglect, but I do see enough here to warrant some evaluation and training.

CONNIE
Training? Your honor, we're good parents. We just had a bad day.

JUDGE
I believe you, Mrs. Baxter. And you'll have 30 days to prove just that. But if after that time, the court's Family Monitor finds you unfit, your children could be taken from the home.

The Baxters look around at each other in confusion and shock.

FRED
What's a "Family Monitor"?

EXT. BAXTER HOME - EVENING

The stillness of the neighborhood is shattered as Benny's car comes roaring down the street blaring AC/DC's '*Shook Me All Night Long*', and SCREECHES to a halt in front of the house.

INT. BAXTER HOME - CONTINUOUS

Hearing this, the Baxters all head to the front window to see Benny in the car, PLAYING FINGER DRUMS on his steering wheel.

CONNIE
What in God's name...

The song ends and they watch as Benny looks in the rearview.

PHILLIP
Is he talking to himself?

INT. BENNY'S CAR - SAME

Benny stares at his reflection, giving himself a pep-talk.

BENNY
From now on, I'm no longer Benny LaRoche, lovable underachiever. I'm "Officer Benny", the baddest Family Cop on the force. The Baxters aren't gonna know what hit 'em. They're about to be... scared straight.

INT. BAXTER HOME - SAME

The Baxters watch Benny gets out, swagger up the walkway, and ring the doorbell. Fred opens the door to find Benny flipping through their mail.

BENNY
Benny LaRoche, Family Cop.

He salutes. The Baxters look at each other.

FRED
I thought you were a "Family Monitor"?

BENNY
Potato, po-tah-to. For the next 30 days, I'm on the case. We're gonna be one big happy family.

Benny hands Fred his mail -- except for a Victoria's Secret catalog, which he folds and stuffs into his back pocket.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Fred gives Benny a quick tour of the house.

FRED
...And this is the living room.

BENNY
Hmm... I dig the post-colonial WASP decor, but you know what would make this room really pop? A kegerator. And an air hockey table right over there.

Fred can't tell if he means that or not. Just then --

CONNIE (O.S.)
Dinner is served.

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

As the Baxters head in for dinner, Benny sees Fred going for the head of the table seat, and beats him to it. Fred doesn't say a word, taking another seat as Connie enters with food.

CONNIE
Sorry I didn't have time to prepare something nicer, but Hamburger Helper is an old Baxter family favorite.

EMILY
Uh, not since I became a vegetarian.

CONNIE
Oh. Right... Good thing I made a salad.

BENNY
Wow, Hamburger Helper. This really takes me back... Growing up in the projects, all mama could afford was "The Helper" and government cheese.

Nobody quite knows what to say to that. An awkward beat.

FRED
So Mr. LaRoche, what exactly can we expect out of this for the next month?

BENNY
Please, call me Benny. Think of me as your personal Mr. Miyagi.
(MORE)

BENNY (cont'd)
Except instead of teaching you to kick ass, capture Elizabeth Shue's heart, and win the All-Valley Karate Championships, I'm here to heal your family.

CONNIE
Heal? Who says we need to heal?

BENNY
Hmmm, let me think. Oh yeah, the Judge.
(beat, to Phillip)
Pop quiz, hotshot: What's the only thing that hurts Superman?

PHILLIP
Duh. Kryptonite.

BENNY
Sharp kid. I know your type -- two laptops, no friends. Am I right?
(beat)
Kryptonite -- a piece of his own home planet. See, home is where the heart is, but it's also where the hurt is.

FRED
Are you saying *we're* hurting them?

BENNY
'Fraid so. Parents worry about drugs and the internet, but what's really screwing up their kids is *them*. Think about it, when was the last time you met a stripper *without* a daddy complex?

The Baxters shift uncomfortably, most of all Connie.

BENNY (cont'd)
Don't worry, I'm not blaming you for all your family's problems. It's not your fault you never got the proper training. That's what I'm here for.

Annoyed, Connie glares at Fred -- *Say something!* He doesn't.

CONNIE
Tell me, Benny, do you have any children of your own?

BENNY
None that I know of. I've taken three paternity tests, and passed them all.

CONNIE
Don't you think someone who's had kids would know more about parenting then someone who hasn't?

BENNY
Got any evidence to back up that argument, Con? Or did you just pull it outta your ass? Because, according to a study I just made up, you don't know what in the Hell you're talking about.

CONNIE
Okay... Just how do you plan to "train" us to raise our own children?

BENNY
Glad you asked, Con. I feel like I'm uniquely qualified. I've spent my whole life thinking about family. I've traveled the globe, learned about many cultures, and never missed a single episode of 'Modern Family'. I think my track record speaks for itself. Any questions?

The Baxters are too stunned to say a word.

BENNY (cont'd)
Great, I'll go move in my stuff.

CONNIE
Wait. You're not *staying* here?

BENNY
Didn't the judge tell you? It's the only way I can adequately evaluate you. But if you prefer, I can always check on the kids at their new foster homes.

INT. FRONT HALLWAY - NIGHT

The Family looks at a stack of GARBAGE BAGS full of Benny's crap. Emily holds her nose.

EMILY
His stuff smells like moldy sweat socks. What do you think's in there?

Phillip reaches into a box, pulling out a DEFLATED SEX DOLL.

PHILLIP
Cool!

EMILY
Oh my god, what a freak!

CONNIE
Phillip, put that down before you catch something!

Stressed out, Connie paces, talking to the kids.

CONNIE (cont'd)
Okay, we can all see he's weird, but we have to remember he has the power to make you wards of the state. So, I want you both on your very best behavior... You know, so he thinks we're normal.

FRED
How would *he* know what normal is?

Benny enters carrying a LIFE-SIZED PROMOTIONAL CARDBOARD CUTOUT of him in BOXING SHORTS, in the air, MID-ROUNDHOUSE KICK, under which reads: "BENNY 'THE MONGOOSE' LAROCHE".

PHILLIP
Cool! You were in Mixed Martial Arts?

BENNY
I know my way around the octagon.

INT. ARENA - THAILAND - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

The stands are packed with SCREAMING THAI FANS, cheering wildly as they watch Benny, pinned against the cage, GETTING THE SHIT KICKED OUT OF HIM. In fact, he might be unconscious.

BACK TO SCENE

Benny sets down his stuff and calls over to Phillip.

BENNY
Hey boss, do me a solid and go grab my guitar and amp from out of my rig.

Phillip doesn't move, not used to getting orders.

BENNY (cont'd)
Not getting any younger here, chief.

Phillip heads out the door. Fred can't believe his eyes.

INT. BAXTER HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Benny re-arranges the cushions on the couch as Fred enters in his pajamas carrying pillows and a blanket.

FRED
Are you sure you wouldn't be more comfortable in Phillip's room? I know he won't mind staying with his sister.

BENNY
No thanks. I like to fall asleep in front of the TV watching Cinemax.

Benny winks at Fred, who hands him the bedding and leaves. Benny takes a DICTAPHONE from his pocket and speaks into it --

BENNY (cont'd)
The father has obvious confrontation issues. I don't know if that's 'cuz his wife is wound so tight, or vice-versa. Either way, I'm betting it's mighty cold between those sheets.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - SAME

Fred enters to see Connie already in bed.

FRED
He says he wants to stay in the living room. What can I say?

CONNIE
Tell him that's what bedrooms are for.

Fred shrugs, turns off the light, and gets into bed.

CONNIE (cont'd)
He wouldn't even be here if you didn't convince everyone at our kids' school that you're a raging alcoholic.

FRED
I told you, it was a business meeting.

CONNIE
Where you got loaded? Sounds grueling. I see why you're always complaining.

FRED
The school only called me because you were "unavailable".

CONNIE
Sorry for building a business which pays all our bills. You think I *want* to work this much? I'd go back to the way it was in a heartbeat -- if you could still support us.

FRED
You're right. Sorry I'm such a disappointment.

Hurt, Fred turns away from Connie, who feels guilty. She cuddles up to Fred, spooning against him.

CONNIE
You know I didn't mean it that way...

FRED
I'm tired. It's been a long day.

Connie bristles at the rejection and rolls away from Fred.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Benny drinks Bud tallboys and watches '*The Great Santini*' on TV. Watching the funeral scene, he gets a little misty.

INT. LAROCHE HOUSE - KITCHEN - SAME

The phone rings. Chuck enters in pajamas, muttering.

CHUCK
Who the hell would call at this hour?

An OLD SCHOOL ANSWERING MACHINE picks up, and he listens in. INTERCUT between him and Benny

CHUCK (V.O.) (cont'd)
You've reached Chuck LaRoche. I'm not here, please leave a message... And if you're a debt collector calling for Benny LaRoche, he doesn't live here.

Beep.

BENNY
Nice passive-agressive outgoing message, Pop. Remind me to nominate you for Father of the Year.

Chuck rolls his eyes at that, as Benny chugs more beer.

BENNY (cont'd)
I just called to tell you I don't need your help anymore. Sure, I was down, and you could've lent a helping hand. But you let me down in my time of need. Again. But no worries. It's cool. I barely remember it now. I just wanted you to know, that I've totally moved on, and turned things around. I've got a job now. A good one. It would probably make you real proud of me -- if I cared about that type of thing.

Chuck looks sad, maybe a little guilty. Benny's just drunk.

BENNY (cont'd)
Okay, I'm gonna go vomit now.

LATER

Benny, now wearing a headband, plugs his guitar into his amp and launches into Led Zeppelin's "*Whole Lotta Love*".

MASTER BEDROOM - SAME

Fred's eyes BULGE OPEN, as the sound of Benny's "performance" wakes him. As a frustrated Connie moans and elbows him in the ribs, Fred just covers his head with his pillow.

INT. BAXTER HOME - KITCHEN - MORNING

Wearing an apron, Connie cooks up eggs and waffles. Fred, Emily, and Phillip all wait patiently at the kitchen table.

PHILLIP
What's with the big breakfast? You haven't made waffles in forever.

EMILY
Yeah. Who are you, and what did you do with our real mother?

CONNIE
I told you, we all have to put our best foot forward for the next 30 days. After that, you're free to be as whiny and ungrateful as before.

FRED
You won't hear me complaining. I'm too tired.

EMILY
Yeah, what's up with him playing guitar all night? He's so--

BENNY (O.S.)
--Awesome? What can I say? It's a gift.

Benny enters in a TOWEL, opens the fridge and drinks milk from the carton. He turns to see the family staring at him.

BENNY (cont'd)
Aww, look at you guys -- one big, happy family... Or so you would have me believe. Do you always have such nice breakfasts together like this?

CONNIE/EMILY
Yes, always./No, never.

INT. FRONT HALLWAY - MORNING

Benny watches the family gather their things and leave. Alone, he looks around, grinning mischievously.

BENNY
Where to begin...

BEGIN MONTAGE --

--Benny tears apart the Baxter's home: scouring closets, rifling through personal effects, setting up a TEDDY BEAR NANNY CAM on Emily's bookshelf, trying on Fred's clothes.

--Benny looks around Phillip's room to see it is an Obsessive-Compulsive's dream -- immaculately clean, and organized to the extreme (Benny*: "Okaay... Obsess much?"*)

--Benny hacks into Emily's Facebook and Instagram, catching up on her friends' gossip (Benny*: "Oh no, she didn't!"*)

--Searching through Fred's desk, Benny finds a locked drawer. Using a LOCKSMITH KIT, he picks the lock to find a hidden porn stash (Benny*: "'High Society' I'm impressed, sir."*)

--Benny scans the Baxter photo albums into a laptop, laughing at them as he does (Benny*: "Sweet feathered bangs, Con!"*)

INT. COUNTRY DAY ACADEMY - THEATER - DAY

TEENS crowd around a LIST posted on an notice board. Phillip fights through the crowd to get a look. He pumps his fist.

PHILLIP
Yes! You're looking at the lead!
Phillip Baxter *is* Hamlet, in 'Hamlet'.

Phillip struts off proudly, only to find Mr. Dobney waiting.

MR. DOBNEY
I can't deny true talent when I see it.
But don't let stardom spoil your focus,
you'll need every ounce to play Hamlet.

Phillip nods and walks off, leaving Dobney, who stares off into the distance, and speaks to nobody in particular.

MR. DOBNEY (cont'd)
This will be my masterpiece.

INT. COUNTRY DAY ACADEMY - HALLWAY - DAY

Emily and Jared walk hand in hand. Bridget passes, smiling at Jared, who shoots back a sly wink. Emily sees this and pulls his arm around her, resting his hand on her ass. He grins.

JARED
Hey babe, we got 10 minutes 'til bell --
wanna go steam up the Rover?

INT. FRED'S OFFICE - EVENING

Fred packs up his things to leave when Todd appears.

TODD
Baxter. Glad I caught you. Since you're
still waiting on Smiley's book, I
thought I'd give you a chance earn your
keep around here another way.

Todd throws down a thick manuscript on Fred's desk.

TODD (cont'd)
This is the first draft of Kanye West's
autobiography. It badly needs an
editor. If not a translator. Whip into
shape. By Monday.

Todd flashes a douchey grin at Fred, as if to provoke him. Fred wants to say something, but silently watches Todd exit.

EXT. BAXTER HOME - DRIVEWAY - EVENING

Connie gets out of her car, giggling on her iPhone.

CONNIE
I'm so glad you have a sense of humor about this. I was sure I blew the deal.

Connie runs into Benny, who appears out of nowhere, grinning.

CONNIE (cont'd)
Sorry Chase, I need to call you back. There's a strange man in my driveway.

Connie hangs up.

BENNY
Check out Con, flirting on the celly. You go, girl. Chase, huh? Sounds like a real dreamboat.

CONNIE
That was a business call.

BENNY
If you say so. But you're not that bubbly with Fred.

INT. BAXTER HOME - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

The Baxters sit around looking at their flat screen, where Benny prepares to run a slide show from a laptop.

BENNY
Cultures have used pictures to tell their stories since the dawn of time. So I took the liberty of digging out your family photos for a little slide show. It's my version of "Show & Tell".

Benny clicks a remote, and an old BLACK & WHITE PHOTO appears, depicting a TOUGH-LOOKING MAN with a crew-cut, and his HARD-FACED WIFE.

BENNY (cont'd)
Old man in the military, Fred?

FRED
How'd you know?

BENNY
Crew-cut. Piercing eyes. Bet he's a hard-ass.

FRED
He was.

BENNY
Lemme guess -- heart attack?

FRED
Yeah... Died when I was in high school.

BENNY
My mom died when I was 12... It's hard.

Benny CLICKS his remote, bringing up PHOTOS OF PHILLIP CELEBRATING ACHIEVEMENTS -- holding a trophy in Karate class, winning a ribbon at the science fair, shaking hands with Paul Ryan at a 'Very Young Republicans Club' meeting.

