

WHY DO MOTHS FLY INTO LIGHT BULBS?

screenplay by

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WHY DO MOTHS FLY INTO LIGHT BULBS?

FADE IN:

EXT. CORPORATE GLASS TOWER - AFTERNOON

The type of building where people in suits work on dull carpets and look forward to lunch.

INT. MCGREW STEVENS MULTIPURPOSE ROOM

Many EMPLOYEES of this large hedge fund are gathered, all dressed in business attire.

CLOSE ON: The BOSS solemnly addressing the crowd.

BOSS

Frank's sudden, unexpected departure is certainly gonna leave a void here at McGrew Stevens. It's been chaotic around here recently -- I don't have to tell any of you that -- so it shouldn't come as a surprise that one of our fellow employees decided to, shall we say, check out early...

BEN WOODMAN (50) stands in the back of the room with DOUGLAS and RUBEN.

DOUGLAS

I can't believe he did it.

RUBEN

Only five years shy of retirement age.

DOUGLAS

He had a great parking space. I wonder who I talk to.

BEN

I think he was brave. Twelve hour shifts, beepers going off in the middle of the night... Who wants five more years of that? It's hard to do what Frank did -- pull the trigger and just end the pain. Sometimes I wish I had the guts to do it myself.

RUBEN

Ben? You okay, Buddy?

BEN

(back to reality)
I'm fine. I was just-- I'm fine.

SFX: CLAPPING.

WIDE SHOT of the front of the room.

A banner reads: "Happy Early Retirement"

FRANK is at the microphone now, addressing everyone.

FRANK

Thank you all...

ON BACK OF ROOM

SFX: BEEPER

Ben looks at his beeper readout.

BEN

Again the servers are down?

Ben sighs and dutifully trudges to the exit.

DOUGLAS

You're gonna miss the cake.

EXT. STREET - EVENING

BEGIN CREDITS

A Lexus pulls out of the parking structure and into rush hour traffic.

INT. LEXUS - CONTINUOUS

Ben is at the wheel, cupped in the plush interior of his LS460 -- the one with the heated steering wheel and Adaptive Variable Air Suspension. We should all have cars this nice.

Although Ben has left work, his job is never done. He maneuvers through traffic, talking on a hands-free cell phone.

BEN

..Yeah, I reset the caches before I left. Listen, if Fenniger bitches again about response times, tell her my guys are doing what they can. The system wasn't built to support this amount of trading-- Learn to drive, Idiot!

Ben HONKS the horn and swirls to avoid a car.

CUT TO:

INT. COFFEE SHOP KITCHEN - SHORT TIME LATER

WAITRESSES cross through and BUSBOYS come and go. It's busy.

Behind the grill is NANCY WOODMAN (48.) She's skillfully slinging out orders and filling in another COOK to take over.

NANCY
 (calling out)
 Pick-up tuna melt... Fran, these soups need to go out...
 (to other cook)
 You have two salmon working and you're waiting on a club from Danny...

Through the pass-thru window she sees Ben enter and stand off to the side to stay out of everybody's way.

Ben points at his watch.

NANCY (CONT'D)
 (to Ben)
 Five minutes. We got busy.

END CREDITS

INT. STAFF CHANGING ROOM - SHORT TIME LATER

A WAITRESS is getting ready for the night shift. Nancy, in nicer clothes now, punches out on the time clock.

WAITRESS
 My sister's getting married in October. Will you be up and running by then?

NANCY
 If there's a god.

WAITRESS
 They're vegans though. You can do a vegan wedding, right?

BEN (O.C.)
 (through door)
 We're late.

NANCY
 (yelling out)
 I'm coming!
 (to waitress)
 Sure. I don't have cards printed yet. If I don't see you tomorrow, I'll leave my new contact info with Roy.

CUT TO:

INT. LEXUS - LATER

Ben is driving. Nancy fixes her hair in the visor mirror.

BEN
The Spanish ones? Really?

NANCY
You said it was up to me.

BEN
It's just the kitchen's pretty large.
We're talkin' probably three hundred
handmade tiles. It'd be cheaper to
just move to Spain.

Nancy looks annoyed her choice isn't being approved.

BEN (CONT'D)
Fine. The Spanish ones. It's your
kitchen.

Nancy lets a smile escape as they pull up to the VALET of...

INT. TRENDY RESTAURANT - NIGHT

The restaurant is crowded. Ben and Nancy are seated at a
table with two other married couples -- CATHY & BRIAN FADER
and RANDELL & JANET CAROLA.

They are all holding menus.

BRIAN
(aside to Ben and
Randell)
What are you guys gonna order?

RANDELL
Have you met Nancy? It's not up to
us.

The WAITER comes over. Sure enough Nancy takes command.

NANCY
Any specials?

WAITER
Tonight the chef has prepared a lovely
Moroccan Chicken. Perfect.

NANCY
With the candied prunes? Oh, we've
all had that before. It's great.

Many at the table nod and close their menus - sale.

NANCY (CONT'D)
(to table)
Should I order a bunch of appetizers
and we'll just pick?

The others nod. They'll leave it in Nancy's hands.

NANCY (CONT'D)

(scanning menu)

Let's see... Three arugula and shaved parmesan salads, two orders of calamari, extra crispy and two crab cakes. Can we get lemon caper sauce with those instead of the mustard mayo? And I think we're all gonna have that chicken special.

Everybody expresses agreement. They hand their menus back.

BEN

You know what? I want the duck.

NANCY

You got that last time. You didn't like it.

BEN

No, you said it was fatty. I liked it.

NANCY

(to waiter)

The duck is fatty, right?

The waiter glances over his shoulder to make sure the owner isn't around and dares to nod in agreement.

BEN

(to waiter)

I want the duck.

The waiter exits and Nancy shakes her head at Ben's choice.

BRIAN

So Ben, still crazy at work?

BEN

You wouldn't believe. Nuts.

NANCY

His beeper's gone off every night this week.

BEN

Great. Tempt The Fates.

JANET

Nancy, before we forget, Randell saw a kitchen space-- You tell her.

RANDELL

In Normandy Park. I don't know the rent but the location would be great for deliveries--

NANCY

I'll be working out of our new kitchen. You guys didn't know that?

JANET

Catering out of your own house? That's gonna be a mess.

BEN

Thaankk-you.

NANCY

The bank wasn't very generous. I had no choice--

BEN

We. We had no choice.

NANCY

It's gonna be my business.

BEN

In a situation where others have a stake, etiquette requires one to be inclusive and use the royal we.

Nancy stares at Ben. Ben stares back. They wait for the other to break. After a few beats...

NANCY

The duck is gonna be fatty.

BEN

Yes!

Ben won. The guys share small high-fives.

SFX: BEEPER

BEN (CONT'D)

No!

(to Nancy)

See? You jinxed it.

NANCY

Maybe it's karma for that royal we shit.

Ben begrudgingly gets up from the table.

CATHY

Can't you pretend you didn't get it?

BEN

Computers down at a hedge fund can cost millions. That's why they pay me the big money...

Nancy finishes his obnoxious slogan with him...

BEN AND NANCY

...To take care of the computers that take care of the big money.

NANCY

Shoot me? Please?

Ben gives Nancy a quick kiss and reaches to take a bread stick for the road but Nancy pulls the basket out of reach. He tries to grab it but Nancy again pulls it away. She then sticks out her tongue. Ben sticks out his tongue.

BRIAN

Why don't you guys get a room?

FADE TO:

INT. WOODMAN KITCHEN - EVENING

A nicely appointed house in Seattle. The kitchen is in mid-renovation -- still no stove, unpainted walls, some cabinets lack hardware...

Nancy holds a sample tile against the wall. She stretches back as far as she can to see what it looks like from a distance. Unfortunately she can only go back the length of her arm.

She finds some tape in a drawer and tapes the tile to the wall. It's too heavy and falls. She tries again using more tape when...

Ben, dressed in a suit, enters.

NANCY

Can you hold this up? I'm having second thoughts about the tiles.

Ben doesn't answer. He just crosses to the LIQUOR CABINET and grabs the closest bottle.

NANCY (CONT'D)

Another long day?

BEN

I was fired.

NANCY

What'd you do?!

Ben takes a swig of whatever he ended up grabbing. He immediately SPITS it back into the bottle.

BEN

Ugghh!

(looks at label)

Irish Creme? We expecting prom kids?

NANCY

Why were you fired? Focus.

BEN

Everybody was. We went out of business.

NANCY

What do you mean out of business?

BEN

Out of business. What do you think it means?

Ben catches himself -- it's not her fault she doesn't know.

BEN (CONT'D)

We went insolvent. Or something. Who knows how a hedge fund works?

NANCY

Just like that? No warning?

BEN

When the President says we're in the greatest financial meltdown since The Great Depression that's kind of a warning.

(searching)

We had a bottle of scotch.

NANCY

I used it for that sauce, remember?

BEN

The whole thing? That was a two hundred dollar bottle!

NANCY

How was I supposed to know?

BEN

You didn't know Blue Label is expensive?

NANCY

I wasn't thinking about it.

(MORE)

NANCY (CONT'D)

And by the way, I believe your exact words were, "This is the greatest steak I've ever had."

BEN

Well, yeah. I was drunk on a whole bottle of liquor.

NANCY

Can we focus? Please? What about your bonus?