BENNY (cont'd)
Damn, Phillip! You accomplish more by 8am than most people do in a lifetime.

PHILLIP
(glances at Fred)
I learned early on: No one's going to give you success, you have to take it.

BENNY
I admire your spirit, young Padawon. But if you don't stop and smell the Girl Scouts now and then, you're gonna end up blowing your brains out with your mistress in a bunker under Berlin.

Benny keeps CLICKING, stopping on VACATION PHOTOS of the Baxters having fun at DISNEYLAND, MYRTLE BEACH, GRAND CANYON.

BENNY (cont'd)
What are these from, Baxterpalooza '09?

CONNIE
My folks didn't have money for vacations, so I like to plan a family trip every Summer... Haven't found time the last couple of years, though.

Benny clicks to PHOTOS OF CONNIE WITH A YOUNGER EMILY -- them screaming on a ROLLER COASTER, Connie helping Emily prepare for a dance, a mall PHOTO BOOTH STRIP of them goofing around.

BENNY
Mother and daughter? If I didn't know better, I'd say you two were BFF's. Hmmm... Didn't see too many recent photos of you girls together.

EMILY
Mom doesn't have time anymore.

CONNIE
That's not fair. When I do make time, you get angry at me, or blow me off.

EMILY
I have a life now, Mom. Sorry I don't fit neatly into your schedule.

BENNY
So Con, I take it you're the primary breadwinner?

CONNIE
Well... Yes. But Fred does work.

PHILLIP
Pfft... Part-time.

FRED
When the economy tanked, my publishing company down-sized, and I was laid-off. Now I have to work my way back up the food chain as a part-time editor.

Benny sees Fred's embarrassed. The whole family is tense and uncomfortable -- he's touched some nerves.

INT. BAXTER HOME - DAWN - MONTAGE

--Fred and Connie sleep soundly in bed until... Benny SHOUTS INTO A BULLHORN, POINTED RIGHT AT THEIR FACES. They jump up, alarmed to see Benny standing there in a track suit.

--Emily is asleep in her bed until... Benny walks in, BANGING A POT AND PAN TOGETHER. Startled, she wakes up SCREAMING.

--Phillip, wearing a sleep eye-mask, ear plugs, and nasal strip, is sound asleep until... Benny BLASTS AN AIR HORN, waking Phillip so violently, he FALLS OUT OF HIS BED.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Benny leads the groggy, annoyed Baxters toward the back door.

BENNY
6am to 6:30: Calisthenics. 6:30 to 7am: Showers and/or baths. Me, I'm a bath guy -- I find it soothing. 7am to 7:30--

EXT. BAXTER HOME - FRONT YARD - MORNING

Benny leads the Baxters through JUMPING JACKS while a boom box blasts “You’re The Best (Around)” from ‘The Karate Kid’. NEIGHBORS gawk and scowl at them from their windows.

CONNIE
Can you please tell me what waking us at dawn so our neighbors can ridicule us has to do with raising a family?

BENNY
I picked this up at the Troubled Youth Boot Camp I got sent to in New Mexico. It’s a “team-building exercise”.

EMILY
The only thing this is building is my urge to puke.

BENNY
Sounds like the Baxter girls are baking up a fresh batch of frownies. You gals wanna take a lap around the block to adjust your attitudes? Didn’t think so.

INT. BAXTER HOME - STUDY - DAY

Benny hooks Phillip up to a MYSTERIOUS MACHINE, rigged up ‘MacGyver’-style, with lots of knobs, dials, and lights.

PHILLIP
Don’t you know how easy it is to beat a polygraph? I could do it in my sleep.

BENNY
This isn’t a polygraph. It’s the latest in bio-technology. Rigged it up myself. I call this exercise “The De-Brief”. I got the idea from when I was a Scientologist for a few weeks in the late 90’s -- they’ve been using gizmos like these for years. I figure if it’s good enough for Tom Cruise...

Benny flips on the power switch, and ALL THE LIGHTS GO OUT.

BENNY (cont’d)
Don’t worry, that’s normal.

ON EMILY

Benny questions Emily, who's now hooked up to the machine.

BENNY
So, from what I hear, you're hoping to go to Princeton in the Fall?

EMILY
Yeah, that's right.

Benny looks at a METER on his machine -- the NEEDLE is still.

BENNY
That's great. Have you heard back yet?

EMILY
No... Still no word. Fingers crossed.

Benny looks again -- the needle still doesn't move at all.

BENNY
Hmmm... That's not what the machine's tellin' me. You've got this needle twitchin' like Michael J. Fox.

EMILY
Seriously? I don't know why.

BENNY
Maybe 'cuz you got accepted two weeks ago and are hiding it from your mother.

EMILY
What?! No way! How could you know that?

BENNY
I'm just that good... But don't worry, everything said in here is strictly confidential -- I'm like a shrink, minus the God complex. And training.

ON CONNIE

Connie fidgets nervously in her seat as Benny asks questions.

BENNY
You seem a little stressed out, Con. Do you get stressed often?

CONNIE
I wouldn't say that. I mean, sure, I get a little stressed when I have to work a lot. Or when money's tight... Or the kids are difficult. Or Fred refuses to do his fair share around the house.

BENNY
So, basically 24/7 then? Tell me, is it the kind that makes you wanna bludgeon total strangers to death with a shovel, or curl up into a ball and cry?

CONNIE
No, mine's more like the walls are closing in, and I can't breathe. Last week, I almost fainted in a meeting... But I was probably just dehydrated.

BENNY
Survey says, "ERRRR!"... Panic attack.

CONNIE
A panic attack? No way. Not me.

BENNY
Look on the bright side, you've already nailed the first stage -- denial.

ON FRED

Benny stares silently at Fred, who looks uncomfortable.

BENNY
Tell me, Fred, how did you meet Connie?

FRED
Funny story. They showed her on the big screen at a basketball game in college. I just had to meet her. So I bought two beers and started searching the stands to give her one. I didn't find her until the game was over, and the beers were warm. She was walking out, and her friends thought I was a stalker, but I got her number.

BENNY
Freddy! My man! That's what I'm talkin' 'bout! You were one ballsy son of a bitch. But I gotta ask, what happened to that guy?

INT. BAXTER HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

The lazy boy chair has been moved across from the couch, where the Baxters sit. Benny stands before them in a JUDGE'S ROBE and ENGLISH BARRISTER WIG, holding a STOPWATCH.

BENNY
Hear ye, hear ye. "Court Benny" is now in session. Calling our first witness: Emily Baxter. Please take The Hot Seat.

Emily moves over to the lazy boy. Benny clicks his stopwatch.

BENNY (cont'd)
You have one minute. Go.

EMILY
Okaaay... What am I supposed to do?

BENNY
Oh, I don't know. Maybe you could talk about why you didn't tell your mother you were already accepted to Princeton?

CONNIE
What?! You were?! When?

EMILY
No way! You said that was confidential!

CONNIE
Emily, I asked you yesterday if you'd heard. Why didn't you tell me?

EMILY
I'm not sure I even wanna go, okay?!

CONNIE
Why not? It's perfect for you.

EMILY
How would you even know? You don't know me! How could you? You're never around.

Connie looks guilty -- she can't argue that point.

EMILY (cont'd)
Princeton's too stuffy and lame.

PHILLIP
That's not what I heard her tell her friend Becka. She wants to go to State, so she can be with her *loooover*, Jared.

Phillip makes mocking kissing noises at Emily, who glares.

EMILY
Eavesdropping on my calls again, perv?!

PHILLIP
It's not my fault my morals have been corrupted by societal decay while our absentee parents turned a blind eye.

CONNIE
Phillip, don't change the subject. Emily, following a boy to college is--

BENNY
Time! Emily, you're off The Hot Seat.

CONNIE
Hold on, I'm not done!

BENNY
Calm down, Con. We don't want you having another panic attack.

Fred, Emily and Phillip look at Connie, who glares at Benny.

CONNIE
Look you--

BENNY
Hold that thought... 'Cuz you're up next on The Hot Seat! Come on down!

Connie trades seats with Emily. Benny clicks his stopwatch.

CONNIE
Okay. Emily, honey, I don't want to push you towards Princeton, but I know--

BENNY
We've moved on to new business now, Con. Why don't you tell the family why you've been so stressed out lately?

CONNIE
Well, I do shoulder a lot of the responsibility around here. Work, watching the kids, cooking, cleaning...

BENNY
Uh oh, sounds like you think *someone* is not doing his fair share?

CONNIE
Well, I admit I had hoped Fred would embrace his new role in the house a little more enthusiastically.

FRED
Hey, I try. I don't exactly have a degree in home-making, you know.

CONNIE
You don't need one to help out with dinner and a few chores. I've been asking you to change the front porch light for two months.

BENNY
Ouch! I'm sensing some resentment, Con.

CONNIE
All I'm asking for is a little--

BENNY
Time!

INT. BAXTER HOME - NIGHT

It's late, and everyone's asleep -- except Benny, who's reading the social services family therapy manual. Frustrated, he tosses it aside.

Benny pulls out his laptop and does a Google search for "UNORTHODOX FAMILY THERAPY TECHNIQUES". Reviewing the findings, he grins.

EXT. BAXTER HOME - BACK YARD - DAY

The SUN BEATS DOWN HARD on the Baxters, who stand in a circle around Benny, a PILE OF CLOTHES at each of their feet.

BENNY
This exercise is called "Good News/Bad News". You take turns telling each other everything you think about them, starting with the bad. For every negative thing said about you, you must put on an article of clothing from my wardrobe... Let's start with Connie.

CONNIE
Okay... Phillip, I really wish you'd stop with all the snide remarks.

BENNY
Pretty tame, Con, but it's a start.

Benny points to the clothes at Phillip's feet. Phillip picks up a RASTA HAT (with DREADS), muttering as he puts it on.

PHILLIP
I'm so getting lice from this.

CONNIE
And Emily, I don't understand why you're so angry with me all the time.

Emily opens her mouth to respond, but Benny cuts her off --

BENNY
No rebuttals, just put something on.

Emily grabs a METALLICA SHIRT, sniffs it, then puts it on.

CONNIE
And Fred... Well, I guess I wish you were a little more... affectionate.

Embarrassed, Fred picks up a pair of LEG WARMERS dubiously.

BENNY
What? Guys wear leg warmers. Ever see Travolta in the movie 'Perfect'?

LATER

The Baxters are DRENCHED WITH SWEAT, weighed down by LAYERS OF CRAZY CLOTHING -- ZUBAZ PANTS, FUBU JERSEYS, PIMP FEDORA, etc. Fred wears the most, listening glumly as Phillip rants.

PHILLIP
--And I'm sick of your pity parties. I wish you'd stop feeling sorry for yourself all the time. It's pathetic.

Fred sighs, putting on a STARTER JACKET. He's out of clothes.

FRED
I knew we haven't always gotten along, Phillip, but I never knew... Wow.

PHILLIP
Sorry, but I need a positive male role model, not a spineless underachiever. You got fired, and you just accepted defeat. What kind of example is that?

FRED
I don't think it's fair to say I'm spineless... Or, that I was fired.

BENNY
No rebuttals, Freddy.

FRED
Fine. But should that count as another negative statement? He already said I was throwing myself pity parties.

CONNIE
How is being spineless the same thing as being self-pitying?

FRED
I wasn't talking to you, Connie... Can we get a ruling on this, Benny?

CONNIE
Excuse me? This is a *family* exercise.

FRED
No rebuttals, Con.

Emily laughs at that, Connie snaps at her, and the session devolves into a SHOUTING MATCH. Benny watches a moment with a grin before blowing his AIR-HORN to get them to stop.

BENNY
Those clothes weighing you down? That's the burden of unresolved tension keeping you from happiness. But there's "Good News": You can remove those clothes by having something *positive* said about you. So, whenever you're ready to say something nice...

Everyone fumes in silence.

BENNY (cont'd)
Hmmm... Looks like we could be here a while. I'm gonna go grab me a cold one.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Benny looks out the window, watching the Baxters in the yard -- fighting, and THROWING CLOTHING AT EACH OTHER in frustration. It's chaos. He speaks into his Dictaphone.

BENNY
Lots of resentment... I think Fred's lay-off was the "trigger point".
(MORE)

BENNY (cont'd)
It'll take some serious work to fix this family. Lucky for them, they've got me.
(singing softly)
I'm the best... Around!
Nuthin's gonna ever keep me down!

INT. EMILY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Emily lays in bed, talking on her phone.

EMILY
Sorry I was M.I.A. all weekend -- our lame Family Monitor had us on lockdown the entire time. Uggh!

INT. BASEMENT - SAME

Benny sits in a corner, wearing headphones, which are TAPPED INTO THE MAIN PHONE LINE, listening to Emily's call and taking notes. Hearing her, Benny mouths *"Lame?"*

JARED (V.O.)
Sucks for you, the beach was slammin'. Everybody was there. We grilled, had chicken fights, some of the girls even had a wet t-shirt contest. It was hot.

BENNY
That *is* hot.

JARED (V.O.)
Bridget Swann won. Of course. She's never shy about showing off that rack.

EMILY (V.O.)
Great, Jared. I'm gone one weekend and you're drooling over Bridget Swann? I thought you had better taste than that.

JARED (V.O.)
What're you talking about? All I said--

EMILY (V.O.)
You know, Jared, sometimes you really suck! I gotta go.

Emily hangs up. Benny jots down: "BRIDGET = EMILY'S RIVAL?"

INT./EXT. LAROCHE NAUTICAL - DAY

Benny pulls into the parking lot of a BOAT DEALERSHIP featuring a HUGE PHOTO OF CHUCK IN A CAPTAIN'S UNIFORM.

Benny strides into a SHOWROOM filled with all manner of SMALL PLEASURE CRAFT. Seeing Patrick consulting with a YOUNG COUPLE on a shiny new ski boat, he grins, and walks over.

PATRICK
Oh yes, ma'am, this boat is 100% safe for children. In fact--

BENNY
Sorry to interrupt, but who do I talk to about getting compensated for my little girl having her arm ripped off by the propeller you sold me last week?

Hearing that, the young couple look horrified.

PATRICK
He's kidding.

Not taking any chances, the Couple quickly walk away. Patrick glares at Benny, who just shrugs innocently.

INT. LAROCHE NAUTICAL - CHUCK'S OFFICE - DAY

Chuck sits at his desk, wearing jeweler's glasses, carefully working on a TINY MODEL OF A BOAT when Benny swaggers in.

BENNY
Well, well, well, look who's here.

CHUCK
It's my office. Who'd you expect? The question is, why are *you* here?

BENNY
Just wanted to tell you the big news -- I got myself a job. No wait, a career.

CHUCK
So you said -- in your drunken answering machine message.

BENNY
Really? Drunk dialing my old man? Freud would have a field day with that one.

Finished raising the sails on the model, Chuck grins proudly, and places it on a stand on the front of his desk. Benny takes a closer look, seeing it's a replica of the *Camelot*.

BENNY (cont'd)
Seriously? *Camelot*? Again? It's been 20 years. Let it go, Dad.

CHUCK
Let me tell you something about that boat. Your mother loved Jackie Kennedy. She kept that issue of Life magazine with her and JFK on that boat under her bed for 10 years. When I made my first real money, I commissioned a replica. It cost me a fortune, but the look on her face -- worth every penny. The best memories I have of her were on that boat. So no, I will not "let it go".

BENNY
Jeez... Okay, I get it... I'm sorry.

Chuck just rolls his eyes.

BENNY (cont'd)
Oh... And by the way, not that you care, but I'm a Family Monitor now. I help families with their problems.

CHUCK
Family Monitor? What will they think of next?... And just what in God's name would you know about raising a family?

BENNY
I know what *not* to do. Like send your kid to military school in his time of need.

CHUCK
I wouldn't have had to send you away if you hadn't acted out all the time.

BENNY
Hello -- my mom had just died.

CHUCK
I know -- she was my wife. And I had to raise your brother, and build a business to put food on the table. I didn't have time to come get you at school or the police station every other day. What was I supposed to do?

BENNY
I don't know, show a little compassion?

CHUCK
Stop blaming everybody else for your shortcomings, Benjamin. You've got too much potential to just be some civil servant. Your mother always believed you were headed for great things.

This hits Benny especially hard.

BENNY
Sorry I'm such a disappointment, Dad.

CHUCK
That's not what I meant, and you know--

It's too late, Benny storms out angrily, SLAMMING the door behind him. The room SHAKES and the *Camelot* model falls off the edge of Chuck's desk, SMASHING INTO PIECES on the floor.

INT. BAXTER HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Connie types on her laptop in bed as Fred finishes changing into pajamas, then slams the dresser drawer shut.

CONNIE
Whoa, take it easy. What's wrong?

FRED
Let's see -- my son thinks I'm a wuss, my wife doesn't respect me, and we have a lunatic ruining our lives.

CONNIE
Don't be so dramatic. I respect you, and so does Phillip -- he's just going through a phase. And Benny... Well, I don't know what to say about Benny.

FRED
I do. He's an idiot! In the morning, I'm calling Social Services to complain about him and his crazy exercises.

CONNIE
Don't go making waves right now, Fred. Let's just ride it out like we planned. Besides, I think there are actually some positives in what he's been doing.

FRED
You cannot be serious. How is turning us all against each other a positive?

CONNIE
Well, maybe you should see it more as constructive criticism.

FRED
I can't believe you're taking his side. Has everyone suddenly lost their mind?!

Fed up, Fred stomps out.

LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Wet from the shower, Benny enters in a robe, drinking a beer, to find Fred on the couch, going through shows on his DVR.

FRED
Where the heck is my 'Blue Bloods'?!

BENNY
Had to delete that. It conflicted with a marathon of 'Duck Dynasty'.

FRED
Is that my robe?

BENNY
Looks good, huh? A little tight in the crotch, but I'll live.

Benny plops on the couch next to Fred, his robe falling open. Fred can't help but see Benny's junk. Disgusted, he jumps up.

BENNY (cont'd)
Sorry, didn't mean to give you an inferiority complex or anything.

Fred ignores this, leaving the room. Benny calls after him.

BENNY (cont'd)
Hey, if you're heading out, can you make a beer run? This is your last one.

Benny pulls his Dictaphone from a pocket and speaks into it.

BENNY (cont'd)
No matter how hard I push Daddy Downer, he won't get froggy. I may have to step up my game.

INT. BAXTER HOME - KITCHEN - MORNING

Connie eats breakfast, Phillip studies a script. Fred enters.

FRED
What're you working on there, chief?
(Phillip glares)
Right, no nicknames. Sorry, I forgot.

PHILLIP
It's the school play -- 'Hamlet'. I happen to be playing the title role.

FRED
Good job! Hey, maybe I can help you out with that. Have I ever told you how your old man played Danny Zucco in the Roosevelt High production of 'Grease'?

PHILLIP
Ad nauseam.

Fred shrugs and thumbs through the newspaper on the counter.

FRED
Where's the sports section?

CONNIE
I saw Benny looking at it earlier...
While he made a call to his *bookie*.

Fred rolls his eyes as Benny exits a nearby bathroom.

FRED
Benny, do you have the sports section?

BENNY
I left it on top of the toilet.

Going in, Fred stops in the doorway, catching a whiff.

FRED
I'll just read it online at work.

Emily passes by, heading for the door.

EMILY
Jared's pulling up. I'm outta here.

INT./EXT. BAXTER HOME - CONTINUOUS

Through a window, Benny watches Emily exit. She quickly loses her jeans and sweater, revealing a SEXY MINISKIRT and TANKTOP underneath. She grabs a pair of heels out of her bag, stuffs her old clothes in, and gets into Jared's car.

INT. PALMER PUBLISHING - FRED'S OFFICE - DAY

Fred sits at his desk on the phone.

FRED
Duncan, it's Fred. Again. I know the book isn't done, I just need an ETA on it. So please, call me back. Please.

As Fred hangs up, Benny appears at his door, wearing glasses, a turtleneck, and a corduroy blazer with elbow patches.

FRED (cont'd)
Benny? What are you doing here?

BENNY
Just wanted to get a first-hand look at your work environment. You realize you have the smallest office on this floor?

FRED
Thanks for reminding me. Now, please leave. I'm on thin ice as it is.

BENNY
No worries. I'm incognito -- a prospective author you're courting. Which isn't far from the truth -- I've always wanted to write a self-help book. I just haven't been able to find the time. Or work ethic.

FRED
Great. Now please go before Todd--

Just then -- speak of the devil -- Todd enters.

TODD
Before Todd what?

FRED
Oh... Um... I was just saying that you would have to read this author's work before I'd be authorized to sign him.

TODD
Recruiting new talent? I'm impressed, Baxter. Didn't know you had it in you.
(extends hand to Benny)
Hello. Todd Blackstone, VP. You are?

BENNY
Dr. Emile Brohammer. But my friends all call me "Bro".

TODD
And are you a medical doctor or...

Todd's iPhone BUZZES and he checks it.

BENNY
PhD. My book's a moving memoir mixed with a revolutionary guide to achieving modern family utopia.

TODD
Uh-huh... Sounds great...

Seeing Todd is distracted by his iPhone, Benny snatches it from him and pockets it, then acts as if nothing happened.

BENNY
Think Deepak Chopra meets *"Eat Pray Love"*.

TODD
What the hell?

BENNY
What, not a Chopra fan?

TODD
No! You took my iPhone!

BENNY
You were being rude.

TODD
Give it back, asshole!

BENNY
If that's the attitude around here, I'm taking my book to Simon and Schuster. You'll be hearing from my attorneys.

Benny storms out, tossing Todd's iPhone into a trash can on the way. Fuming, Todd turns to Fred.

TODD
What is it with you and crazy authors?!

FRED
If you ask me, all authors are--

TODD
I'm not asking! All I wanna hear from you is "Here's the Smiley manuscript". We signed that fossil because *you* vouched for him! He's blown our advance on whiskey, the least he can do is turn in a draft. No more excuses! No more delays! Deliver that novel, or else!

Todd storms out, stopping at the trash to fish out his iPhone. Fred sits and sighs.

INT. BAXTER HOME - FRONT HALLWAY - DAY

Emily and Jared walk in and look around. The place is empty.

EMILY
Looks like nobody's home yet.

Jared likes the sound of that and starts necking on Emily.

JARED
Why don't we go upstairs and "study"?

EMILY
Okay, but only for a minute.

BASEMENT - SAME

Benny eats Chinese take-out and watches his laptop, which displays a LIVE FEED FROM EMILY'S ROOM. INTERCUT as Jared and Emily make out on her bed. Jared tries to take it up a notch.

EMILY
Stop... I told you, I'm not ready.

Jared rolls off of her, clearly frustrated.

JARED
You're never gonna be ready.

EMILY
I want the first time to be something special, Jared, not some quickie before my parents get home. I feel like someone's watching me, judging me.

JARED
Who's watching, God?

BENNY
As far as you're concerned, punk.

JARED
Come on! You don't know what's it like for a guy -- we *need* it. And if you can't give me what I need, I'm sure there are plenty of girls who will.

EMILY
If we did, you'd have to promise not to go and tell all your friends.

JARED
Of course not, what kinda guy do you think I am? Honestly babe, that hurts.

EMILY
Then I guess... Do you have protection?

JARED
Yes!... I mean, sure. In my bag.

Jared gets up just as Benny suddenly barges in unannounced.

BENNY
I thought I smelled Axe body spray. Hi, I'm Benny. You must be Chad.

JARED
No, I'm Jared.

BENNY
I think I know a "Chad" when I see one.

EMILY
Um, hello?! Some privacy!

BENNY
No problemo, just came to tell you, your dad called. He's coming home early and we're all going out for Moroccan. Sorry Chad, our reservation is for five. But maybe next time?

Before Jared can answer, Benny grabs him and leads him to the door, picking up his NANNY CAM BEAR off a bookshelf.

BENNY (cont'd)
Hey, how'd Teddy Ruckspin get in here?

Before Emily can protest, they're gone, and she's alone -- caught somewhere between anger and relief.

INT. BAXTER BAKED GOODS OFFICE - AFTERNOON

A grinning Chase knocks on Connie's office door.

CONNIE
Chase? Hi. What an unexpected pleasure.

CHASE
I have some good news I thought you'd like to hear personally... Seattle loves you. Your muffins, your company, everything. I even told them about your lap dance and they loved that, too.

Chase winks at Connie, who giggles self-consciously.

CHASE (cont'd)
Kidding! Seriously though, they wanna be in the Baxter Baked Goods business.

CONNIE
Oh my god... I don't know what to say.

CHASE
Say "yes". And then clear your schedule -- you and I are going to do a lot travelling over the next few months. This little company you built is about to get a whole lot bigger. And fast.

INT. BAXTER HOME - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Benny sits on the couch watching DR. PHIL on TV and taking notes. Dr. Phil talks to a family of REDNECKS.

DR. PHIL
See, what you folks need to learn is, the enemy of hating is communicating.

BENNY
Genius! He's helping and rhyming at the same time!

Hearing the front door open, Benny quickly switches the TV to a MEXICAN TELENOVELA just as Phillip enters. Fred follows a few steps behind.

PHILLIP
You know Spanish?

Benny shakes his head, no.

PHILLIP (cont'd)
Then how do you follow what's going on?

BENNY
Shhh! No interrupting my stories.

Phillip just shakes head and leaves. Fred turns off the TV.

BENNY (cont'd)
Hey! Que pasa, pendejo!

FRED
Sorry, but we need to have a talk.

BENNY
Can't it wait? I'm about to find out if Comandante Camacho really is the father of Esmerelda's baby.

FRED
No. After your "performance" in my office, I decided to do some research.

BENNY
Good for you.

FRED
But not for you. Unless you take pride in getting your degree from the University of Phoenix.

BENNY
Hey, I *had* to get a "virtual degree" -- I was touring as a roadie for Ozzfest.

FRED
How does a guy who graduated from some online college have the right to tell me how to run my family?

BENNY
I may not have much formal education, but I do have a Ph.D. in TLC.
(off Fred's eye roll)
Look, I've studied philosophy with Tibetan monks, graduated from numerous 12-step programs, and was the personal assistant to Oprah's personal assistant -- I've got wisdom out the ying-yang.

FRED
How in God's name did you get this job?

BENNY
Between you and me, I know a guy who knows a guy. An old frat brother I have some photos of. Long story.

Benny winks at Fred, who shakes his head and turns to go.

BENNY (cont'd)
That's it? That's all you got? You call *that* a confrontation? Come on, Freddy -- why you gotta be so passive?

FRED
Just because I don't want to make everyone uncomfortable like you doesn't mean I'm passive. I just don't see the point of wasting time arguing.

BENNY
Look, I get it. Not everyone can be the master of their own destiny.

FRED
I see what you're doing, you know. You're trying to get a rise out of me.

BENNY
I'm starting to think that's not even possible... But I've got an exercise that might help.

INT. STUDY - MOMENTS LATER

Benny sits a reluctant Fred down facing an empty chair.

BENNY
I learned this exercise in my one my stints in psychotherapy. It's called "The Empty Chair", but I like to put my own personal little twist on it. More precisely, I like to put a *face* on it.

Benny exits the room, reappearing with his SEX DOLL, which now dressed in MILITARY FATIGUES and HAT (its' bright red mouth agape). He sits the doll down across from Fred.

FRED
What in god's name is that?

BENNY
"That" is your dad, Fred. I'm surprised you don't recognize him.

FRED
You want me to talk to *that* like it's my father? No way. I am not doing that.

BENNY
I want to do this the easy way, but I'll go "bad cop" if you insist. You're not the only one with a key to the internet, and I was briefly a private detective. Want Connie to know about your dirty little pay-per-view habit?

FRED
I don't know what you're talking about.

BENNY
Then I guess she must've ordered 'Load Gobblers 6' on March 12th. Maybe I should ask her how it was?

FRED
You wouldn't!

BENNY
Do you even know me at all?

FRED
Fine. Whatever. Let's get on with it.

Benny ducks down behind the doll's chair, and speaks in a gruff, DRILL SERGEANT VOICE.

BENNY
Sit up straight, maggot!

FRED
Who are you supposed to be, the sergeant from 'Full Metal Jacket'?

BENNY
Too much? Okay, how about this...
(softening)
Tell me what's on your mind, Son.

FRED
Okay... *Dad*... I honestly don't what you want me to say here.

BENNY
Talk about how hard I was on you growing up, how nothing was ever good enough. How I died before you could show me the kind of man you'd become. Before you could make me proud.

This hits a little close to home for Fred, who stands to go.

FRED
Alright, this is really stupid. My dad would never say any of that stuff.

BENNY
(jumps up to stop him)
Relax, It's just an exercise. I wanna explore the reasons why you pussy-foot around all the issues in your life.

FRED
What does that have to do with my dad?

BENNY
It's like I told you, Fred, parents screw you up -- they can't help it. If you can make peace with it, it can't own you anymore. A wise man said "The enemy of hating is communicating." Here, I'll show you.

Benny takes the military hat off the doll, and sits in Fred's seat. He takes a deep breath and visualizes.