BEN

You're not grasping the concept of "out of business."

NANCY

They owe you that money!

BEN

Honey, "they" no longer exist. Is this drinkable?

Ben opens another bottle and smells it - should be okay. He takes a swig and offers it to Nancy. She takes a swig too.

NANCY

We have money saved, right?

Ben doesn't answer.

NANCY (CONT'D)

We HAVE money, right?!

BEN

A few hundred dollars.

NANCY

That's it?! Where'd it all go?!

BEN

This house. This whole renovation I've been paying for in cash.

NANCY

Why would you do that?

BEN

'Cause it's been saving us a ton of money. We're not paying interest on a loan.

NANCY

You put nothing aside?

BEN

The plan was to live week to week until bonus time. We'd then have a ton of money in the bank and no debt.

NANCY

Good plan.

BEN

Hey, I wouldn't lecture me about money, Miss Two Hundred Dollar Steak Sauce. The odds of the entire US banking system not going into the toilet seemed like a pretty safe bet.

Nancy realizes something...

NANCY

I have to keep working now, don't I?

BEN

Until I get another job, yeah.

Nancy grabs the bottle from him and takes big swig.

BEN (CONT'D)

Take another swig. Gets worse. House payment's due this week and we don't have it. We need to sell your car.

NANCY

Why MY car?

BEN

The Lexus is new. It was worth ten thousand less as soon as we drove it off the lot. It wouldn't make sense.

Nancy knows that Ben is right.

NANCY

I can't start a catering service if I don't have a car.

BEN

We'll share the Lexus. It won't be long before I get another job. It's not like I'm not qualified.

Nancy takes another beat or two to wallow in self-pity and then switches gears.

NANCY

What can we do, right?

(MORE)

NANCY (CONT'D)

We've struggle for ten years to get here. We can struggle a month or two more.

(then)

Go get changed. We gotta leave soon.

(off Ben's lost look)

We're having dinner with the Russells. Do you retain anything I tell you?

BEN

I remembered.

NANCY

Green Leaf Cafe? Italian Food? Seventy-three reservation? Remember now?

BEN

(defensive)

I said, I remember.

NANCY

(gotcha)

We're eating at Daily Grill. Green Leaf is Vietnamese and they don't take reservations.

BEN

Okay, I'm gonna admit something to you now. Sometimes I don't remember things just so you can tell me again and feel superior.

(then)

We have to cancel anyway.

NANCY

Why?

BEN

Oh, now who forgets things? Uh, I lost my job? We have no money?

NANCY

We can't even go out to dinner?

BEN

Not to a nice place. No.

NANCY

Daily Grill's now a nice place?

We're that poor again?

(reconsidering)

Probably for the best. I'm drunk.

CUT TO:

INT. GARAGE - DAY

The garage door is up, exposing the contents to the street.

Randell walks up from the street.

RANDELL
How was garage sale?

BEN
Hundred and eighty-four dollars.
Cash money.

Randell picks up a ski.

RANDELL
I'll give ya five bucks for these.

BEN
Those are Rossignols. They were
six hundred new.

RANDELL
Oh. Three bucks then. I thought
they were the top of the line.
(then)
Up for some racquetball?

BEN
(remembering)
That's another thing I gotta do --
put my membership on hold.

RANDELL
Do it in person. Today's game will
be on me.

Ben considers the offer and is pleased when he realizes that it's the middle of the day and he can.

BEN
I guess I don't have to be anywhere,
do I? Okay.

INT. RACQUETBALL COURT - DAY

Ben and Randell have been playing for almost an hour.

Ben serves. Randell makes no effort to get it.

BEN
You didn't even try that time.

Randell shrugs.

Ben gets the ball. As he walks back to the serving line...

BEN (CONT'D)

You know what I'm looking forward to? Staying up late and watching movies again. I can't remember the last time I watched a full movie.

Ben serves. Randell stands there, letting the ball go past.

BEN (CONT'D)

Ready to quit?

RANDELL

If you're tired. Sure.

INT. LOBBY - DAY

They walk to the locker room, past a clock.

RANDELL

Excellent. I can get a nap in before Happy Hour.

BEN

What do you actually work nowadays, two hours a week?

RANDELL

(defensive)

Marrying the daughter of a real estate tycoon was not easy, my friend. It's hard enough finding tycoons, try finding one with a cute daughter. I had to hire detectives to find out her likes, pay off potential boyfriends... Don't kid yourself, I put in some long hours back in the beginning. I paid my dues to work this little.

BEN

"Tycoon"?

Randell shrugs -- it's a word.

BEN (CONT'D)

I've never seen this place so empty.

RANDELL

Welcome to the world during business hours.

INT. LOCKER ROOM

Ben and Randell are getting dressed.

RANDELL

So what are you doing the rest of the day?

BEN

I gotta take some photos of the garage stuff and upload 'em to The Weekly. Other than that, I don't know. It's been so long since I've had a day free.

RANDELL

You know what's fun? Watch the Playboy Channel and count how many times you can jerk off before you fall asleep.

BEN

God, I'd hate to see your to-do list.

RANDELL

(eureka moment)

Wait a sec, that's brilliant! A web site where guys who are home all day can compare numbers.

BEN

Of how many times they jerked off? That doesn't sound a little gay to you?

RANDELL

All right, so we include pictures of naked girls and videos and stuff. And guys won't have to talk to each other if they don't want.

BEN

So...it's a porn site.

RANDELL

(deflated)

Yeah, I guess it's been done.

MONTAGE:

INT. GARAGE - AFTERNOON

Ben is taking pictures of the stuff in the garage.

INT. DEN

Ben uploads the pictures into his computer. After a few beats he decides to take a break.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Ben is on the couch flipping through TV channels. There's nothing on except women's talk shows. He finally gives up searching, opens a beer and lays back to watch one of the shows.

INT. KITCHEN

Ben is at the table eating a bowl of cereal. Like a kid, he is reading the back of the cereal box.

INT. LIVING ROOM

There are 4 or 5 empty beer cans on the coffee table. Ben is flipping through the channels again. Still nothing to watch.

EXT. FRONT LAWN

Ben opens the mailbox, takes out the mail and sorts through it. He's disappointed -- nothing of interest.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Ben is asleep on the couch. We pan around and see he's been watching The Playboy Channel.

Ben wakes up and looks at this watch -- he overslept! He quickly gets up and goes to upload the pictures of the stuff he's selling to the website.

But it's not working! He tries a few things including banging on the keyboard but no luck. Stuff is not uploading!

He checks his watch again then quickly prints the photos.

END MONTAGE

INT. SEATTLE WEEKLY OFFICES - DAY

The Seattle Weekly is a free, youth-targeted newspaper whose typical issue would include an interview with Al Gore or Ed Begley Jr., articles lambasting city government and 2 or 3 band reviews. The rest of the pages are music club line-ups, classifieds and ads for cosmetic surgery.

About 15 desks are scattered about this large open-aired space for the young WRITERS and COPY EDITORS. The place has a casual yet hip busyness.

Ben rushes in and crosses to the walkup counter with an envelope.

Nobody seems to be on counter-duty.

BEN

Hello? Did I make it in time to
place some ads?

A female writer, JO EASTON, 23, looks up from her desk. She
could be pretty if she wanted to be but she doesn't.

Jo begrudgingly gets up from her desk and crosses over.

JO

Fill this out. You can do this online,
you know.

BEN

My ISP went down. I want to get this
stuff in before the weekend deadline.

JO

Nice watch. You married?

Ben is shocked by her bluntness. And flattered. He holds
up his wedding ring.

BEN

Sorry.

JO

Well, if you ever get divorced, my
mom's cute.

Ben sucks it in. As he fills out the form...

BEN

You're a writer here?

JO

Yeah.

BEN

I used to be a scribe myself. College
newspaper. Of course that was years
ago.

JO

Back when they called us scribes.

Ben continues to fill out the form...

BEN

You have a great job. I hope you
appreciate it.

JO

I leave early everyday to celebrate
how lucky I am to be here.

BEN

I'm serious. Hunting for just the right word, struggling with a phrase, mastering the intricacies of syntax...

JO

Whatever.
(making conversation)
So what do you do?

BEN

I run computer networks. Pretty far removed from when I was a writer.

JO

Once a writer, always a writer.

BEN

You think?

JO

No. But the boss says it a lot and when I don't agree he lectures me about fitting in.

BEN

I'm Ben, by the way.

JO

Jo. I write the City Column.

BEN

What's that short for? Joanne?

Jo is tired of always having to answer this question.

JO

My real name is Elizabeth. I wanted a short name and Liz makes me sound like a lesbian. So I changed it. Okay?

BEN

To Jo. Nobody'll think you're a lesbian now.

Ben smiles. Two can play the snarkiness game.

Jo's not sure whether to smile back for being a compatriot or punch him for being an schmuck. Before she can decide...

SAM GARRISON, 55, enters. He's the Editor-In-Chief, a leader among men and he's got no time for your foolishness.

GARRISON

Where's Thompson?
(MORE)

GARRISON (CONT'D)

I've got the mayor crawling down my back. Last thing I need is a renegade cop on the streets!

Garrison looks at Jo. She shrugs.

GARRISON (CONT'D)

LETHAL WEAPON! Have you seen any movies?!