BENNY (cont'd)
Dad. Look. I know you've never forgiven me for suing you for emancipation after Mom died, but I wouldn't have lasted two weeks in military school. I'm a mustang. You can't cage a free spirit.
(beat, getting angry)
I am *not* wasting my life! Why can't you just accept me for who I am?!... Are you even listening to me?!

Benny angrily grabs the doll and shakes, POPPING IT. As air WHEEZES out of it, Benny hugs it tightly to his chest.

BENNY (cont'd)
Dad?... Dad?!... NOOOOOO!!!

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Benny's asleep on the couch when his cell rings. He answers.

BENNY
This better be a booty call.

PATRICK (V.O.)
Benny, it's Patrick. I'm afraid I have bad news... Dad's had a heart attack.

Shocked, Benny looks at his deflated sex doll in the corner.

BENNY
What have I done?

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Benny walks in to see an unconscious Chuck in bed, hooked up to a bunch of machines. Patrick sits at his bedside.

PATRICK
Hey, Benny. Thanks for coming.

Benny just stares at Chuck, speechless. After a long beat --

BENNY
Wh... What did the doctors say?

PATRICK
It's touch and go. The next 24 hours are going to be very important.

This hits Benny hard -- tears form in his eyes. Patrick sees how torn up Benny is, and stands to go.

PATRICK (cont'd)
I'll go get us some coffee.

Benny doesn't even appear to hear him. He sits down next to Chuck's bed, gingerly placing a hand on his arm.

BENNY
Hey, Pop. I hope you aren't in too much pain. I can't believe this happened -- never in a million years did I think...

Benny trails off, overcome with emotion. The only sounds are his sniffles and the beeps of the machines attached to Chuck.

BENNY (cont'd)
I know things have been rough between us, but I always felt like we'd work things out. You have to hang on, so we can do that, okay Dad?

Overcome, Benny drops his head into his hands. As he does, the faint trace of a smile crosses Chuck's face.

MORNING

Patrick sits next to Chuck, reading. He notices Chuck's eyes flutter open groggily.

PATRICK
Dad? Dad, can you hear me?

CHUCK
Where am I? What happened?

PATRICK
You had a heart attack, remember?

Still gaining his bearings, Chuck looks around the room, spotting Benny, curled up asleep on a chair.

CHUCK
He *was* here. I thought it was a dream.

PATRICK
Nope. He came as soon as he heard. And he didn't leave your side all night.

Chuck is touched by this, but stubbornly plays it off.

CHUCK
Not like he has anywhere else to be.

INT. CHEZ PHILLIPE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Connie and Fred sit alone dining in a fancy restaurant.

FRED
It's been awhile since you planned a night out for us. I really missed this.

CONNIE
That's one positive to having Benny around. Although I don't know if I should be thankful he's keeping an eye on the kids, or worried.

FRED
If you'd seen him with that doll, you'd be worried... But you know what? I kind of felt for the guy. Deep down, I think he means well. He's like a puppy who pees on the rug -- it's hard to stay mad because he doesn't know any better.

They both chuckle at that -- a tiny spark of that old magic.

FRED (cont'd)
So... What made you decide on coming here tonight? Hoping to get lucky?

CONNIE
Not exactly... Tempting as that sounds. Actually, it's because we have something to toast. I have big news...

Connie refills their wine glasses, and holds hers up.

CONNIE (cont'd)
Starbucks wants to carry us nationally!

Fred forces a smile, raising his glass to hers.

FRED
That's great, hon. You deserve it -- I know how hard you worked for this. I'm really proud of you. Congratulations.

As they drink, Connie can see Fred is less than enthusiastic.

CONNIE
Is something wrong? I thought you'd be more excited -- it's a lot of money.

FRED
No, I am... It's just... I suppose something like that means we'll be seeing even less of you?

CONNIE
Yes, early on -- I'll be travelling a bit. But we need this, Fred. Emily's starting at Princeton in the Fall, and Phillip's close behind. Not to mention the mortgage. We can't just wait around for your job situation to change.

Ouch -- that stings Fred. He hesitates before speaking.

FRED
It is going to change... Duncan's new novel is going to be his big comeback -- *my* big comeback -- I can feel it.

CONNIE
I hope you're right. But we have to be practical, Fred. We can't let an opportunity like this pass us by.

FRED
So that's it? You've decided?

CONNIE
It's not like that. I want you to get behind this. The kids, too.

FRED
Fine. I'll leave it to you to tell the kids. I'm sure they'll be thrilled.

EXT. BAXTER HOME - NIGHT

Fred and Connie walk to the door silently. The mood is tense. Finding the bulb still out, Fred fumbles with his keys in the dark. He sheepishly peeks at Connie, who conceals a smirk.

INT. BAXTER HOME - LIVING ROOM - SAME

Benny sits on the couch engrossed in a book -- "FIXING THE FAMILY: 99 TOOLS FOR MARRIAGE & PARENTHOOD REPAIR." Hearing the key in the front door, he hides it under a pillow.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Emily's looking in the fridge when Connie enters in a huff.

EMILY
Hey. How was dinner?

CONNIE
Don't ask.

EMILY
So... Is this a bad time to bring up the whole college thing?

CONNIE
Oh, you mean the whole lying to my face thing? That thing? There's no way I work as hard as I do to give you the best in life, so you can throw it away.

EMILY
Who even said going to an Ivy League school was such a big deal anyway?

CONNIE
Princeton was *your* idea, remember? That's why you took those AP courses... Then a popular boy comes along, and all of a sudden it's "I wanna go to State".

EMILY
Maybe I decided I didn't want to become some cold businesswoman like you.

CONNIE
So instead you're mortgaging your future to follow some boy whose name you won't even remember in five years?

EMILY
How dare you?! Jared and I are in love! Just because your relationship sucks, you have to go and ruin mine, too?!

Emily stomps out. Frustrated, Connie slams the fridge door closed to see... Benny stands behind it.

BENNY
Sounds like we need to talk.

EXT. BACK YARD - MOMENTS LATER

Benny and Connie lay on lounge chairs staring up at the sky.

CONNIE
I told you, I'm *not* feeling anxious. Why do I need to stare at the stars?

BENNY
It's important to realize how small and insignificant we all are -- especially you. That'll help when I tell you Emily's about to lose her virginity.

CONNIE
What?!... How do you know this?

BENNY
I'm not at liberty to say. But if you've met Jared I shouldn't need to tell you that's not a wise decision.

CONNIE
Oh my god... I knew she was growing up fast, but we've always been so open. I thought she'd come to me first.

BENNY
You thought wrong. Allow me to paint a scenario: It's nine months from now and you're a grandma. Congrats. Only, you can't work as much 'cuz you watch the baby while Emily works double-shifts on the pole, using her skillz to pay the billz since Jared ran off.

CONNIE
You made your point. Now what do we do?

EXT. MALL - DAY

Benny leads Connie and Emily past shops and cafes.

BENNY
Thanks for taking time out of your busy schedule, Con... Emily, wasn't it nice of her to make time to spend with you?

EMILY
Sure, whatever.

BENNY
You said your mother doesn't have time for you anymore. Now here she is, and you can't do any better than that?

EMILY
Fine, sorry... Yeah, it's nice. But what are we doing here?

BENNY
Something every gal needs every once in a while to relieve stress and soothe our emotions: a "Girl's Day Out".

BEGIN MONTAGE --

--In a spa, Connie's up to her neck in a MUD BATH, cucumber slices on her eyes. Next to her, is Emily, who raises one cucumber slice to sneak a peek next to her to see... Benny, who's eating his cucumber slices.

--They all lay on their stomachs getting massages -- Connie's relaxed as a HE-MAN works her shoulders, Emily's self-conscious as a BUTCH LESBIAN rubs her lower back, and Benny's nervous as a GAY GUY vigorously massages his butt cheeks.

--They walk out of a hair salon, proudly sporting new do's -- Emily's is a little shorter, Connie's is a little sexier, and Benny's is FEATHERED, 70'S-STYLE.

INT. DRESS SHOP - DAY

Benny and Connie watch Emily spin in a SEXY BLACK DRESS.

EMILY
It's perfect! I love it!

CONNIE
I don't know -- don't you think it's a little short? You said this was for your Spring *Formal*, right?

BENNY
Come on, Mom. This is what all the cool chicks are wearing. Get with the times.

Connie reluctantly nods, giving in. Excited, Emily hugs her, mouthing *"Thank you"* to Benny over her shoulder. He winks.

EXT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Benny, Connie and Emily drink lattes on the patio. Benny looks down at his watch, then stands.

BENNY
Ooops, lost track of time. Gotta go.

EMILY
Where are we going?

BENNY
Not we, me. I've gotta pick up Phillip from rehearsal. See ya on the flip.

CONNIE
But your car's not here.

BENNY
I swiped your keys during the mud bath.

EMILY
Wait. What are we supposed to do?

BENNY
I don't know. Whatever you want. I'll meet you back here in an hour... or so.

Benny takes off. Connie and Emily sit in awkward silence.

INT. COUNTRY DAY ACADEMY - THEATER - DAY

Phillip looks over his script as Mr. Dobney approaches him. Dobney hesitates as he speaks, seemingly reluctant.

MR. DOBNEY
There comes a time in every actor's career when changes are made on a production which he disagrees with. It is how the actor responds which defines his ability to be a true collaborator.

PHILLIP
You think I'm demanding too much from my fellow cast members, don't you? It's just that I have a certain standard I--

MR. DOBNEY
I'm sorry, but I have decided to give your role as Hamlet to Blake Johnson.

Dobney gestures over to BLAKE JOHNSON (16), a big, goofy-looking meathead, standing in the corner, his arm in a SLING.

PHILLIP
The Headmaster's son?! He's not even in the play!

MR. DOBNEY
No, but he injured his arm on the baseball squad. Our esteemed Headmaster thinks he would enjoy substituting drama as his extra-curricular activity.

PHILLIP
But the lead?! He's a complete moron!

MR. DOBNEY
This is the theater, dear boy -- he who controls the budget, controls the cast. Headmaster Johnson is like our producer -- without his money, there is no play.

PHILLIP
But this will *ruin* the play!

MR. DOBNEY
Not if you play the role of Laertes, it won't... Phillip, I'm counting on you to be a team player and make this work. Remember, the show must go on.

INT. CONNIE'S CAR - DAY

Benny drives, a fuming Phillip rides shotgun.

PHILLIP
I'm quitting the play, end of story.

BENNY
So it's all about being number one? What happened to being part of a team? What happened to "The show must go on"?

PHILLIP
"The show" is gonna suck! You should've seen Blake -- he's got less talent than Vin Diesel... If that's even possible. I'm way better than him! It's not fair!

BENNY
Of course not. What's fair? It's not fair my dad neglected me, but you don't hear me complaining, do you?

PHILLIP
Actually, you just did... And it's not the same thing. I worked hard for this.

BENNY
I know, but you can't win all the time.

PHILLIP
It's that kind of defeatist attitude that made my dad such a winner.

BENNY
I guess Gandhi was right -- respect for others isn't something you're born with, it's something that's beaten into you... You know what I think you need? A little "Competition Therapy". Hope you're ready to work up a sweat.

EXT. COFFEE SHOP - SAME

Connie and Emily still sit on the patio as the sun fades. Emily looks around impatiently, as Connie hangs up her cell.

CONNIE
I know he's crazy, yet I let him take my car. Doesn't that make *me* crazy?

EMILY
It's not your fault.

CONNIE
Not my fault? That's a nice change.

EMILY
Please, Mom -- martyr yourself much? I don't blame you for everything.

CONNIE
No, not *everything*, I guess.

Connie smiles, playfully elbowing Emily, who smiles back, breaking the ice. Emily thinks a moment, getting serious.

EMILY
I dunno... It used to be whenever I had a problem, or I needed advice, I could ask you. But now, I feel like you just, like, don't want to be bothered.

CONNIE
You're never a bother, Em. If there's one thing I want you to know, it's that -- I'm always here for you. I know when I was your age, I had a lot questions. About boys, and drinking... And sex.
(beat, fishing)
So... if there's anything you want to ask me, it looks like we have the time.

EMILY
Okay... Let's just say, hypothetically, I was thinking about having sex. Not that I am, so don't freak out. But I am 17. So, just for argument's sake, what would you tell me? Wouldn't you, like, get all Mom-ish, and tell me not to?

CONNIE
Not necessarily. I was 17 myself once. I know what it's like. And I'd tell you sex can be very special, and it can also be a huge mistake.

EMILY
But how do you know which is which?

CONNIE
Unfortunately, I don't know if anyone has the answer to that. But I do have a pretty good hint: The best thing to do is wait until it feels right.

Emily nods, reassured. They both smile, sharing a moment.

EXT. BAXTER HOME - FRONT YARD - EVENING

Benny and Phillip play one-on-one on an adjustable basketball hoop. Benny drives to the rim, BLATANTLY TRAVELING before DUNKING VIOLENTLY ON PHILLIP.

PHILLIP
Hey! That's travelling!

BENNY
Not if the ref doesn't call it.

PHILLIP
What ref?
(Benny just grins)
Okay, I see how it is. Fine.

Phillip runs with the ball, not dribbling at all, around Benny, and all the way to the hoop for a lay-up until... Benny soars over Phillip, SWATTING THE BALL OUT OF THE YARD.

BENNY
Not in my house, white boy!

Frustrated and exhausted, Phillip gives up and heads inside.

BENNY (cont'd)
You hurt? Pull your suck muscle?

PHILLIP
I don't suck! You're bigger and stronger than me! It's not fair!

BENNY
No, it's not. But there's always gonna be someone bigger and stronger, or richer, or better looking, or just luckier -- like maybe because their dad's the headmaster or something.

PHILLIP
Maybe if *my* dad was somebody important--

BENNY
Don't say that. You need to stop being so harsh to your dad all the time.

PHILLIP
Me? I heard you *divorced* your dad!

BENNY
That's different.

PHILLIP
How?

Benny tries to come up with an answer, but can't.

BENNY
Don't change the subject. The point is, this is just the first time you'll get screwed over. If you quit every time, you won't make it far -- believe me, I know. One of the best lessons you can learn in life is nothing's fair. All you can do play the hand you're dealt.

PHILLIP
I swear to God, if you say, “When life gives you lemons, make lemonade”, I’ll kick you in the nuts as hard as I can.

BENNY
Understood. But isn’t that exactly what your dad’s doing? It wasn’t his fault he lost his job. That was unfair, too.

PHILLIP
Yeah, and he gave up after that.

BENNY
No, just the opposite -- he took a job he hates, so he can keep supporting his family. If weak ol’ dad can do that every day, you should at least be willing to give your best in some play.

Phillip thinks about this as a TAXI pulls up. Connie and Emily get out, clutching shopping bags and glaring at Benny.

CONNIE
I can’t believe you stranded us, Benny!

BENNY
Looks like you two made the best of it. Have a little retail therapy, did we?

EMILY
We had to do something to kill the time. You wouldn’t answer your phone!

BENNY
I thought you girls could use some “Isolation Therapy” -- the monks I hung with in Tibet swear by it.

EMILY
We don’t need *you* to get us to spend time together. Do we, Mom?

CONNIE
No. No, we don’t.

Connie and Emily head inside together -- friends again. Watching them, Phillip can’t believe his eyes.

PHILLIP
You’re good.

BENNY
Just figuring that out now? I thought you were supposed to be the smart one.

EXT. DUNCAN'S HOUSE - EVENING

Fred knocks repeatedly on the front door, but no one answers.

FRED
Come on Duncan, I know you're in there. I passed the liquor store delivery guy on my way in. Just talk to me. Please.

The door cracks to reveal a disheveled Duncan in his robe.

DUNCAN
Good god, man! Can't you see I'm in no condition to receive visitors?

FRED
You don't return my messages, and I need the manuscript. No fooling around this time. My livelihood depends on it.

DUNCAN
As does mine. Cutty Sark and escorts don't come cheap, my boy. And unfortunately neither does inspiration.

FRED
You said "a few days", Duncan. That was more than two weeks ago!

DUNCAN
Sorry, ol' chum. But it's like I told you, this is my best work in years.

FRED
It has to be -- you haven't produced anything in years.

DUNCAN
And every moment I spend with you is one I can't spend procrastinating before writing the ending, so you're not doing either of us any favors.

Duncan shuts the door in Fred's face. He sighs and walks off.

INT. BAXTER HOME - LAUNDRY ROOM - EVENING

Connie puts clothes in the dryer as she talks on her cell. Walking by, Fred stops outside the door to listen in.

CONNIE
Thanks, Chase. It means a lot that you care enough to let me sort this out.
(MORE)

CONNIE (cont'd)
(beat, laughs)
You're too funny... I'm sure you say that to all the girls... Okay, bye.

Connie hangs up and turns the dryer on, spotting Fred.

FRED
Chase again? What's that, the third time this week he's called you at home?

CONNIE
Perfect. You picked a great time to become the jealous type, Fred. Because I'm not under enough stress as it is.

FRED
What? Now I'm not spineless *enough*?

INT. KITCHEN - SAME

Benny sits at the kitchen table listening to an AUDIO BOOK on his iPhone and jotting notes.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
The key to understanding your partner is seeing things from their point of view. Try walking a mile in *their* shoes.

When Connie enters with Fred, he removes his headphones.

FRED
We should have him over for dinner. Then you won't have to sneak off to the laundry room to have your little talks.

CONNIE
What's gotten into you, Fred?!

Connie stomps out, leaving Fred and Benny alone.

BENNY
Uh oh. Looks like I might have to make room for you on the couch tonight.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Fred and Connie sit on opposite ends of couch as Benny paces.

BENNY
To help you work through your issues, I'll be using "Role Play" technique.
(MORE)

BENNY (cont'd)
I picked it up from a dominatrix I used to frequent. Not the only thing either.
(winks at Connie)
I'll model desirable behavior in your relationship, so you can see where you need improvement. Tomorrow, I'll be Connie, the next day, Fred. Sound good?

Worried, Fred and Connie look at each other.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - THE NEXT MORNING

Fred sleeps peacefully in bed, waking to see... BENNY LYING NEXT TO HIM, HIS SMILING FACE INCHES FROM FRED'S.

BENNY
When you look at me like that, I feel like I'm the only girl in the world.

Before a bewildered Fred can answer, Benny KISSES HIM ON THE LIPS. Freaked out, Fred jumps out of bed, rubbing his mouth.

FRED
What are you doing?!

BENNY
Just giving my hubby a "Good morning" kiss. What's wrong with that?

FRED
Oh god... This is really going to suck.

BENNY
You say that now, but wait 'til you've tried my blueberry pancakes.

FRED
Look... Blueberry pancakes? Seriously?

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

The Baxters sit at the table as Benny (in an apron that says "WORLD'S BEST MOM") serves up beautiful blueberry pancakes.

BENNY
Enjoy it, kids. Remember, breakfast is the most important meal of the day. And don't forget to have some O.J. -- I squeezed it fresh this morning.

They all "Oooh" and "Ahhh" at that. Connie rolls her eyes.

CONNIE
Show-off.

INT. FRONT HALLWAY - MORNING

As Fred, Connie and the kids head out the door, he hands them each a SACK LUNCH. Phillip's last, and Benny rubs his head.

BENNY
I made a special lunch for my special boy -- PB&J with the crusts cut off.

PHILLIP
I'm allergic to peanut butter.

Benny casually switches Phillip's bag with Fred's.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Benny and the Baxters eat a sumptuous dinner.

BENNY
In addition to slaving over a hot stove to cook up this delicious and healthy meal, I also did the cleaning, the laundry, and grouted all the bathrooms.

CONNIE
Of course, you didn't have that pesky little career thing to worry about.

BENNY
Maybe not, but I have to save a little energy for this frisky one over here.

Benny reaches under the table and grabs Fred's thigh. Fred shoves him off.

BENNY (cont'd)
What? I'm just trying to put some spice back in our relationship.

FRED
We don't have a relationship!

BENNY
Not with that attitude, mister.

Emily and Phillip giggle. Even Connie can't help but smile.

INT./EXT. BAXTER HOME - THE NEXT MORNING

Connie and Fred head off to work, opening the front door to see Benny on a ladder, changing the front porch light bulb.

BENNY
Morning, hon. Just taking care of those chores you wanted me to do.

INT./EXT. CAR - AFTERNOON

Emily drives around her neighborhood. Benny rides shotgun.

BENNY
You're not bad... For a girl. How long have you had your permit?

EMILY
Like a year, at least. I never got my license since Jared always drives.

BENNY
You're not gonna have Jared forever.

EMILY
How do you know?

BENNY
Kids -- so naive. A wise man once said, "Hold on to 16 as long as you can, changes come around real soon, make us women and men."

EMILY
Who said that? Vonnegut?

BENNY
Nope -- Mellencamp, John Cougar. 20th Century American poet. Frankly, I'm surprised you're not more familiar.

They pass Fred, driving the other way, on his way back from work. Seeing Emily driving with Benny, he's shocked.

INT. BAXTER HOME - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Benny and Phillip rehearse Hamlet, using golf clubs as swords. Fred watches them enviously from the doorway.

EXT. IL CIAGO RISTAURANTE - PATIO - NIGHT

Benny and Connie sit at a moonlit table, drinking wine.

CONNIE
This is nice... If I didn't know better I'd say you were trying to seduce me.

BENNY
I'm willing to take this husband/wife thing as far as you are, Con.
(winks)
Like the flowers I sent to your office?

CONNIE
Those were from you?

BENNY
Who did you think they were from? Fred?
(off Connie's hesitation)
Chase perhaps?

CONNIE
It's not what you think. He's made an offer to take my business national. That's actually why Fred and I are fighting. He wants me to turn it down.

BENNY
And what do you want?

CONNIE
Honestly, I don't know anymore. I worked so hard to get it, because we could really use the extra money and...

BENNY
And you want to make sure your kids have every opportunity you didn't.

Connie tears up a bit. Benny re-fills her glass with wine.

BENNY (cont'd)
Here, wine goes great with crying about your childhood trauma, trust me.

CONNIE
I didn't realize I'd have to trade my kids for this career. I'm not built for it. I was happier when I was home with them all the time... I guess that makes me some kind of old-fashioned cliche.

BENNY
Better than lying to yourself to pretend you're not one. When it comes to big decisions, I say ask your head and your heart -- and if they disagree, trust your gut to break the tie.

CONNIE
Maybe it's the wine, but that actually sounded thoughtful. Wise even.

BENNY
I have my moments.

INT. BAXTER HOME - NIGHT

Benny and Connie laugh as they enter the dark house. Tipsy, Connie trips, and Benny catches just her before she falls.

CONNIE
Whoops... I better get out of these heels before I hurt myself... Thanks, Benny. Tonight was just what I needed.

Connie smiles at Benny, who winks back. She stumbles off, and a LAMP IN THE CORNER TURNS ON, revealing Fred sitting there.

FRED
Enjoy your date with my wife?

BENNY
Whoa, I didn't see you lurking there. Yeah, we had a blast -- your ol' lady sure can put away the Shiraz.

Fred stands and approaches Benny, a bit confrontational.

FRED
First I have to worry about that punk Chase moving in on her, and now you?

BENNY
Nah, you got it twisted. I was fending guys off of her all night at the club. She was Big Cougar On Campus. I hope you appreciate what you've got, 'cuz there's plenty of guys out there ready to take over for you if you don't.

FRED
Of course I appreciate her.

BENNY
That's funny, she gave me the distinct impression you're not exactly "taking care of business".

FRED
She said that?

BENNY
Didn't need to -- if there's one thing I know, it's an unsatisfied woman... See, you don't even try to get busy with Connie, 'cuz you don't think you deserve her. You're not "the provider" anymore. She is. So you let her make the first move. Only, she feels like since she wears the pants in the family you think it makes her less of a woman.

FRED
We may be on a cold streak right now, but that's because of this thing with her business. If she'd only listen to me, she wouldn't be so stressed. Then things would get right back to normal.

BENNY
No, Fred! You've got it all wrong. You can't tell a woman what to do. Ever.

FRED
I'm not. I'm only trying to help.

BENNY
Same difference. Women don't want our help, they want to be understood.
(puts an arm around Fred)
See, men think, but women *feel*. A man has a problem, he wants a solution. But a woman wants someone to empathize and offer support. All you have to say is "I see you have a problem. I'm sorry. I'm here for you if you need anything."

FRED
Seriously? That's all they wanna hear?

BENNY
That, and their butt looks good in whatever they're wearing... Come on, Freddy, this is Chick 101, not brain surgery. Just be there for her and everything will take care of itself.
(Fred nods)
(MORE)

BENNY (cont'd)
Okay champ, I've got her all liquored-up and sweet-talked for you, now get in there and close the deal... And let's see some effort out there, huh.

Benny pats him on the butt and shoves him toward the bedroom.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Connie sits on a loveseat, rubbing her sore feet when Fred comes in and sits next to her.

FRED
Here, let me help you with those.

Fred grabs Connie's feet and begins massaging them.

CONNIE
Mmmm. To what do I owe this honor?

FRED
I wanted to make up for pressuring you before. I know you're stressed about this decision, and I'm sorry you're in this position. I want you to know I'm here to support you any way I can.

CONNIE
Oh sweetie, thank you so much. But I've been thinking... The extra money isn't worth missing more time with you and the kids. I can't get that back. Maybe we can still get by if your situation improves like you think it will.

FRED
Either way, I'll stand behind whatever decision you make 100 percent.

Connie smiles, touched. Fred leans in and kisses her. Soon, they're making out like teenagers. Caught up in the moment, Fred scoops her up into his arms, tosses her down on the bed and joins her. Connie giggles, practically purring.

INT. BAXTER HOME - KITCHEN - THE NEXT MORNING

A groggy Benny enters to see Fred and Phillip eating. A whistling Connie cleans up. She greets Benny with a smile.

CONNIE
Morning, sleepyhead. Looks like you need some coffee. I just brewed a fresh pot. Sit down, I'll get you a cup.

Benny sits as Connie cheerfully pours him a cup.

CONNIE (cont'd)
I was up early, so I made everybody lunch. They're in the fridge, just grab the bag with your name on it.

Connie cozies up to Fred, leans down, and gives him a big kiss. Benny looks at Phillip -- *How about that?* Connie exits the room humming happily. Benny grins at Fred.

BENNY
Connie's pretty chipper. Looks like somebody pushed the right buttons.

FRED
Couldn't have done it without my wingman.

Fred offers his fist, which Benny answers with a pound.

BENNY
That's my dog.

PHILLIP
You do realize I'm old enough to know what you're talking about, don't you?

The guys shut up as Connie pokes her head back in.

CONNIE
Phillip, if you want a ride, get your things. We've got to go soon.

PHILLIP
If it's okay, I'll get a ride with dad.

Everybody's pleasantly surprised at that, especially Fred.

FRED
Sure... On the ride, maybe we can even work on your lines for the play.

PHILLIP
Don't push your luck, Dad.

INT. COUNTRY DAY ACADEMY - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Jared laces up his cleats when Emily storms in, blowing past his surprised TEAMMATES -- all in various stages of undress.

EMILY
So when were you going to tell me?

JARED
Tell you what?

EMILY
Oh, I don't know. Maybe how Bridget Swann asked you to Spring Formal! And, how you didn't tell her no!

JARED
In my defense, I didn't say yes either.

Emily punches Jared in the arm. Hard.

JARED (cont'd)
Oww!

As his Teammates snicker, Jared leads Emily into the showers.

JARED (cont'd)
Relax! What's your problem?

EMILY
My problem?! You're the one considering going with that slut and not me!

JARED
C'mon babe, put yourself in my position -- I've been waiting a while for you to... you know. And this is my last Spring Formal. I want it to be memorable -- if you know what I mean.

EMILY
So you're willing to throw away everything we have for one night?

JARED
It's a big night. The guys and I chipped in on a hotel room. I don't wanna waste it... Maybe you don't love me as much as you say you do.
(beat)
I've gotta get out to practice.

Jared exits, leaving Emily to think about that.

INT. BAXTER HOME - DAY

Benny sits on the couch watching an NEW AGEY INSTRUCTION VIDEO called "ME & MY DAD", depicting FATHER AND SON CARTOON BEARS participating in a variety of activities.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
There's no shortcut to bonding.
Spending time together is crucial.

As he watches the Father and Son Bears go fishing, a tear appears in Benny's eye.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Chuck, appearing a little healthier, sits up in bed as Benny fetches him a glass of water.

BENNY
There's your water, Dad. Can I get you anything else? Something to eat maybe?

CHUCK
No, no. I'm fine.

PATRICK
Maybe we should let Dad get some rest.

CHUCK
Nonsense. I've got my sea-legs back under me now... I swear, you two are like a couple of nurses. Ugly ones.

Thinking for a moment, Chuck appears a bit emotional.

CHUCK (cont'd)
I want you to know, Benny -- it's nice to have you around again. I mean that.

BENNY
I'm just glad I got the chance, Pop.

Benny and Chuck share a moment. Patrick looks happy for them.

BENNY (CONT'D) (cont'd)
You know, I've been doing a lot of thinking about our situation recently, and I decided I'm ready to forgive you.

CHUCK
Forgive me? For what?

BENNY
You know -- the way you treated me after Mom died.

CHUCK
Oh God. Are you still on about that?

BENNY
No, I'm not. That's the point -- I'm putting it behind me. I'm moving on.