(then)

Where's Thompson?

JO

Hasn't been in.

GARRISON

He just emailed me his Answer Man column.

He shows her a printout of the email.

JO

(reading)

"Why do moths fly into light bulbs?
Answer: Go to hell. I quit."

She hands the paper back.

JO (CONT'D)

Didn't send it from here.

GARRISON

(to Ben)

Kids, huh? Good work ethics. Don't even bother showing up to quit.

Ben nods in agreement.

GARRISON (CONT'D)

(running for Governor)

Welcome to the Seattle Weekly. Samuel Garrison, Editor-In-Chief.

BEN

Ben Woodman.

JO

He used to be a writer.

BEN

Once a writer, always a writer.
That's what I say.

Garrison smiles.

GARRISON

(to Jo)

Learn from this.

BEN

By the way, that quote was actually from LETHAL WEAPON TWO. Not ONE.

Garrison thinks for a moment.

GARRISON

You're right!

(testing)

"In the year of our Lord 1314, patriots of Scotland, starving and outnumbered, charged the fields at Bannockburn."

BEN

"They fought like warrior poets. Like Scotsmen. And won their freedom."

Garrison can now die happy.

GARRISON

Gimme your name again. I was only pretending to listen.

BEN

Ben. Ben Woodman.

GARRISON

Ben, any man who can quote BRAVEHEART is my type of guy. Find out why moths fly into light bulbs and write it up by tomorrow.

Ben is taken aback.

BEN

Wait, wait... You want me to write The Answer Man column?

GARRISON

You said you're a writer.

BEN

I did. It's just--

GARRISON

If you're not interested--

BEN

No, I am! I'd love to write The Answer Man column! This is great--

GARRISON

Don't pop a vein. If it sucks I
don't print it. Here's my card.
Email it to me by five PM tomorrow.

Garrison hands him a card and exits.

BEN

I can't believe that just happened!
I feel like I'm in the movie WALL
STREET. "This is your wake up call,
Pal."

JO

Didn't see it. Didn't see BRAVEHEART
either.

She stamps his completed form and hands him a copy.

JO (CONT'D)

Ad will be in next week's edition.

INT. LEXUS - NIGHT

Ben and Nancy are driving to dinner.

NANCY

Is Seattle Weekly the one with all
the futon ads?

BEN

That's the one. There's always a
stack in front of record stores.

NANCY

Think you can still do it?

BEN

Write? I imagine it's like riding a
bike.

NANCY

If I rode a bike now I'd fall on my
ass. I thought you wrote stories in
college. What do you know about
being an answer man?

BEN

What's to know? I'll talk to experts
and put what they say into English.
Should be fun.

NANCY

Sounds like work to me.

(then)

Probably more productive than watching
porno in the middle of the day.

(MORE)

NANCY (CONT'D)
 (off his silence)
 You forgot to change the channel
 when you were done.

Ben is not going to give her the satisfaction of admitting anything. If he keeps staring at the road maybe the uncomfortable moment will go away.

After what seems like two weeks...

BEN
 Was Roy happy when you told him you're
 staying on a little longer?

NANCY
 He was thrilled. Makes me think he
 hasn't been paying me enough all
 these years.
 (then)
 I thought we didn't have money to
 eat at restaurants.

BEN
 I'm hoping your dad picks up the
 tab. You didn't tell him, did you?

NANCY
 About your job? Yeah, Ben, I'm a
 moron.

BEN
 Last thing I need is a mobile home
 salesman lecturing me about planning
 for the future.
 (then)
 By the way, I used the rest of our
 credit card to pay more bills. We
 have just enough to cover tonight
 and that's it.

NANCY
 Where you going?

Ben drove past the restaurant and heads down a side street.

BEN
 Five bucks we won't have to give to
 the valet.

EXT. STREET IN FRONT OF RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Ben and Nancy walk to the entrance. Nancy is wearing heels so she's not happy.

NANCY

Walking wears out shoes. We might not be saving money here.

BEN

I have an idea - let's make a game of this. Whoever saves the most money each day gets a blowjob.

(off her annoyed look)

Or a compliment. Their choice.

(still annoyed)

Okay, your choice.

They turn the corner and are spotted by Nancy's dad, LAWRENCE BARNES, 70, waiting at the entrance.

MR. BARNES

Kate! They're here!

KATE BARNES, 65, was stationed at the corner in case they came from that direction.

BEN

I hope you weren't waiting too long.

MR. BARNES

Six minutes. Hopefully they'll honor the reservation.

Mr. Barnes holds the door open. They'll exchange greetings inside.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ben and Nancy just got home from dinner. They enter the bedroom and start changing into their sleep attire.

They're in mid-conversation.

NANCY

But crab cakes were fourteen dollars, not ten. I saved fourteen.

BEN

No, you only save the average in that category. The average appetizer was ten bucks.

NANCY

That's not fair.

Nancy crosses out to the bathroom.

BEN

Okay then, I didn't order lobster.
Saved a hundred bucks. Oh, and I
didn't order caviar either. See, it
IS fair.

NANCY (O.S.)

You shouldn't get credit for the
valet. That was before we agreed to
play.

BEN

Fine. I only won by seven bucks then.
You shouldn't have ordered dessert.

Ben unbuckles his pants and lays on the edge of the bed
waiting for Nancy to return.

She emerges from the bathroom wearing her night attire.

NANCY

What's the point of dining out if
one can't order popcorn shrimp?
What are we, savages?

Nancy finally notices how Ben is lying.

NANCY (CONT'D)

Nice try.

BEN

I won. A deal is a deal.

NANCY

Right. And the choice was up to me --
blowjob or compliment. I gave you a
compliment: "Nice try."

Nancy walks to her side of the bed and gets under the covers.
Ben accepts his loss, gets up and puts on his robe.

NANCY (CONT'D)

You're not coming to bed?

BEN

Are you taking back the compliment?

Nancy turns out her night light.

NANCY

Maybe in the morning.

BEN

I'm gonna stay up then. Work on
that Answer Man thing. Wanna hear
the question they gave me?

NANCY

(no)
Sure.

BEN

"Why do moths fly into light bulbs?"

NANCY

Why?

BEN

I don't know. I have to Google it.
I'll tell you first thing in the
morning. Or rather..
(suggestively)
..second thing.

NANCY

I said maybe.

FADE TO:

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

It's the next morning. Nancy is dressed, reading the paper.
She's been up awhile.

Ben enters, still wearing his sleeping attire.

NANCY

Good morning, Mary Sunshine.

Ben grunts as he grabs some coffee. He was up late.

He sits at the table, takes a sip of coffee and makes a face.

NANCY (CONT'D)

We're out of fresh ground. That's
from a can of Folgers. Better get a
job quick cause after this it's freeze-
dried from the survival kit.

BEN

Can't you steal some from work?

NANCY

You mean BORROW some from work?

Ben picks up a section of the newspaper and gets an idea...

BEN

We can cancel the newspaper.

NANCY

Already made the call. Eight buck
in MY column each week.

(MORE)

NANCY (CONT'D)
 (teasing him)
 You're on your way to a lot of
 compliments.

The phone RINGS. Ben answers.

BEN
 Hello?

INTERCUT BETWEEN:

Garrison in his office.

GARRISON
 Woodman? Garrison here. Seattle
 Weekly.

BEN
 Mr. Garrison! Hi. I emailed the
 piece to you late last night--

GARRISON
 What do you think, I'm calling to
 find out what you had for breakfast?
 I got it. I'm gonna be blunt,
 Woodman. Best thing I've read today.

BEN
 Wow! That's nice of you to say--

GARRISON
 Relax. I'm headin' to the crapper
 with The New Yorker so your rein's
 about to end. Listen, I want you to
 write the column from now on.
 Interested?

Ben is shocked.

BEN
 You want me to be the new Answer
 Man?!

GARRISON
 Hundred bucks a column. I need an
 answer now.

BEN
 I'm interested! I'm between jobs
 though so it'd only be temporarily.

GARRISON
 Fine. Be here tomorrow. Nine sharp.

Garrison hangs up.

NANCY

What was that?

BEN

They want me to be the new Answer Man. Can you believe it?

NANCY

Ben, that's amazing! You're always talking about how you miss writing. How cool is that?

BEN

It is kinda cool, isn't it?

NANCY

Get on the couch. Let's make up for last night.

(off his confusion)

"Maybe in the morning"?

Like an excited puppy, Ben scampers to the couch.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Ben quickly sets up the pillows so he can lie in a good position. He and Nancy start to make-out.

NANCY

(while kissing)

Before I forget -- the appliance store called. When we're done here you need to write a check so they can deliver the stove.

BEN

(still kissing)

We don't have it.

Nancy stops kissing.

BEN (CONT'D)

It's eight thousand dollars-- Can we talk about this in ten minutes?

Ben tries to go back to kissing but she's holding out.

BEN (CONT'D)

Five minutes? I'm willing to skip the kissing.

NANCY

When we ordered that stove I specifically remember you saying, "I'll put this money aside."

BEN

I did. In my head.

NANCY

Ben, I need that stove. I can't start a catering company with just a toaster. Nobody caterers toast!

BEN

Honey, do you think we still have eight thousand dollars laying around somewhere? We're down to garage sale money for gas.