CHUCK
Glad to hear it. This heart attack has been a wake up call for me -- I can't go full throttle anymore. And Patrick can't handle the whole load himself. That's why I'd like you to come work for LaRoche Nautical, Benny... And take over for me once I retire.

BENNY/PATRICK
Me?/Him?!

CHUCK
Sorry Patrick, if I need an "i" dotted or a "t" crossed, you're my man. But a leader needs imagination and passion -- two things you don't have. Benny, immature and misguided as he may be, is a Big Idea Guy. He has potential for greatness.

BENNY
I knew it!

CHUCK
Don't get ahead of yourself, Benny. You're going to need to grow up fast. And lots of training, starting now.

BENNY
But Dad, I have a job. Actually, I think it might be my true calling.

CHUCK
I give your "true calling" 30 days before you're back, begging for seed money to start some pyramid scheme.

BENNY
That hurts, Dad. This job gives me a purpose. And it's allowed me to get past your abuse, and turn the negatives from my upbringing into a way to bring positive change to others.

CHUCK
Abuse?! I never laid a hand on you!

BENNY
Actions hit harder than fists, Pop. And emotional scars never heal. Ever.

CHUCK
Oh, for the love of God! Enough with the touchy-feely, Dr. Phil crap!

BENNY
Hey now, there's no need to drag Dr. Phil into this. The man's a national treasure.

CHUCK
It's time to be a man and take some responsibility, Benny! I'm asking you to join the family business! If you want to help another family more than your own, you're no son of mine!

As Chuck yells, the machines monitoring him BEEP and SOUND ALARMS. Benny's worried as NURSES rush over to check on him.

BENNY
Dad? Are you okay?

PATRICK
You better go, Benny. For Dad's safety.

Benny walks out, looking back at Chuck with worry.

INT. BAXTER HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Fred cooks dinner while a depressed-looking Benny watches.

FRED
Connie should be home any minute. Would you mind setting the table for me?

BENNY
You're not the boss of me.

Fred sighs and shoots Benny a look as Phillip enters.

PHILLIP
Dinner smells good. When do we eat?

FRED
In about 15 minutes. In the meantime, can you please set the table?

PHILLIP
Sure, no problem.

Benny watches Phillip grab plates and head out of the room.

BENNY
Wow, that was easy. Seems like things are a lot better between you two.

FRED
Yeah. I'd almost go so far as to say he's actually showing me respect. I didn't know kids still did that.

BENNY
You know how you can really win him over? Tomorrow is "Take Your Kid To Work Day" -- you should bring him in with you, let him see the job you do.

FRED
Let him see my tiny office, and the boss I hate? How is that going to help?

BENNY
What better way to show him how much you sacrifice for this family? Besides, there's no substitute for bonding.

FRED
I dunno. It's already going so well. I don't want to screw things up.

BENNY
Okay, but don't come crying to me when he's hanging out in truck stop bathroom stalls to make up for his lack of a strong male role model.
(off Fred's look)
Okay, slight exaggeration, but I did you right with Connie, didn't I?

INT. PALMER PUBLISHING - HALLWAY - THE NEXT MORNING

Fred leads Phillip on a tour of the office, pointing the way.

FRED
This is the break room... Don't mind the smell, that's just Hakim's lunch.

Phillip laughs at that, as they turn into Fred's office.

FRED (cont'd)
And this is my office... Or, as I like to call it, "the closet".

PHILLIP
It's not *that* small.

FRED
You're right, it could be worse... It's nice to have you come in with me today. I'm glad you want to see where I work.

PHILLIP
Beats school any day.

FRED
Really? Wanna trade?

INT. BAXTER HOME - BACK YARD - DAY - SAME

Benny lays on a deck chair, slathered in baby oil, sunning himself, when he hears a DING on the laptop next to him.

BENNY
Uh-oh, somebody's IM-ing in class.
(looks at laptop)
So what's the latest, Em?

CLOSE ON the computer screen, which displays EMILY'S IM CHAT:

BeckaBot: what r u doin about the jared sitch?

EmBax: idk... i don't wanna lose him but not sure if ready

BeckaBot: wtf! what r u waiting for?! if u dont, bridget will

EmBax: yeah, maybe ur rite

BENNY (cont'd)
No, Em! She's not right! She's the opposite of right! She's wrong!

INT. PALMER PUBLISHING - FRED'S OFFICE - DAY

Fred works at his desk while Phillip reads a manuscript. Todd stalks into the office, confronting Fred.

TODD
Okay Baxter, judgement day is here. Where's my Duncan Smiley manuscript?
(notices Phillip)
Who's this, another prospective author?

FRED
No, this is my son, Phillip.

TODD
I know we don't pay you much, Baxter, but can't you at least afford day care?

FRED
Of course. I just figured since it was "Bring Your Kid to Work Day" and all I'd show him what I do for a living.

TODD
Considering you don't do much, that shouldn't take long. But "Take Your Kid To Work Day" is next month. I should know, my money-grubbing ex sticks me with the rugrat every year.

FRED
Are you sure? I thought it was--

TODD
Stop trying to change the subject! Where's my goddamn book?!
(off Fred's embarrassed look)
That's it, Baxter, I'm done with your ineptitude. Consider this your two weeks notice -- unless by some miracle, you sack up and get that book by then. Good luck at the unemployment office.
(to Phillip)
I hope you take after your mom, kid.

With that, Todd stomps out. Fred is mortified, but not as much as Phillip, who can't even look Fred in the eye.

EXT. COUNTRY DAY ACADEMY - PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

Benny sits in his car, wearing HEADPHONES connected to a PARABOLIC MIC, which he points at Emily and Jared as they get in his Range Rover. We HEAR them through Benny's headphones.

EMILY
Didn't you say your parents are gonna be home late tonight?

JARED
Yeah. Why? What're you thinking?

Emily leans over and starts necking on Jared. He grins, getting the idea, and PEELS OUT of the lot. Benny quickly follows them, pulling out his cell and dialing.

BENNY
Connie! Thank god I got you! Emily's virginity is at Def-Con 1! Get over to Jared's house ASAP! This is not a drill! I repeat, this is not a drill!

EXT. JARED'S HOUSE - DAY

Benny sits in his car, his headphones on, pointing his mic toward a BIG HOUSE. Connie knocks on the window -- in front of the mic. Benny YELLS IN PAIN, throwing off the headphones.

CONNIE
What are you doing out here?

BENNY
You mean before you totalled my eardrums? I was trying to save your daughter from a devastating heartbreak.

CONNIE
And apparently spying on her to do it.

BENNY
Desperate times call for desperate measures, Con. That's why I called you.

CONNIE
I thought about it on the way over, and I don't want to interfere. Emily's old enough to make her own decisions. I have to trust she makes the right ones.

BENNY
You obviously haven't seen the Lifetime movie 'Mother, May I Sleep With Danger' starring Tori Spelling. Believe me, Emily's about to make a big mistake.

CONNIE
Well, I'm sure it won't be her last. But at least it'll be her own choice.

BENNY
You don't understand. That punk pressured her by threatening to take some other girl to their Formal.

CONNIE
How do you even know this?
(looks down at microphone)
Nevermind... Are you sure about this?

BENNY
Trust me, he's bad news. If you don't get in there right now to save her, you'll regret it. And so will she.

INT. JARED'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - SAME

Jared and Emily make out like crazy on his bed when the DOORBELL RINGS. Jared doesn't stop kissing her.

EMILY
Shouldn't you get that?

JARED
Don't worry about it.

After a moment, there's LOUD KNOCKING at the door.

EMILY
Are you sure? It sounds important.

JARED
It's probably just a telemarketer.

EXT. JARED'S HOUSE - SAME

Getting no answer, Connie walks around the side of the house, peering in windows, unable to see anything. Finding an OPEN WINDOW, she thinks a moment, then climbs through it.

CONNIE
I can't believe I'm doing this.

INT. BEDROOM - SAME

Jared and Emily begin clumsily removing each other's clothes when they hear a VASE BREAK downstairs.

EMILY
What was that?

JARED
Probably the cat. She's blind -- always breaking stuff.

Jared paws at Emily, who doesn't seem quite as into it now.

EXT. JARED'S HOUSE - SAME

Benny frantically looks from window to window of Jared's house through his binoculars for any sign of Connie inside.

BENNY
C'mon, Con. Where are you?

Benny turns up the volume on his headphones to hear better.

JARED (V.O.)
What's wrong, babe?

EMILY (V.O.)
I'm sorry... I know I said I was ready, but... It doesn't feel right.

BENNY
Uh oh... Abort, Connie! Crisis averted!

Benny jumps out of his car and runs around the side of the house. He sees the open window, and DIVES IN, COMMANDO-STYLE.

INT. BEDROOM - SAME

Emily gets up off Jared's bed and straightens her clothes.

JARED
This is getting really lame, Em!

EMILY
I know, I'm sorry... But I need to wait until it feels right. And right now--

Just then, Connie BURSTS THROUGH THE DOOR in a panic.

CONNIE
Emily, stop! Don't do it!

EMILY
Mom?! What are you doing in here?! Were you *following* me?!

CONNIE
Ummm... I... I was only trying to--

Benny appears in the doorway, out of breath.

BENNY
Whoops, too late.

EMILY
You two are in this together?! I can't believe you broke into Jared's house!

JARED
Okay, this is really freaking me out. I don't know what's up with your family, Em, but I really don't wanna get involved... Sorry, but it's over.

Tears well up in Emily's eyes, and she storms out. As she does, Connie turns to stare daggers at an embarrassed Benny.

BENNY
This totally did not go down the way I envisioned it.

INT. BAXTER HOME - NIGHT

Fred passes the living room, spotting Benny's cardboard cut-out. He glares into its lifeless eyes. Enraged, he PUNCHES and KICKS IT FURIOUSLY, finally stopping as a crying Emily storms through the door, followed by Connie and Benny.

EMILY
I've never been so embarrassed! Jared's gonna take Bridget to Formal! All because you couldn't trust me!

CONNIE
I'm sorry, honey. I do trust you... But Benny convinced me it was an emergency.

BENNY
I know it's hard to hear, Em, but Jared was trying to take advantage of you.

EMILY
So what if he was?! That's *my* choice!
(to Connie)
First Princeton, now this! I don't need you making my decisions! Especially since you don't even care what I want!

CONNIE
You're wrong, Emily, I do care. I'm turning down an offer to supply Starbucks because it means more time away. I want to be with you before you go off to school. Wherever you go.

Phillip appears, chiming in angrily.

PHILLIP
Turning down Starbucks? Are you insane?! Do you know how much their branding is worth in the global marketplace?! They're printing money!

BENNY
Okaaay, I think that's enough CNBC for awhile, Phillip.

PHILLIP
That is so fiscally irresponsible! Yale isn't cheap, you know! How will you afford to send me after Dad's fired?

Shocked, Connie looks at Fred, who drops his head in defeat.

FRED
You had to bring that up now.

PHILLIP
Somebody has look after this family's finances. The adults clearly aren't!

CONNIE
What is he talking about, Fred?

FRED
Listen, I'm not fired... yet. I still have a couple weeks to save my job.

CONNIE
If you're on such shaky ground, why did you tell me things were looking up?

FRED
Things were fine... Until Benny started sabotaging me with Todd.

CONNIE
Well, I'm glad I found this out before I turned down the offer, and lost any chance of keeping this family afloat.

EMILY
Wait, now you're taking it? Great, so I guess that whole "reconnecting" speech was a big fat lie! I can't wait to leave for college! This family sucks!

With that, Emily bolts from the room. Benny looks at Connie.

BENNY
If you want, I can go talk to her.

CONNIE
I think you've done enough, Benny.

Connie follows Emily out of the room. Phillip looks to Fred, shakes his head, and exits, leaving Benny and Fred alone.

FRED
Thanks Benny, that "Take Your Kid To Work Day" idea was a real winner.

BENNY
Maybe it's just me, but I'm detecting a little sarcasm.

FRED
You want sarcasm? I'll give you sarcasm. You're a *great* Family Monitor, Benny. You've helped us *so* much.

BENNY
Okay. You're unhappy. I get it.

FRED
No Benny, I don't think you do get it. Because of you, my whole family hates me... And each other. And I thought we had problems *before* you got here.

Fred shakes his head and walks out, leaving a downcast Benny.

INT. BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A fuming Fred walks in and takes a seat on the bed. Connie and Emily can be heard arguing through the walls. Fred can't take it anymore -- he reaches for the phone and dials 4-1-1.

FRED
The number for Social Services, please.

INT. SOCIAL SERVICES - SUPERVISOR'S OFFICE - MORNING

Benny pleads his case to McGuckin, seated behind his desk.

BENNY
This is just a speedbump, boss. I've got this family right where I want 'em. All I need is another week, and I'll--

SUPERVISOR MCGUCKIN
Are you kidding me?! You were *living* with these people! Threats, harassment, surveillance -- all violations of department policy. Not to mention several laws. If it weren't such a black eye for the department, you'd be brought up on charges.

BENNY
Hold on. I admit I bent some rules, but it was all in the interest of healing.

SUPERVISOR MCGUCKIN
You stepped over the line, LaRoche! You broke Rule #1: You let it get personal. You should've stuck to The Manual. I warned you about your crazy theories.

BENNY
I thought that was one of those “wink wink, nudge nudge” kinda warnings.

SUPERVISOR MCGUCKIN
Do I look like a “wink wink, nudge nudge” kinda guy? Last time I checked, I was a “do exactly what I say, or I’ll have your ass” kinda guy.

BENNY
But boss, this job is all I have. It’s what I meant to do. I need this family just as much as they need me. If you take it away from me, I’ll have to go work for my dad. And there’s no way our relationship can stand that stress.

SUPERVISOR MCGUCKIN
At least you’ll only be screwing up your own family. Now hand over your badge and get the hell outta my office before I call security.

Realizing he’s beat, Benny reluctantly places his ID badge on McGuckin’s desk and walks out, looking like a beaten man.

INT. LAROCHE NAUTICAL - CHUCK’S OFFICE - DAY

Benny enters to find Chuck walking on a treadmill.

BENNY
Hey, Pop. You’re looking better.

CHUCK
Make it quick, Benjamin. I’m busy.

BENNY
I’ve been thinking a lot about that job offer. Maybe it’s time I grew up and got myself a real job.

CHUCK
You said Family Monitor was a real job.

BENNY
It is. But it’s helped me realize I need to put my own family first. So I’m ready to step up and take the reigns of the company just like you asked.

CHUCK
Son, I've got good news and bad news. The good news is, I'm well on the road to a full recovery. The bad news is, the idea of you running this business isn't nearly as appealing now that I'm off the morphine drip.

BENNY
But you said I have imagination and passion. You said I'm a "Big Idea Guy".

CHUCK
Did you not hear the part where I said I was high as a kite on morphine?

BENNY
Can't you at least give me some kind of job? I just wanna do my part to help the family business.

CHUCK
You can't fool me, Benjamin, I know you too well. You're quitting again. Like you quit everything. Like you tried to quit this family.

BENNY
I thought we got past that.

CHUCK
Maybe you did, but not me. I can't stand quitters. And I won't have one in my company -- even if it is my own son.

BENNY
But I didn't quit! I got fired!

CHUCK
Bah! That's just another way you quit -- break all the rules, until you force them to quit you. If you really wanted that job, you wouldn't let them fire you! You think I got where I am by taking "no" for an answer? If you ever want to get anywhere, you won't either!

Defeated, Benny goes to leave, stopping at the door.

BENNY
Wait. If I leave now, aren't I taking "no" for an answer -- from you?

CHUCK
No.

BENNY
Are you sure? Because--

CHUCK
I said, “No!”

EXT. LAROCHE NAUTICAL - PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

A bummed Benny trudges to his car when he’s met by Patrick.

BENNY
Don’t worry, Patrick, the kingdom’s yours. Dad just told me to get lost. Again.

PATRICK
I don’t know where you got the idea I’m out to get you, but I’m not. I love you, Ben. You’re my brother... And Dad may not show it, but he loves you, too. Heck, sometimes I wish he cared about me the way he does about you.

BENNY
What’re you talking about? He hates me!

PATRICK
No, he’s just disappointed. He knows what to expect from me -- I’m boring and dependable. But you, I think he sees a lot of Mom in you. That’s why he pushes you so hard -- he thinks you’re special.

Benny is surprised -- that gives him a whole new perspective.

PATRICK (cont’d)
Don’t give up on him, Ben. Trust me, he hasn’t given up on you.

INT. BAXTER HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Benny packs his things, looking sadly at the items he collects (the sex doll, Judge’s wig, rasta hat). The phone rings. Benny answers it reflexively.

BENNY
Hello.

SUPERVISOR MCGUCKIN (V.O.)
Hello, Mr. Baxter. This is Lester McGuckin, Department of Social Services.
(MORE)

SUPERVISOR MCGUCKIN (V.O.) (cont'd)
Thank you for reporting your unfortunate experience with your Family Monitor, Benjamin LaRoche. I wanted to let you know, your case has been reviewed by the court, and settled in your favor. Please accept our deepest apologies for any inconvenience.

Benny thinks a moment, then disguises his voice.

BENNY
Thank you. Good day, sir.
(hangs up)
Sorry boss, but LaRoche's don't take "no" for an answer.

Benny starts unpacking.

INT. HOTEL BALLROOM - DAY

A packed audience watches a CHEESY SELF-HELP GURU on stage.

GURU
The key to making the most of our relationships is first making the most of ourselves. We all must travel on our own spiritual journeys to discover who we truly are -- and can be.

In the crowd, Benny is rapt with attention, eating this up.

INT. DINING ROOM - EVENING

Benny and the Baxters sit around the table silently eating dinner. The tension is palpable. Benny clears his throat.

BENNY
Look, there's obviously a lot of anger in the room, and I know why. Mistakes were made, nobody can deny that. And the healing can't begin until the offending party apologizes... So, go ahead whenever you're ready.

FRED
Wait. You want *us* to apologize?!

BENNY
Just whoever ratted me out to my colleagues. I mean, what did you think they'd do -- fire me or something?
(forces a laugh, beat)
Relax, I'm just kidding.
(MORE)

BENNY (cont'd)
No hard feelings, really. I realize I may have made a few small errors in judgement.

EMILY
Uh, you think? Like stalking me?

BENNY
Okay, I deserve that. But I want you to know, everything I did was with your best interests at heart. Still, I know I screwed up, and I wanna make things right.

FRED
I wish you'd start by quitting all the head games you've been playing.

CONNIE
Exactly. How can you possibly expect us to open up and trust you if you can't return the favor?

PHILLIP
Seriously. Instead of all the tricks, just tell us what you really think.

This makes an impact on Benny, who nods.

BENNY
What can I say? You're absolutely right. Thank you, Baxters. I promise, from now on, you're gonna see a new, improved, open and honest Benny.
(beat, emotional)
You know, after all we've been through together, I feel like I'm part of the family now -- like the fifth Baxter.

This is met with eye rolls and sighs by the Baxters.

BENNY (cont'd)
Come on, don't quit on me. The finish line's just ahead. This is the where you gotta dig deep and re-dedicate. Like when Rocky beat Apollo in that beach race in 'Rocky III'. Minus the short-shorts and raging homoeroticism.
(beat)
So, what do you say, Baxters?

CONNIE
Do we have a choice?

BENNY
As a matter of fact... No.

EXT./INT. BENNY'S CAR - DAY

Benny drives Phillip through a RUNDOWN URBAN NEIGHBORHOOD.

PHILLIP
What are we doing in this neighborhood, buying crack?

BENNY
Our talk the other night really made me think. Your feedback inspired me to take each of you on your very own, personalized "Spiritual Journey". Think of it as a field trip -- for your soul.

Benny pulls over at a CONSTRUCTION SITE in the ghetto.

PHILLIP
Don't stop! That makes us 100 times more likely to get car-jacked.

BENNY
Why would these people car-jack us, Phillip? We're here to help them. This is Habitat for Humanity -- they build homes for the less fortunate. I want you to see just how good you have it with your family... See, that's me being open and honest.

INT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

Phillip halfheartedly paints a wall and looks over to see Benny talking with a MOM, DAD, and SON (about Phillip's age). The family starts working as well, as Benny re-joins Phillip.

PHILLIP
Who are they? Another family you monitor?

BENNY
No. They're gonna be living here in one of these places we're building.

PHILLIP
Here? Why? They don't look poor.

BENNY
See the dad there -- Frank? He hurt his back on a construction job.
(MORE)

BENNY (cont'd)
He can't work now, so he lives off a disability check which barely pays the bills.

Phillip watches the family as the Son and Dad work happily side by side, the Son playfully flicking paint at the Dad.

BENNY (cont'd)
Too bad you and your dad don't get along like that, huh?...
You know, he only takes crap at his job 'cuz he wants to make sure you have the best of everything. And maybe he'd show a little more confidence in himself if you showed some confidence in him.

Phillip thinks about that, looking over at the other family.

EXT. PRINCETON UNIVERSITY CAMPUS - DAY

Benny leads a spellbound Emily around campus, full of IVY-COVERED BUILDINGS and STUDENTS heading every which way.

BENNY
I know you resent your mom and I for pushing you towards Princeton and away from Jared, but it's only 'cuz we know you deserve better. I wanted you to see what you'd be missing.

Emily is speechless, taking it all in -- especially the boys. A CUTE OLDER GUY (21) smiles at her as he passes.

BENNY (cont'd)
See, you've been in the minors all this time. This right here is "The Show".

INT. REGISTAR'S OFFICE - DAY

Emily pages through a class curriculum handbook.

EMILY
Wow, they have over 20 classes in Environmental Studies alone.

BENNY
You won't get that at State. Though, to be fair, I hear the Beer Pong Tourney at the Sig Ep house is pretty sick.

INT. COFFEE HOUSE - DAY

Benny leads Emily into this bohemian-type joint, packed with STUDENTS talking and studying.

BENNY
I can see it now: It's finals week, and you're pulling an all-nighter all hopped-up on lattes, when Foster, the cool guy from class, walks in. You talk about Hybrids and Paris, and before you know it, it's morning and you haven't studied a lick. But you don't care 'cuz you just met the love of your life.

Emily laughs as they approach the counter and read the menu.

BENNY (cont'd)
Look, they even have vegetarian options. How sweet is that?

The EMO-HUNK (20) behind the counter hears this and smiles.

EMO-HUNK
I highly recommend the tofu burger. It;s my favorite -- I'm vegan.

Emily blushes at the attention, obviously attracted to him.

EXT./INT. BENNY'S CAR - DAY

Benny takes an excited Emily on the long drive back home.

EMILY
--There was such a great energy there. And everyone seemed so into what they were doing, or talking about.

BENNY
See? Told you. Two weeks there and you won't remember who Jared even was.

EMILY
I know... It's just hard to see him with Bridget every day. And now I don't even have anybody to take me to Formal.

BENNY
I think maybe I can dig you up a date.

EXT. MOUNTAIN TRAIL - DAY

Benny leads Connie down a winding path through a forest.

CONNIE
A sweat lodge? What for? And why wasn't I allowed to eat for 12 hours?

BENNY
To clean out your system of all toxins. The "enlightenment ceremony" cleanses your mind and body. It changed my life.

CONNIE
And we're sure that's a good thing?

BENNY
Trust me, this will give you a whole new perspective on all your problems.

CONNIE
I don't need perspective. I know what I have to do -- take the offer. Sure, I'd rather be home with my family more, but that's just not an option right now.

BENNY
Don't limit yourself. That's what this journey is all about -- learning to relax and let the world open up to you.

CONNIE
What, you mean like it teaches you to think outside the box, or something?

BENNY
No, it'll teach you to forget every stupid cliche like "thinking outside the box" you've ever heard, and *really* open up your mind.

They reach an old NATIVE AMERICAN CAMPGROUND by a CAVE.

EXT. CAMPGROUND - MONTAGE

--Benny and Connie sit inside a TEE-PEE close to a FIRE, draped in WET TREE BARK. A NATIVE AMERICAN SHAMAN fans a GREENISH SMOKE all over them. Connie looks a little worried.

--Benny, Connie, and the Shaman sit in a bubbling HOT SPRING, meditating. Connie's eyes are closed, her arms spread wide, looking relaxed... Until the Shaman stands up -- STARK NAKED.

--Inside the CAVE, Connie and Benny sit Indian-style, IN THEIR UNDERWEAR, and DRIPPING WITH SWEAT. The Shaman pours water on hot coals, causing the cave to fill with steam.

--The Shaman ladles cups of MURKY BROWN LIQUID out of a pot. He motions for Connie to drink, but she looks scared. She looks to Benny to see he's already chugging down his cup.

--A SERIES OF SHOTS AS TIME ELAPSES:

In the cave, Connie and Benny both drift in and out of consciousness -- LAUGHING HYSTERICALLY one moment, SOBBING the next, then VOMITING. Meanwhile, the Shaman sits nearby, reading '*Us Weekly*'. By the end, Connie is down to her bra and panties, dancing around like she's tripping on something.

INT. BENNY'S CAR - MORNING

Benny drives them back to civilization. He and Connie are both disheveled, but she's happy and energetic.

CONNIE
That was maybe the single weirdest experience of my life, but things seem so much clearer to me now! I realized something: Success can't guarantee you happiness, but if you're happy, then you're automatically a success.

BENNY
Wow, Connie, that's pretty deep.

CONNIE
What I never saw was, Starbucks doesn't want me, they want my muffins. I could just sell them the recipes. Sure, I'd lose ownership, which might cost me money down the road, but the lump sum now would let me be at home -- at least until the kids are away at school.
(beat, realizing)
Thank you so much for this, Benny... But I do have one question: What in god's name was in that tea?

INT. THE RUSTED CHAIN - NIGHT

A dive bar filled with a motley crew of BIKERS and BADASSES. Benny leads in a wary Fred. All eyes turn to them curiously.

FRED
Uh... Are you sure you want to get a beer *here*? I think I saw an Applebee's a couple exits back on the Interstate.

BENNY
Come on, Fred, there's nothing to be scared of... As long as you steer clear of the glory hole in the men's room.

LATER

Fred and Benny drink while Benny puts a song in the jukebox.

FRED
I have to hand it to you -- I've heard great things about these "Spiritual Journeys" from the family. I'm kind of excited... So, what's mine all about?

BENNY
Funny you should ask.

Just then, "The Eye of the Tiger" plays on the jukebox.

BENNY (cont'd)
The Eye of the Tiger, Fred. Confidence. Killer instinct. I know you had it when you tracked down Connie at that game. But somewhere along the line you lost it, and now life's pushing you around -- your boss, that author, me... You can't be afraid of getting knocked down, or you'll never stand up to a fight.

FRED
Okay, maybe you're right. But what does that have to do with us being here?

BENNY
Ever seen 'Road House'?

Benny reaches over and GRABS A BADASS BIKER'S ASS as he passes by Fred. The Biker turns to see Fred looking at him and gets right up in his face, SHOVING him.

BADASS BIKER
You grab my ass, fruitcake?

FRED
No! It was him!

BENNY
It's okay, Fred. You can tell him.
(to Biker)
He thinks your cute. In fact, he was just telling me how he'd love to go for a ride on your hog -- in more ways than one. Isn't that right, Fred?

FRED
No! I don't even wanna *see* your hog!

BADASS BIKER
What's wrong with my hog?! You think you're better than me or something?!

The Biker throws a PUNCH at Fred, who DUCKS just in time, the Biker's fist SLAMMING THROUGH THE JUKEBOX, stopping it.

MASSIVE DIRTBAG
Hey, I was listening to that!

The Massive Dirtbag PUNCHES OUT the Badass Biker, whose FRIENDS rush to his aid, SWINGING WILDLY. Soon, it's a FULL-ON MELEE. Fred DUCKS and WEAVES to avoid being punched. He DIVES UNDER A TABLE to hide, then makes a DASH FOR THE DOOR.

EXT. PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Fred hurries out the door, running into a grinning Benny.

BENNY
Was that awesome or what?! I thought that guy was gonna kill you!

FRED
That's because he was, you moron! What were you thinking?!

BENNY
I was just trying to get you to stand up for yourself. You can't succeed in life unless you confront your problems head-on. Life's like a bully, or that biker -- it plays on your fears, and the only way to defeat it is to punch it in the mouth.

FRED
Oh, you mean like this?

Fred PUNCHES BENNY IN THE MOUTH, dropping him to the ground. Dazed, Benny looks up at Fred, smiling through BLOODIED LIPS.

BENNY
See Freddy, I knew you had it in you!

As Benny gets to his feet, Fred looks suddenly invigorated.

FRED
You're right! That was exactly what I needed! Hell, let's get back in there!

Fired up, Fred heads toward the bar. Benny pulls him back.

BENNY
Whoa! Let's not get crazy, Swayze!

EXT./INT. DUNCAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Fred pounds on the door until Duncan finally opens it. Fred pushes past him, stomping into the house with purpose.

DUNCAN
Frederick? Good god, man! It's the middle of the goddamn night!

FRED
I know you're up, Duncan. The only question is, are you writing?

DUNCAN
A writer's always writing, my boy. We--

FRED
Save the BS, Duncan. Time for a reality check. I'm the only editor who believes you've got another novel in you.