Nancy gets up and heads back to the kitchen. Ben is left on the couch, pants half-unzipped.

INT. SEATTLE WEEKLY - DAY

It's the next morning. Ben, dressed in a tie and sports jacket, is at his new desk across from Jo's. He's the only writer there so far.

BEN

(into phone)

Twelve o'clock it is. I'll see you there.

Ben hangs up as Jo enters.

JO

(annoyed)

How long have you been here?

BEN

Half an hour or so. I was told we start at nine.

JO

If you show up on time we all have to start showing up on time. Am I getting through or are the others gonna have to chime in also?

BEN

I'll try to be late from now on.

JO

I'm not trying to be mean or anything, it's just it only takes one kiss-ass to ruin it for everyone.

Jo sits down at the desk across from Ben. She turns on a radio to an alternative station.

Another writer, TIM MCWALSH, 20, enters.

TIM
I hear there's a new guy.
(noticing Ben)
How ya doin'? Your son around?

BEN
I'm the new guy.

TIM
Cool! New guy's an old guy.

JO
This is Tim. He writes...

Jo searches for the right way to say it...

TIM
Music reviews.

JO
(finding words)
Below average.

Tim "accidentally" knocks over her radio.

BARRY, 19, wanders in.

BARRY
(announcing)
Coffee run.

During the following, various WORKERS cross in giving Barry money and their coffee order -- "black vente," "my normal"...

JO
This is Barry. Anything you need,
supplies, whatever, talk to him.

TIM
Barr's a vegetarian now. Aren't you
Barr?

Barry nods a sad admission.

BAR
Couple of years ago Tim bet me I
couldn't give up meat.

BEN
For how long?

BARRY
The rest of my life. I used to love
meat.

BEN
So quit the bet.

BARRY

Where am I gonna get two hundred bucks?

(then)

Every morning I make a run to Starbucks. Want anything?

Ben puts his hands up in polite refusal.

TIM

Don't drink coffee? Oh, right. Bad for the prostate.

BEN

I'm trying to save money. I thought I saw a coffee machine in the kitchen.

TIM

We use that as a hot plate to cook bacon.

BARRY

(vindicated)

I did smell bacon. I knew I wasn't going crazy.

Barry exits and Tim wanders off.

BEN

Can I get your opinion on something?

JO

Yes, lose the tie.

BEN

I think I've come up with a good question for my column. You being the smart one around here...

JO

Smooth.

Jo stops what she was doing and focuses on Ben.

BEN

Okay. "If apes are so smart, how come they haven't learned to ride horses yet?"

Jo considers the question and smiles.

BEN (CONT'D)

I think that's the first time I've seen you smile.

Jo immediately stops smiling.

JO

Why do they?

BEN

I don't know yet. I just arranged a meeting with some primate expert at the zoo.

JO

You're gonna drive all the way to the zoo? Just Google it.

BEN

I did that for the first column and realized something -- I was just reordering facts other people had already written. That's not real writing. I should be getting my hands dirty. Meeting the experts. Learning everything there is to know about a subject. If I don't dig beyond what others have already written how are I gonna form any original insight?

JO

(politely dismissive)
Good point.

Jo goes back to work.

BEN

Did I do something wrong?

JO

What do you mean?

BEN

When I was here the other day I sorta got the impression we hit it off. Now you don't seem to like me.

JO

It's important that I like you?

BEN

Never mind.

Ben goes back to work. Jo does also. After a beat...

JO

(not looking up)
You passed the test, by the way.

INT. GARRISON'S OFFICE - LATER

Ben knocks on the open door and sticks his head in.

BEN
Mister Garrison?

GARRISON
Come in, come in. I hear you're
going to the zoo.

BEN
How'd you know that?

GARRISON
It's my job to hear things. You
have a new question yet?

BEN
You mean for the column?

GARRISON
No, for when you run into Pat Boone
at a cupcake shop. Time is money,
Woodman.

BEN
"If apes are so smart, how come they
haven't learned to ride horses yet?"

Garrison considers it and then pats Ben on the back.

GARRISON
Perfect!
(testing)
"I'm a seeker too. But my dreams
aren't like yours."

BEN
PLANET OF THE APES. Fox. 1968.

GARRISON
Sweet Shakespeare! You are good!

BEN
I'll probably have to reference that
in the answer somewhere--

GARRISON
Please don't tell me you came in
just to visit.

BEN
Oh, right. How are receipts handled?
(off his blank look)
For expenses. Do I hand them in
each week, end of the month?..

GARRISON
Oh! Receipts. Right.
(MORE)

GARRISON (CONT'D)

Put them in an envelope and mail 'em in. I'll give you the address.

Garrison grabs a pen and Post-it, writes down something and hands it to Ben.

BEN

(reading)

Santa Claus. North Pole.

GARRISON

I bet you think you're getting health insurance too.

BEN

I'd lose that bet, wouldn't I?

GARRISON

Yes.

(then)

So, if there's nothing else, the column's due every Friday and office supplies are not to be sold on eBay. See you in December at the Christmas party.

The phone RINGS.

Garrison gives a look of "gotta take this", so Ben leaves.

EXT. ZOO - APE CAGE - DAY

Ben checks his watch just as DR. HARRIS, the ape expert finally enters.

BEN

Dr. Harris? I was starting to think you forgot about our meeting.

DR. HARRIS

I'm late? I apologize. I tell time by the sun.

BEN

Well, I guess the Sun's forty-five minutes slow.

(beat)

That was a joke.

DR. HARRIS

I've dedicated my life to thinking as an ape. Humor is foreign to me now.

Dr. Harris starts to get undressed.

DR. HARRIS (CONT'D)
Come, we'll walk among them.

BEN
Uh... That's okay.

DR. HARRIS
I sense your anxiety. We're good at that. There's nothing to fear.

BEN
Except eight hundred pounds of monkey.

DR. HARRIS
We are not monkeys!! We are apes!!
(calm again)
Sorry. We are quick to anger.

Dr. Harris picks something from Ben's hair and eats it.

BEN
Oo-kay. Look, I'd love to hang out and groom but I'm due back in the human world. Let me just ask a question and then I'll get going -- How come apes haven't learned to ride horses?

DR. HARRIS
I don't have a clue.

BEN
I thought you're an expert.

DR. HARRIS
Yeah? Well than what's a pronoun, Mister I Must Know Everything About Writing 'Cause I'm a Writer?

An ape reaches through the bars and grabs Ben's jacket off the bench.

BEN
Hey! Give that back!

The apes are throwing the jacket back and forth between them. Ben tries to grab it back through the bars but it's no use.

BEN (CONT'D)
Tell 'em to give that back!

DR. HARRIS
They won't listen.
(admitting)
They don't like me.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

The kitchen, already a mess from construction clutter, is now also covered with cooking clutter.

Nancy has been cooking for hours, trying to use 3 lightweight backpacking stoves that Ben bought her. Her cooking pots are too heavy, making the stoves extremely top-heavy.

She accidentally bumps one and it begins to wobble! She grabs the pot handle, saving it. In doing so, however, she bumps one of the other stoves which does topple, hitting the third one which also topples spilling hot food onto the counter and floor. It's a mess.

She considers lighting the house on fire and watching it burn but forces herself to take a cleansing breath instead.

Ben enters through the garage door holding a large plastic bag with his jacket in it.

NANCY

Finally. Taste this.

She shovels a spoon into Ben's mouth.

NANCY (CONT'D)

It's burnt, right?

BEN

Yes?

Wrong answer. Nancy tosses the spoon into the sink. Her failure as a chef is now officially confirmed for all time.

NANCY

Damnit! I can't cook like this!! I can't test recipes if I don't have-- What's that smell?

Ben holds up the plastic bag.

BEN

Monkey shit. I was at the zoo and the apes took my jacket--

NANCY

I hate you so much right now.

Ben doesn't respond. He knows her thought process. It'll all make sense in time.

NANCY (CONT'D)

I've been trapped at home, I have no car, I can't spend money, I'm burning everything on rickety camp stoves...

(MORE)

NANCY (CONT'D)

The only thing I had to look forward to was you getting back so I could complain about how I had the worst day ever. And now you come home with clothes covered in monkey shit. I don't even get to have the worst day ever!

Nancy starts to cry.

Ben puts down the bag and hugs her.

BEN

I'm sorry, Honey.

(glass half full)

The day's not over yet. There's still a chance you can crack your head open on the countertop and win.

This makes Nancy smile.

NANCY

(comrades in misery)

Your day sucked too, huh?

Still hugging, Ben maneuvers and reaches a plate on the countertop, nabbing a cracker.

BEN

Actually it was pretty great. Even with the monkey shit-- Do I get in trouble if I eat these crackers?

NANCY

Dip 'em in the sauce.

Still hugging her, Ben dips the cracker and eats it. He takes another cracker and does it again.

NANCY (CONT'D)

Before I forget.

Nancy breaks the hug and hands him a piece of paper.

BEN

This guy's a headhunter. Melissa gave me his number-- Savor the taste. Don't just shovel it down.

Ben slows down his cracker eating.

BEN (CONT'D)

I only mailed the resumes two weeks ago. They'll call. We don't need to pay someone.

NANCY
It's free. He's paid by whoever
hires you. Just call him.

Ben puts the paper in his pocket.

NANCY (CONT'D)
Oh, and somebody called about the
skis. He said he saw the ad and
he'll give you four bucks. That's
as high as he'll go.

Ben laughs.

NANCY (CONT'D)
What?

BEN
Did it sound like Randell?

NANCY
(mystery solved)
I thought the voice sounded familiar.

EXT. YOUNG DRESS LADY DRY CLEANERS - DAY

A typical dry cleaning shop in a strip mall.

INT. YOUNG DRESS LADY DRY CLEANERS

The OWNER is working behind the counter. He is a recent Chinese immigrant whose command of the language is minimal.

Ben steps to the counter and pulls his soiled jacket from a plastic bag. It immediately fills the room with the unpleasant smell of monkey shit.

OWNER
What this?

BEN
Ape feces.

The owner doesn't understand.

OWNER
Woof, woof?

Ben half-heartedly imitates a monkey.

BEN
Ape... Monkey...

The owner isn't getting it. He YELLS IN CHINESE to some other CHINESE EMPLOYEES to come and help figure this out. The employees TALK IN CHINESE between themselves, trying to guess the animal. Finally...

OWNER

Oh! Monkey! Yes. We clean good.
Special soap.

INT. SEATTLE WEEKLY - DAY

Jo is at her desk working when Ben enters.

JO

What are you doing here?

BEN

It's nine forty-five. I waited in
the car an extra ten minutes just to
be safe.

JO

You already wrote your column this
week.

BEN

Mister Garrison called and said he
wanted to talk to me. Which is good
'cause I got this great idea last
night. I think I can turn this thing
into a lot of money--

GARRISON (O.C.)

Woodman!

Mr. Garrison is at his door, waving him in.

BEN

I'll run it by you later.

INT. GARRISON'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Ben enters.

GARRISON

Let's talk about your column.

BEN

I hope the writing's been okay.

GARRISON

Okay? First two so far have been
world class-- Why are you sitting?

Ben stands up.

BEN

You know, I'm glad you said that.
About the column. Because I wanted
to ask you something--

GARRISON

Don't waste time announcing. Just ask.

BEN

Oh. Okay. I was wondering... And I know the details would have to be worked out...

GARRISON

Spit it out, Woodman. The next ice age is coming and I need to pack.

BEN

I'd like to syndicate my column-- YOUR column-- The paper's column. Try to at least. I really think people will respond--

GARRISON

Do it.

Ben is surprised. That was easy than he thought it'd be.

BEN

Really? Okay... Uh, any tips on how to go about it?

GARRISON

You're the damn Answer Man. Figure it out. Just run everything through Legal before you start sending out letters or whatever.

(then)

Now, if we're done with your concerns, let me tell you why I called you in. Write dumber.

BEN

Excuse me?

GARRISON

Dumb down your writing. Your column sounds like some fancy-pants is writing it.

BEN

You just said the writing's world class.

GARRISON

But our target market is not. Writing that good makes our readers feel stupid.

BEN

Well.

GARRISON

Well what?

BEN

Writing that well. Not "good."

Garrison realizes Ben is right and smiles in appreciation of Ben's knowledge. But mostly his nerve.

Ben sees a small window of opportunity open to control the conversation...

BEN (CONT'D)

And I gotta say, I think you're wrong.

GARRISON

I'm sorry, what was that? I didn't hear you over my big pile of money.

BEN

I'm just saying, I don't think we should underestimate the readers.

GARRISON

Oh. I understand. You thought this was The New Yorker. A lot of folks who walk in to place ads and get hired make that mistake. So let me give you the lowdown on our readers. You know why we publish in tabloid format? Because at any given time thirty-four percent of these readers don't have the motor skills to deal with large sheets of paper.

Garrison pulls out a folder and opens it.

GARRISON (CONT'D)

Let me read you some other choice findings from the research.

(finds item)

Twenty-two percent read our publication sitting on a bus bench. Eighteen percent on the toilet.

(next research item)

Ah, here's an enlightening nugget -- When asked to finish the sentence: "I'd like to see more _____ in this newspaper," nineteen percent wrote "bright colors." Just shy of the twenty-one percent who wrote, "The word wiener."

Garrison closes the folder.

GARRISON (CONT'D)

So, write dumber. Each big word
will cost you five bucks from now
on.

BEN

(re: research)

Was that real?

Garrison doesn't answer. Does it matter?

Ben is about to exit in defeat when he spots a "BUTCH CASSIDY
AND THE SUNDANCE KID" poster on the wall.

BEN (CONT'D)

Remember that scene in BUTCH CASSIDY
AND THE SUNDANCE KID? They're on
that cliff and Sundance is afraid to
jump but Butch says "Trust me." So
Sundance does and everything works
out. He just had to trust him.

GARRISON

And at the end of the movie they
still died a violent death at the
hands of the enemy.

(then)

Remember, my door is always open.
Close it on your way out.

Defeated, Ben exits.

INT. SEATTLE WEEKLY - LATER

Ben and Jo are at their desks. Jo is reading something Ben
wrote. After a few beats Jo puts it down, impressed.

JO

It's great. I really love this part:
(reading)

"My guess is the apes are not against
riding horses because it subjugates
another species so much as they don't
want to add even MORE traffic to the
morning rush hour. This alone
suggests they may have already passed
humans in the brain department."
Nice.

BEN

"Subjugates" is gonna cost me five
bucks but I think it's worth it.

Jo keeps holding the papers and shakes her head in admiration
of the writing.

BEN (CONT'D)

You seem surprised that it's good.

JO

I am. You said you used to be a writer. You didn't say you were a great writer.

BEN

I don't know about that.

(then)

It's not too snooty? I don't want it to sound like something out of MY DINNER WITH ANDRE.

(off her look)

Don't tell me you never saw it. Oh you have to! The whole movie's one long conversation--

JO

I saw it in the video store. I couldn't even finish reading the box before I got bored.

Tim enters and proudly presents Ben with a sheet a paper.

BEN

(reading)

"Why don't dogs eat cats once they catch 'em?"

Ben looks at Jo. Is this question as bad as he thinks?

TIM

I'm new at this. They can't all be gems. Hey, there's one: "Why can't they all be gems?"

Ben looks at his watch.

BEN

Darn, have to go. I'll finish these later.

EXT. STREET IN FRONT OF WOODMAN HOUSE - DAY

Ben pulls up to the curb and HONKS the car horn.

Nancy, pissed at something, comes out with a picnic basket.

NANCY

You don't answer your phone?

Ben looks at his phone -- turned off. Nancy gets into the car and Ben starts driving.

NANCY (CONT'D)

The bank took back my catering loan.

BEN

What?!

Nancy takes a letter out of her pocket.

NANCY

"The employment situation in your household has changed." Can you fricken' believe this?

BEN

How'd they find out? You didn't tell 'em, did you?

NANCY

Yeah, Ben. I called the bank and said, "My husband lost his job. We can still get the money though, right?"

EXT. PUBLIC PARK - DAY

Ben and Nancy are sitting in the grass, eating from the picnic basket. Given the loan news, the mood is not festive.

BEN

There has to be somebody at the bank who can overrule this.

NANCY

There's gotta be, right? Let's drive over now. Make a fuss.

BEN

I'm gonna have to drop you off. I gotta be at the zoo by one-thirty.

NANCY

You were just there.

BEN

I go where the questions take me.
(admitting)
I kinda like the trip. It's relaxing.

NANCY

They reimburse you for gas, right?

BEN

Of course.

INT. BANK - DAY

MR. SIMON, a loan officer, sits at his desk reading a paperback book: THE BIOGRAPHY OF JIMMY CARTER.

Nancy enters and heads to his desk with a head of steam.

NANCY

You gave me a loan. Now you want to take it back?

Mr. Simon looks up from his book.

MR. SIMON

Miss... Uh--

NANCY

Woodman.

She tosses the bank letter onto his desk.

MR. SIMON

Let's see... uh huh... right... that's you...

(to Nancy)

That appears to be the case.

NANCY

And the reason is?

MR. SIMON

I send paperwork upstairs. What happens after that, not up to me.

Mr. Simon goes back to reading his book.

NANCY

Uh... Hello? Let me speak with somebody upstairs then.

Mr. Simon realizes he's going to have to actually deal with this. He puts down his book.

MR. SIMON

I'm gonna save you some time Miss...

NANCY

Woodman.

MR. SIMON

Right. Walk away.

NANCY

I'm sorry?

MR. SIMON

The bank said no. What are you gonna do, change their mind? "That lady's complaining. Maybe we SHOULD give her the money."

Nancy is taken aback, unsure how to respond to that.

MR. SIMON (CONT'D)

By the way, the people upstairs? They might not even be upstairs for all I know. Never met 'em. But hey, you want to wander the halls, knock yourself out.

Nancy just stands there in shock, her mouth hanging open.

MR. SIMON (CONT'D)

For your information? I can't get an ACCOUNT at this bank. And I WORK here! Oh, they'll give me one but then they'll charge me outrageous fees 'cause all the money I have in the world isn't worth their time. And I'm supposed to care they won't give you MORE money? Boo hoo. Let me get right on that.

Nancy looks around for help.

MR. SIMON (CONT'D)

A manager? Is that who you're looking for? Here, I'll call him for ya.

Mr. Simon picks up the phone, then pauses...