DUNCAN
That seems a bit harsh.

Fred grabs his by his robe and shoves him up against the wall, getting right in his face.

FRED
Let make this real simple: If you don't finish the book this week, I'm out of a job. That means there won't be one person left who'll return your calls. You'll officially be a has-been, and when you die -- alone, unloved, and soaked in liquor -- you might not even warrant an obituary. Got it?

DUNCAN
(truly shaken by this)
Okay. Okay. You've made your point.

INT. COUNTRY DAY ACADEMY - GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

The gym is decorated with STREAMERS and BALLOONS, and filled with TEENS in FORMAL WEAR. Jared and Bridget hold court with the COOL KIDS when there's a stir -- all eyes shift to see a gorgeous, confident Emily enter, walking arm in arm with --

Benny, who's had a makeover -- faux-hawk, guy-liner, wearing a sleek Armani suit. Everyone BUZZES ("Who's that older guy?"). Suddenly, Emily is the talk of the dance.

LATER

All eyes are on Emily and Benny as they show off ELABORATE MOVES on the dance floor, twerking it (they've obviously been practicing). They wow the crowd, who circle around, cheering them on.

Jealous, Jared stares at Emily. Bridget notices, and fumes.

BRIDGET
If you want Miss Geek Chic so bad, you can have her! I don't know what I'm doing with you anyway -- I can date college guys!

Bridget storms off, and Jared makes bee-line right for Emily as she takes a break to grab some punch.

JARED
Hey, Em... Can we talk?

EMILY
Umm... Sure.

JARED
Listen, I've been thinking, and maybe I put too much pressure on you before. You're important to me, and I'm willing to wait for you. To feel right, I mean.

EMILY
That's sweet, Jared, but I'm heading to Princeton in the Fall, and I don't wanna do the whole long-distance thing. Especially with all those hot, brainy Ivy League guys all around. Good luck at State.

Emily walks off, her head held high, leaving a crushed Jared.

INT. BAXTER HOME - NIGHT

A bubbly Emily enters to find Connie in the living room.

CONNIE
You're home a little early, aren't you? Did everything go alright at Formal?

Without a word, Emily walks up to Connie and gives her a hug.

EMILY
You were totally right about Jared. I don't know why even I bothered -- he's *so* beneath me... Besides, there'll be much better guys at Princeton.

CONNIE
Oh honey, I'm so excited for you!

Thrilled, Connie hugs Emily tightly. Watching from the doorway, Benny gets misty and joins in for a three-way hug.

INT. BAXTER HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Fred sits on the couch watching TV when Phillip walks in, dressed in his SHAKESPEAREAN COSTUME for the play.

FRED
There he is. If I didn't know better, I'd think you were Hamlet himself.

PHILLIP
I wish... But I guess it could be worse -- I could be Ophelia.
(beat, coy)
I know it's only a dress rehearsal, but for some reason I'm nervous. Would you mind running some lines before we go?

FRED
I think I can manage that.

Fred beams with pride as... The doorbell RINGS.

FRED (cont'd)
Hold on. I'll be right back, I promise.

Fred answers the door to find nothing but a PACKAGE on the doorstep. Fred picks it up and opens it to reveal --

FRED (cont'd)
Oh my God... Duncan's manuscript.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Fred talks on the phone as Phillip waits patiently.

FRED
I found it on my doorstep. Duncan must've had it messengered over...
(hesitates, looks at Phillip)
Now? I can't. I have plans with my son.
(beat)
You've already waited this long, Todd, I think you can wait another day.
(beat, defiant)
If that's what you need to do, then do it! I'm sick of being bullied! If you don't want to treat me with respect, I'll find someone else who will!

Fred hangs up the phone, and turns to Phillip.

FRED (cont'd)
You ready to run some lines, or what?

Impressed, Phillip grins at his dad.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Fred and Connie lay in bed. She's watching the news and he's reading the manuscript. Finished, he sets it down in awe.

FRED
Man... It's been a long time since a novel moved me like that. It's got everything -- love, death, remorse, revenge, redemption...

CONNIE
That's great. Maybe you can use it to get your job back?

FRED
I don't want it back. And their option ran out when Duncan didn't deliver it on time and they cut off his checks.

CONNIE
Wow. So then what will happen to it?

FRED
I wish I could publish it myself. But I guess my best bet is to shop it around to some publishers and see if I can use it as leverage to land a new job.

CONNIE
Wait. I've got all this money coming from the Starbucks deal. Why let it sit in the bank? You could use it to publish the book!

FRED
I dunno, hon. That would take a lot of money. And it's one hell of a risk.

CONNIE
If you believe in it, then it's worth the risk -- because I believe in you.

FRED
Really? You'd do that for me?

CONNIE
Of course, sweetie. I'd do anything for you.

Moved, Fred leans over to give Connie a big kiss. Before long, they're making out passionately. Just like old times.

EXT. BAXTER HOME - BACK YARD - DAY

The Baxters again wear BENNY'S CLOTHES under the hot sun, doing the "Good News/Bad News" exercise. But this time, the "Good News" stage is going much faster -- everyone's being nice. Before long, they've removed all of Benny's clothes.

BENNY
Doesn't it feel great to be free of that burden? I'm really proud of you guys. I think it's safe to say my work here is done.

EMILY
Really? Already?

BENNY
My bags are packed and loaded in the car... It *has* been a month.

The Baxters actually appear a little melancholy about that.

FRED
I hadn't even noticed.

BENNY
You guys taught me a lot. And I like to think I did the same for you. But sadly, there are lots of other families out there who need my help.

CONNIE
So does that mean you'll be giving us a positive evaluation with the court?

BENNY
The city won't be bothering you guys any more... I guarantee it.

INT. COUNTRY DAY ACADEMY - THEATER - BACKSTAGE - EVENING

Phillip looks around, finally spotting Mr. Dobney in a hallway, looking nervous. Phillip approaches him.

PHILLIP
Mr. Dobney? Stacy said you wanted to talk to me... Mr. Dobney?

Distracted, Dobney looks right past Phillip, into a dressing room. Hearing LOUD VOMITING inside, Phillip peeks in to see Blake on his knees, PUKING HIS GUTS into a trash can.

MR. DOBNEY
The pressure's too much for him. And the Queen's home with mono. The play's yet to begin and it's falling apart.
(beat, pointed)
But the show *must* go on, Phillip. And you're our last great hope. You know the lines. You could still play Hamlet!

PHILLIP
You know me -- always the team player.

MR. DOBNEY
Jolly good, young man! Scott can go back to playing Laertes, and even I'll pitch in -- to play the Queen.

PHILLIP
(under his breath)
How appropriate.

INT. THEATER - EVENING

Fred, Connie and Emily wait in their seats, an empty seat next to them. Fred checks his watch as... Benny arrives, sliding into his seat. The Baxters all smile, greeting him warmly as the THEATER LIGHTS GO DOWN.

CONNIE
You made it! Thanks for coming, Benny.

BENNY
I wouldn't miss this for the world.

LATER

The audience is rapt as the final scene plays out. The wounded HAMLET (Phillip) lays next to a dying LAERTES. Nearby are the dying QUEEN (Dobney in drag), the KING, and HORATIO.

LAERTES
Thy mother's poisoned. The King... The King's to blame.

Phillip staggers to his feet, charges the King, and RUNS HIM THROUGH WITH HIS SWORD. The King drops dead, and Dobney lets out a GIRLISH SHRIEK. In his seat, Benny pumps his fist.

BENNY
Yeah, Hamlet! Get him a body bag!

On stage, Phillip STAGGERS AROUND DRAMATICALLY and FALLS. HORATIO kneels at his side.

PHILLIP
Horatio, I am dead. Thou livest. Report me and my cause to the unsatisfied... If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart, absent thee from felicity awhile, and in this harsh world, draw thy breath in pain to tell my story.

HORATIO
Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet Prince... And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.

THE CURTAIN FALLS, and the theater EXPLODES INTO APPLAUSE. The curtain rises again and each cast member takes their bows. ROSES fly onto the stage, where a beaming Mr. Dobney, his mascara running, gathers them up and takes his bow.

Mr. Dobney then grabs Phillip and pushes him back to center stage, where he gets a STANDING OVATION. In the crowd, he spots his family and Benny all cheering him proudly.

INT. THEATER LOBBY - NIGHT

Benny and the Baxters enjoy refreshments and catch up. Seeing the Baxters all laughing and happy, Benny smiles proudly.

BENNY
Wow... You guys all look really terrific. How have things been?

CONNIE
Everything's great, Benny. We're so happy, and we owe it all to you.

EMILY
Yeah, Mom's even planning Baxterpalooza '14 for the Summer. You should come.

PHILLIP
Totally! Can he, Dad?

FRED
Of course. Benny's part of the family.

BENNY
Wow, that means a lot to me... But I shouldn't. It would be unprofessional.
(getting emotional)
Okay Baxters, this is where I ride off into the sunset. You guys take care.

A melancholy Benny hugs them all goodbye and goes to leave.

FRED
Hold up, Benny, let me walk you out.

EXT. PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Fred walks Benny to his car.

FRED
I slipped the novel to a couple of critics, who wrote glowing reviews on their blogs, and the word of mouth got us pre-orders from Amazon, Barnes & Noble, everybody. Now my only problem is figuring how to get 'em all printed.

BENNY
That's a good problem to have.

FRED
If you hadn't pushed me, I'd still be in that miserable job. Instead, I'm finally doing exactly what I want. You gave me back my life. And my family.

BENNY
Oh, I don't know about all that... Well, okay, maybe you're right.

FRED
That's why I feel so bad about those complaints I made...
(MORE)

FRED (cont'd)
So I called Social Services to let them know what a great job you ended up doing. Turns out you're not too popular over there.

BENNY
Yeah, it's kinda a love/hate thing. Mostly hate.

FRED
You can drop the act, Benny. I know. And I'm sorry about getting you fired.

BENNY
Don't be. I really overstepped my bounds. I was way outta line.

FRED
Yeah, that's true... But I still feel bad after everything you did for us. If there's anything I can ever do for you -- anything at all -- please let me know.

BENNY
Now that you mention it, maybe there is one thing.

FRED
Sure. Just name it.

Benny grabs a HUGE STACK OF PAPERS from the back seat of his car and hands it to Fred.

FRED (cont'd)
What's all this?

EXT. LAROCHE HOME - EVENING

Chuck opens the front door to see a package at his feet. He picks it up, and opens it to look inside. His jaw drops.

CHUCK
Well, I'll be damned.

INT. SET OF "DR. PHIL" SHOW - DAY

Benny sits across from DR. PHIL.

DR. PHIL
The book is 'The Process: A Revolutionary Guide to Modern Family Utopia'. The author is our guest, Benjamin LaRoche.

BENNY
Please Dr. Phil, call me Benny. I feel like I've known you forever.

DR. PHIL
I have to tell you, Benny, I thought I had the market cornered on homespun wisdom, but your book has taken it to whole new level. And it seems I'm not alone -- it's taken the non-fiction world by storm.

INT. LAROCHE NAUTICAL - CHUCK'S OFFICE - SAME

Chuck, Patrick, and the other EMPLOYEES crowd around the TV watching Benny on 'Dr. Phil'. A CUSTOMER pops his head in.

CUSTOMER
Excuse me, can I get some service?

CHUCK
Quiet! My son's on 'Dr. Phil'!

INT. SET OF "DR. PHIL" - SAME

Benny still chats with Dr. Phil.

DR. PHIL
The book's so honest and personal. Tell me, what motivated you to write it?

BENNY
Well Doc, you know how they say, "Those who can't do, teach"? That's pretty much describes me. My family life wasn't the best growing up. I spent a lot of time blaming others and looking to fill that void. And I failed at just about everything I ever tried.

Dr. Phil nods thoughtfully.

BENNY (cont'd)
But I managed to pick up a few things along the way.
(MORE)

BENNY (cont'd)
Most importantly, that nothing can replace family, and that having a healthy, happy family life is about always working at it -- and never giving up, no matter how hard it gets.

Chuck nods proudly at that -- *That's my boy*!

Benny looks out to see the Baxters sitting in the front row.

BENNY (cont'd)
But it wasn't until I met one special family that it all came together for me. The Baxters. They're here today. C'mon, stand up, guys. The Baxters, everybody. Phillip, Emily, Connie, and my publisher, Fred.

The Baxters all stand and acknowledge the cheering crowd. This is their moment.

EXT. LAROCHE HOME - BACK YARD - DAY

A familiar scene: the yard is FILLED WITH PEOPLE eating and talking. WAITERS serve hors d'oevuers and cocktails. A MAGICIAN entertains KIDS. A BANNER reads: "LaROCHE FAMILY REUNION".

Benny walks out the back door, and GUESTS hurry over. Benny's suddenly the main attraction -- relatives shake his hand, hug him, pepper him with questions, even ask for his autograph.

LATER

Chuck, Benny, and Patrick drink and chat.

CHUCK
I guess you're so successful now I'll never convince you take over the business for me when I'm gone.

BENNY
It's an attractive position, Dad. But I think you've already got the perfect man for the job right under your nose.

Chuck looks confused until Benny pats Patrick on the back.

BENNY (cont'd)
I think Patrick has a lot more vision and passion than you give him credit for. If you're not careful, you might lose him to someone who recognizes it.

Patrick beams. Chuck thinks about that, and nods.

CHUCK
I guess I've got a couple of pretty special sons.

The guys all smile, sharing a moment. Benny looks at Patrick.

BENNY
I can't wait anymore. Is it time yet?

Patrick checks his watch and nods.

CHUCK
Time for what?

EXT. FRONT YARD - MOMENTS LATER

Patrick and Benny walk a blindfolded Chuck out the front door, followed by the rest of the family.

CHUCK
What is this? What's going on?

BENNY
Take off your blindfold and see for yourself.

Chuck takes off his blindfold to see -- an EXACT REPLICA OF *CAMELOT* in the driveway. The nameplate reads "CAMELOT 2".

CHUCK (CONT'D)
Camelot? But... How?

BENNY
I commissioned a replica, Pop -- just like you did. Those pictures you kept really helped. So did Patrick.

Patrick and Benny grin proudly, seeing Chuck getting misty.

CHUCK
This is the best gift I've ever gotten.

Chuck puts an arm around each of their shoulders, and gazes at the boat dreamily, choking up a bit.

CHUCK (cont'd)
Your mother would be so proud.

This means a whole lot to Benny. Pretty choked up himself, he clears his throat and changes the subject.

BENNY
So what do you say, Pop -- wanna take her out for a spin?

CHUCK
You bet your ass I do... On one condition: You leave the sailing to me.

The guys all laugh at that, especially Benny. The hatchet is officially buried. They climb aboard the boat as we --

FADE OUT.

THE END