MR. SIMON (CONT'D)

'Course who's he gonna believe? The employee working here for six years or some lady seeking to pacify her loan rejection grief by making false accusations? Walk away.

Nancy realizes she's not gonna win. She exits in a huff.

A SECURITY GUARD, unaware what took place, smiles kindly and holds the door open.

SECURITY GUARD

You have a nice day, Ma'am.

EXT. OUTSIDE AVIARY AT ZOO - DAY

A BIRD EXPERT is standing outside the entrance to the aviary. He's wearing a hard hat with the zoo's logo. Ben arrives.

BIRD EXPERT

Mister Woodman? Pleasure. I only have about half an hour. Why don't we talk as I give you a tour.

Ben nods and they cross to the aviary entrance.

BIRD EXPERT (CONT'D)

I read your column every week. If you don't mind me saying, the past few have been the best in years.

BEN

Thank you.

He hands Ben a hard hat.

BIRD EXPERT

You have to put this on. Regulations.

Ben puts the hat on and they enter the aviary.

EXT. OUTSIDE BIRD AVIARY AT ZOO - 20 MINUTES LATER

They exit the aviary. Ben's hat and jacket are covered with bird shit.

BIRD EXPERT

I should've warned you about standing under the condors. There's a hose around the corner.

Ben gingerly takes off the soiled hat and tries to hand it back but the expert doesn't want to touch it.

INT. YOUNG DRESS LADY DRY CLEANERS - DAY

Ben dumps his soiled jacket out of a bag onto the counter. The faces in the room show that the jacket stinks.

Ben shrugs. The owner begrudgingly takes the jacket into the back using a long stick.

INT. SEATTLE WEEKLY - DAY

Ben finishes reading something Jo wrote. She's anxious to hear his thoughts.

BEN

It seems a little...mean.

JO

I wanted to be mean. He's the mayor. His policies shouldn't discriminate against women.

BEN

They don't.

JO

They sure do!

BEN

You say they do but-- I don't know.
The whole thing just seems like a
lot of name-calling.

JO

Okay. Thanks.

Ben can tell she doesn't like his critique.

BEN

You asked my opinion.

JO

I kinda expected you wouldn't get
it. Don't worry about it.
(off Ben's look)
That's not an insult.

BEN

Sounded like one.

JO

You're a successful white guy. This
is one of those ingrained
discrimination things you don't see.

BEN

Ingrained discrimination?! Oh, come
on! We elected a black president,
for Christ's sake. This isn't the
fifties.

JO

Just because they got rid of Little
Black Sambo doesn't mean
discrimination's gone. It's more
subtle now. More hidden.

BEN

Give me one example.

Jo points to her story.

JO

I just did.

BEN

A better one.

JO
So you want two examples.

BEN
They're all over the place. Should be easy.

Jo thinks.

JO
Flintstone vitamins.

She reaches into her desk and pulls out an old bottle of Flintstone vitamins.

JO (CONT'D)
There's no Betty.

She spills the contents onto her desk.

JO (CONT'D)
Fred, Barney, Wilma... Here's Dino. Here's the car... No Betty. Two men and two women star in the show but here they only include one of the women. Discrimination.

Ben smiles and shakes his head in amusement.

BEN
You saved that bottle from when you were a kid, didn't it?

She nods.

BEN (CONT'D)
They didn't include Betty because her waist was too thin. The vitamins kept breaking.

JO
Oh, is that their excuse?

BEN
They include her now. Since 1996. You just have an old bottle.

JO
How do you know that?

BEN
It was in the news. You probably didn't read it 'cause you were, what, ten?

Jo, beaten, goes back to work.

JO
 (not looking up)
 You're annoying, you know that?

Despite his best efforts to stop it from happening, a smile sneaks out from Ben's face.

EXT. WOODMAN BACKYARD - NIGHT

A casual party is taking place. A serving table is set up buffet-style.

Randell & Janet and 5 or 6 OTHER COUPLES are milling about.

RANDELL
 The clam chowder's cold. FYI.

BEN
 It's vichyssoise.

RANDELL
 The vichyssoise is cold. FYI.

BEN
 It's supposed to be. It's cold potato soup. There's no clams in there.

RANDELL
 Really? It's gotten that desperate?

BEN
 (to heaven)
 Cover me, God, I'm going in.
 (to Randell)
 What?

RANDELL
 It was your guys' turn to pick the restaurant and you decided to have the group over here instead. Fair enough. You're out of work. But things are so bad you can't spring for clams in the clam chowder?

BEN
 May I respond?

RANDELL
 Please.

BEN
 It's not clam chowder.

RANDELL
 How much you wanna borrow?

BEN

Thanks, but no thanks.

RANDELL

I'm not the Mafia. Name a number.

BEN

I'm not going to.

RANDELL

Am I gonna have to break your legs
for NOT borrowing money?

Ben considers whether he wants to let Randell in on his plans. He gestures for Randell to follow him. They walk through the backyard to talk in private.

BEN

Here's the situation. I'm thinking
about not going back into computers.
Becoming a writer full-time.

RANDELL

A writer? You? Oh that's right, I
kinda remember you wrote back in
college.

BEN

You "kinda" remember? It was my
passion.

RANDELL

Hey, I only kinda remember college
in general. I did a lot of bong
hits, remember?

(then)

Can you make money as a writer?

BEN

If I syndicate I can. But it'll
take time to build the syndication
so my plan is get a book deal first.
That way I'll get an advance that
will tide us over while building the
syndication. The book will feed the
column, the column will feed the
book... If it works the money could
be huge.

RANDELL

Okay, so you'll pay us back when it
gets huge.

BEN

I really don't want to borrow from
friends. Just in case.

RANDELL

A writer. I can't believe Nancy agreed to this.

BEN

I haven't told her yet.

RANDELL

Oh, so this is still all Fantasyland. Let me ask you a question -- What's the one thing you want? In the entire world?

BEN

Were you here for anything I just said?

RANDELL

I'm talkin' anything. Any job, live anywhere... And don't say, "I'd be a fireman."

Ben doesn't even have to think about it.

BEN

Be a writer.

RANDELL

I'd be a fireman.

(then)

Okay, here's what I think. First, you're lying about the soup. Potato soup just happens to be the same as clam chowder but without clams? Not buying it. You made it up. Second, you're having a mid-life crisis.

BEN

I'm not.

RANDELL

No, you are. My uncle had one so I recognize 'em. He bought a Winnebago and drove to Vegas with his wife. She ended up gambling away the nest egg.

BEN

That was an Albert Brooks movie.

Randell thinks.

RANDELL

You're right. My uncle shot himself on the veranda. I always get those stories confused.

BEN

We should probably get back before
the soup gets warm.

CUT TO:

INT. STARBUCKS - NIGHT

Nancy and Ben get their coffees and look for an empty table.

NANCY

I could've made coffee at home.
Four bucks in my column.

They find an empty table and sit.

NANCY (CONT'D)

Okay, we're here. What couldn't you
tell me at home?

BEN

I could have. I just thought, you
know, all that work putting together
the party, why not get some fresh
air? It's not like what I have to
say is bad news or anything--

NANCY

Are you gay?

BEN

No!

NANCY

Than just say it! Nothing is this
hard to say.

BEN

I want to write. Full-time.

NANCY

You are.

BEN

No, I mean forever. Become a writer
instead of go back to computers.

NANCY

You're kidding, right?

BEN

Running a corporate network is
stressful. The hours, the pressure...
Since I started writing again, it's
like this huge weight's been lifted
from my shoulders--

NANCY

Okay, stop. You make a hundred bucks a week. If they paid you twenty times that it still wouldn't be enough.

BEN

This isn't about the money--

NANCY

Coffee is two bucks! It NEEDS to be.

BEN

If I syndicate the column-- and I already have permission to do that -- we can make big money. Really big. Way more than I made in computers.

NANCY

You want to syndicate the column?

BEN

Yeah-- Well, I'm jumping ahead. First I'm gonna put out a book. I need about ten good samples for the proposal but I can crank those out quickly--

NANCY

So how long until you make this "big" money?

BEN

Depends.

NANCY

Ballpark.

BEN

(best guess)

A year.

NANCY

A year?!

BEN

Maybe less.

NANCY

What about our mortgage? Or do we just abandon the house?

He pulls a paper from his pocket with things listed on it.

BEN

I've been working on this.

(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)

We can stay in the house. We just have to cut some things, make some adjustments. It'll be tight but we can do this.

(re: list)

Cable channels. When's the last time we watched Cinamax? Hundred bucks a month right there.

(next item)

Bottled water. We get one of those Brita filters.

(next item)

Oh, here's a good one -- Mexican tiles. We don't need Spanish. You're just paying for the name--

NANCY

I like bottled water.

BEN

These are just ideas. We can go back and forth on which ones--

NANCY

Ben, listen to me. You want to get rid of bottled water? Fine. But I'm not putting discount tiles in the new kitchen. And we're not gonna stop going to nice restaurants...

BEN

Honey, we can't afford these things if this plan's gonna work.

NANCY

That's my point.

Nancy sees she's pissing on Ben's dream. She feels bad.

NANCY (CONT'D)

Don't make me the bad guy here. C'mon, Ben, you know this isn't a smart idea. Suppose an emergency comes up, we miss a few house payments? How do we move? My business is run out of this kitchen. It's too risky.

BEN

You changing careers, that's not risky?

NANCY

You really want to compare catering to trying to become famous writing an answer man column?

(MORE)

NANCY (CONT'D)

(firm)

You have to go back into computers.
I'm sorry.

Ben is obviously disappointed. He gets up and starts to cross out, depressed.

NANCY (CONT'D)

Where you going?

BEN

To steal some Sweet 'N Lows for the house.

(couldn't care less)

Dollar in my column.

EXT. COASTAL HIGHWAY - DAWN

MUSIC: Indigo Girls' POWER OF TWO or equivalent.

Ben's car is driving down the highway.

INT. LEXUS

Ben is behind the wheel. He's listening to the stereo and taking in the view. It's a beautiful day.

VOICE (V.O.)

Why do the birds that fly south for the winter bother coming back? You probably assume our feathered friends travel to Florida each year for the same reason you or I do: Who wants to search for hot meals in a snowstorm when you could sit at a Hooters and have half-naked chicks bring you baskets of wings?

Ben rolls down the window to let the wind hit his face.

VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Okay, that analogy is a little messy. You have to be either a guy or a lesbian to relate to it and why would a bird want to be served parts of another bird? Forget that. I'm sorry I said it.

Ben pulls up next to a semi. He holds his arm out the window and makes a "blow the airhorn" motion. To his surprise the trucker blows the AIRHORN!

Ben grins. That's the first time that ever worked!

VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Anyway, the assumption that birds hate bad weather is wrong. Birds make the migration because there's more insects down south. Everybody goes to where the biggest collection of food is. This is one of the reasons the cruise ship industry does so well. It's certainly not because people are trying to avoid gout.

EXT. HIGHWAY TURNOFF

Ben pulls over and stops at a turnout in the road. It's a picturesque spot with an amazing view of the city skyline.

VOICE (V.O.)

When adult portions become hard to find the birds take flight and distance is not an issue. The Arctic Tern flies all the way from Antarctica to Massachusetts. The American Golden Plover can beat that -- Nova Scotia to South America! Senior citizens cross the Pacific Ocean each year to reach the hotel feeding grounds of Hawaii. You're right -- they're not birds. Forget I said that too.

INT. SEATTLE WEEKLY OFFICES - DAY

Ben is at his desk. We see he's doing something he enjoys.

VOICE (V.O.)

How do they find their way? Some suspect they're guided by magnetic fields deep within the Earth. I'm talking about the senior citizens but birds probably have something just as sophisticated. Okay, so we now know why they went and how they found their way but our central question remains -- If life is warmer and the food more abundant in this new place, why return to the old?

INT. COFFEE SHOP

Nancy is working hard behind the grill.

VOICE (V.O.)

My guess is because the old is simply the life they're used to. It's familiar and change is scary.

(MORE)

VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

So despite compelling reasons to uproot, they stay put. To them the burden of flying back and forth and back and forth is a small price to pay to keep the familiar while still putting food on the table.

FADE TO:

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ben is at the table, working on his laptop.

Nancy enters from work, wearing her cook's uniform.

NANCY

I hate Mexicans. Not all of 'em.
Just the ones I know.

Ben doesn't say anything. The details will probably be vented shortly. Sure enough...

NANCY (CONT'D)

The dishwashers taught me how to say "nice tits" in Spanish. They didn't actually teach me. After awhile I just figured it out by their hand motions.

BEN

This is one of those Men Are From Mars things -- sounds rude to women but it's actually a compliment.

NANCY

Except they were talking about a waitress. They had plenty of chances to include me. But no.

Beat.

BEN

So you're mad they weren't talking about your tits? I gotta be honest, I don't know how to play this one.

She gives Ben a look -- let's drop it. Ben gets behind her and massages her shoulders. This relaxes her a bit.

BEN (CONT'D)

Sold two things on eBay today.
Seventy bucks. So that's good.

NANCY

(unimpressed)
Break out the Neiman's catalog.
(MORE)

NANCY (CONT'D)

(then)
Any leads from the headhunter?

Ben shakes his head.

NANCY (CONT'D)

When's the last time you checked in with him?

BEN

Honey, if he has any leads, he'll call. There aren't a lot of jobs out there right now.

NANCY

Exactly. You should be making sure your name's at the top of his list.
(noticing some letters)
You didn't mail these yet?!

Nancy crosses out, avoiding an argument.

INT. BEST BUY - APPLIANCE SECTION - DAY

Ben is standing before a display of microwave ovens.

A SALES ASSOCIATE, 19, wearing the standard-issue blue shirt with logo, lumbers in.

SALES ASSOCIATE

How sir may I be of assistance to you this morning?

BEN

Oh, hi. I'm writing an article on microwave ovens. I was hoping to find out how they work.

SALES ASSOCIATE

Cool.

Long beat.

BEN

Do you know how they work?

SALES ASSOCIATE

I imagine you push one of these buttons. I normally work in the Tape Deck Department. Lester couldn't come in today 'cause he bogeyed his shoulder so they called me in to cover his shift.

(eureka moment)

You know what we need?

(MORE)

SALES ASSOCIATE (CONT'D)
 Somebody to help the both of us!
 Too bad Lester's not here, he rocks
 this shit.

WIDE SHOT: WHOLE STORE

INTERCOM (V.O.)
*Assistant Manager to the Appliance
 Department. Any Assistant Manager
 to the Appliance Department.*

BACK TO APPLIANCE SECTION

Ben and the Sales Associate have been joined by the ASSISTANT
 MANAGER.

ASSISTANT MANAGER
 You just want to know how they work?
 You push this button.

SALES ASSOCIATE
 I knew it! That's what I said,
 remember?

BEN
 No. I'm trying to find out how they
 work on a technical level. You know,
 how the actual microwaves work.

ASSISTANT MANAGER
 Oh! The magic part.

WIDE SHOT: WHOLE STORE

INTERCOM (V.O.)
*Technician to Appliances. Any
 technician to Appliances. Customer
 waiting.*

BACK TO APPLIANCE SECTION

A TECH GUY is in the middle of explaining exactly how
 microwaves work. Ben is frantically taking notes.

TECH GUY
 ..It then shoots out electromagnetic
 radiation in exactly the right
 wavelength to heat up the water
 molecules in the food. These
 wavelengths are twelve point two
 centimeters and oscillate at a
 frequency of two point four five
 gigahertz--

BEN
 Hold on, hold on...

The tech guy pauses as Ben quickly writes stuff down.

SALES ASSOCIATE

This is what I'm talking about!

(to Tech Guy)

You and Lester should definitely
hook up and rock this shit together.

(re: Ben)

Tell him how that dish inside turns.

EXT. STREET ON SIDE OF THEATER - NIGHT

Ben and Nancy are walking along the side wall of a movie theater. They pass the outside of an exit door.

BEN

I have an idea. Wait here.

Nancy grabs his shoulder and holds him back.

NANCY

You're not gonna sneak me in.

BEN

How do you know that's what I was
thinking?

NANCY

(playful)

Because you're a child.

She's right. Ben gives up on the idea.

BEN

Wouldn't saved ten dollars. Ten in
my column.

Nancy laughs.

NANCY

No. It's illegal. AND we didn't do
it.

BEN

Fine. I'll make it back by not buying
the lobster candy.

They laugh as they continue walking.

EXT. FRONT OF THEATER

Ben and Nancy have bought tickets and are in the short line to enter into the theater.

BEN

Remember, Tim can be rude so don't
take anything he says personally.

NANCY
 (amused)
 Why you so nervous?

Imitating a ten year old...

BEN
 These are my new friends. I want
 you to like them.

They give their tickets to the USHER and enter the lobby.

INT. THEATER LOBBY

Ben spots some people from work including Jo and Tim. They
 cross over and exchange greetings.

BEN
 You guys remember my wife.

Barry crosses in holding 3 or 4 large buckets of popcorn.

TIM
 (to Ben)
 You can still eat popcorn, can't
 you? We bought a bunch to share.

BEN
 Why wouldn't I be able to?

TIM
 (duh!)
 Dentures.

BEN
 I'll be fine. Nancy made a batch of
 salt water taffy if anybody wants
 some.

Ben holds up a bag of candy he was carrying.

BARRY
 You can make candy?

NANCY
 (humble)
 I'm a professional chef.

BARRY
 I didn't know they actually made
 candy.

TIM
 What'd you think, they mine it from
 the ground?

Barry doesn't have an answer.

TIM (CONT'D)
What about the Raisinets?

BARRY
The guy said they don't sell 'em in
four pound boxes.

TIM
I'm telling you, they do. Check the
snack bar upstairs.

Barry heads upstairs to check that snack bar.

JO
Why'd you do that? Now we have to
wait for him to come back again.

TIM
He'll find us.

They all start to walk into the theater.

NANCY
(to Tim)
They really sell Raisinets in boxes
that big?

TIM
Not as far as I know.

INT. THEATER

POV: MOVIE SCREEN LOOKING TOWARDS AUDIENCE

Full audience.

Ben is sitting with Jo on one side and Nancy on the other.
A bucket of popcorn is on Ben's lap.

Nancy reaches over and grabs some popcorn from the bucket
between Ben's legs. Ben's eyes turn to her and he smiles --
good movie. He then returns his glance to the screen.

Jo then reaches into the popcorn bucket between Ben's legs.
Her eyes never leave the screen and Ben probably isn't even
aware she did it. It's completely innocent -- she got some
popcorn. Still, each time Jo's hand comes in for more Nancy
can't help but be distracted.

EXT. FRONT OF THEATER

The movie has let out. They're now all together, standing
in a group.

TIM
I'm reviewing a band at King Cobra
later tonight. Who wants to join me?

JO
I'm up for that.

BARRY
I can hang out for a couple of sets.

The others voice approval also.

BEN
(aside to Nancy)
Night's young?

NANCY
I have the early shift tomorrow.

BEN
(to others)
We're gonna pass.

NANCY
(to Ben)
You can go if you want.

JO
Yeah, come.

BEN
That's okay. I'll see you guys
tomorrow.

Ben puts his arm around Nancy and they exit.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ben and Nancy enter the bedroom and get ready for bed.

NANCY
I really don't mind.

BEN
Would you stop? It's not like I had
plans and you nixed 'em or anything.

Ben gets behind Nancy and kisses the back of her neck.

NANCY
I'm too tired.

BEN
You can go right to sleep.

NANCY
Aren't you romantic? Why don't you
throw flowers at me now.

Ben gets the message. Nancy gets into bed. Ben just stands
there.

NANCY (CONT'D)

You mad?

BEN

I'm trying to decide between Answer
Man stuff or a movie.

NANCY

You just saw a movie.

BEN

I can watch two in one night. It's
not like I have to wake up early.

(realizing)

Sorry. I didn't mean it to sound
like that.

NANCY

Don't worry about it.

Nancy turns out the light. Ben exits.

FADE TO:

INT. BEDROOM

Nancy wakes up and discovers Ben isn't in bed. She looks at
the clock on the nightstand.

INSERT: CLOCK reading 1:30AM

INT. LIVING ROOM

Draped in a robe, Nancy enters and sees Ben's laptop but
he's not behind it.

NANCY

Ben?

Maybe he's asleep on the couch. She checks -- not there.

INT. KITCHEN

Nancy looks at the car keys hook. The keys aren't there.
Mystery solved -- he went out.

She starts to go back to bed but pauses to look at the
unfinished walls. She picks up one of the tiles on the
counter but then has second thoughts and decides she's not
in the mood now.

She puts the tile down, turns on a light so Ben can see when
he gets home and heads back to bed.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

It's the morning rush. Nancy is on grill. She's way behind in the orders.

WAITRESS

(impatient)

Waiting on that second order of bacon.

NANCY

There's another?

ROY, the manager is watching the orders pile up.

ROY

Nancy, I need you to focus.

NANCY

Thanks for the pep talk, Roy.

(calling out)

Pick up garden omelet!

Nancy puts some bacon on a plate and puts it in the microwave.

ZOOM INTO the microwave...

EXT. COASTAL HIGHWAY - DAY

A aerial view of the highway. Cars can be seen driving.

VOICE (V.O.)

How do microwaves work? This has baffled Man since the day after he invented fire and thought, "There must be a faster way to cook this beast."

We ZOOM IN and see that one of the cars is Ben's Lexus. He looks out the window to admire the same scenic turnout we've seen before.

VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I say "he" because traditionally males have been in charge of cooking outdoors.

INT. COFFEE SHOP

Nancy is on grill.

VOICE (V.O.)

Of course nowadays traditions are regularly ignored.

BEGIN MONTAGE

Shots of Ben working hard at the Seattle Weekly...

VOICE (V.O.)

Harnessing microwaves is more complicated than lighting a pile of wood. You're still rubbing two sticks together but those sticks are now made from the fundamental elements of the universe. What's that? Stop stalling you say? Just tell us how microwaves work? Very well.

Shots of Ben at home including...

Ben on his couch searching the Internet and taking notes on a legal pad. Nancy is watching TV.

VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

By an organic chemistry reaction methodology in which intense internal heating is caused by strong agitation provided by the reorientation of molecules in phase with an electrical field excitation.

Nancy has fallen asleep in front of TV. Ben keeps working.

VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Got that? Ask questions now 'cause we're not circling back.

Ben and Nancy are in the kitchen arguing. Yelling in fact.

VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Of course there's more to it than just marrying the right elements together. It also takes the right environment and careful timing.

Nancy is frustrated, throws a book at Ben and storms out.

VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Fire and water in the right combination make steam. In the wrong combination they put out the fire.

Shots of Ben living the good life including...

Ben pulls up to the parking booth at the zoo and the PARKING ATTENDANT waves him through for free -- he's a regular.

VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

"Yes, Yes!" I hear you cry, "But how does the process actually work?"

Ben at Starbucks. He secretly tips the BARISTA and is given a coffee for free -- he's a regular.

VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
*Emily Dickinson wrote: "My father,
 in his ultimate wisdom, took apart
 all the clocks of the world and never
 knew what time it was."*

Ben at dry cleaners. Ben walks in with his plastic bag but the owner and workers rush out holding their noses, waving their hands in refusal -- Ben's business is no longer welcome.

VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
*I'm gonna make an executive decision
 now and not tell you how microwaves
 work. For your own good.*

Shots of Ben at the Seattle Weekly enjoying working with the other employees including...

Ben and some others playing hacky-sack in the park during lunch.

VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
*You see, in complicated processes
 where the elements are ephemeral,
 it's best to just let whatever is
 going to happen, happen. You can't
 control things anyway so why take on
 the stress?*

Ben is at a Starbucks and one of the CUSTOMERS spots Ben from his picture over his column and shakes his hand. Ben is pleased by the attention.

VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
*Stop worrying and learn to enjoy the
 process.*

Ben is at his desk while other employees are gathered around intently listening to some story he's telling.

VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
*It's not giving up. In fact, it's
 the opposite. It's having faith in
 the inevitable. It's knowing, even
 though we can't explain how, that
 bringing together the right elements
 at the right time...*

Jo is sitting on Ben's desk sharing a laugh with him.

VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
*...Will create heat. Every time.
 So if anybody asks you how microwaves
 work, do yourself a favor and just
 say, "Who knows?" And chalk it all
 up to magic.*

END MONTAGE

FADE TO:

EXT. OUTSIDE COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Nancy just finished her shift. Her uniform is filthy. She starts to walk down the street on her way home.

A car HONKS.

She turns and sees Ben driving a 15-year-old LAND CRUISER.

Ben leans over from the driver's seat and rolls down the passenger window.

BEN
Hey, Sexy. Hop in.

Nancy climbs into the car, confused.

INT. LAND CRUISER

NANCY
Where's the Lexus?

BEN
I sold it.

NANCY
You said we'd lose too much if we sold it.

BEN
That was before we ran out of things to sell.

NANCY
So our only car is now an old Land Cruiser?

It's clear that Nancy is not happy.

BEN
You said you liked Land Cruisers. You said you wanted one.

NANCY
I said in COLLEGE I wanted one. I also wanted tickets to Loggins and Messina. You know I really wish you'd make me a part of these decisions.

BEN
(bright side)
Netted fifteen grand.

Wait. There may be an up side here.

NANCY

So I can get my stove now?

BEN

No. I need to pay the mortgage.

NANCY

And there's eight grand left.

BEN

What do think this car cost?

NANCY

You could've bought a car for a few grand.

BEN

Yeah, a shitty one.

Nancy is now officially pissed. She opens the door to get out even though it's still moving!

BEN (CONT'D)

Whoa! Where you going?

Ben slows down so she doesn't get hurt. She slams the door and walks away, fuming.

The car behind Ben HONKS. Ben is forced to drive away.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ben is on the couch watching a movie when Nancy enters though the front door.

BEN

I was wondering where you were.

She plops down into a chair, reaches into her purse and pulls out a box of chocolates. Without saying a word she starts watching the movie and picking at the chocolates.

BEN (CONT'D)

We don't know how long we're gonna have this car. I had to buy something dependable--

NANCY

I don't want to talk about it.

They each watch the TV in silence. After a few beats...

BEN

Can I have one?

Nancy holds out the box without removing her eyes from the TV. Ben takes a chocolate. The taste surprises him.

BEN (CONT'D)

These are good.

NANCY

Forty-five bucks a box. They should be.

Ben realizes she might not be kidding. He gets up and looks at the price sticker on the box.

BEN

You paid a forty-five dollars for chocolates!?

NANCY

They're not chocolates. They're truffles. Truffles have a ganache center.

If Ben stays in the room it'll quickly turn into an argument so he exits, fuming.

He returns a few seconds later.

BEN

Those put us over our credit limit. So they're eighty a box once you add in the penalty.

FADE TO:

INT. SEATTLE WEEKLY OFFICES - NEXT DAY

Randell arrives to pick up Ben.

RANDELL

Ready for lunch? I thought we'd walk to that place on the corner.

Ben finishes putting the last touch on some piece of business.

BEN

Have you guys met yet? Jo, this is Randell.

JO

Hey.

RANDELL

How you doin'?

EXT. STREET IN FRONT OF SEATTLE WEEKLY - MOMENTS LATER

Randell's been waiting 'til they got outside. As they walk...

RANDELL
You didn't tell me Jo was a girl.

BEN
I didn't? Yeah, her name's actually Elizabeth--

RANDELL
Does Nancy know yet?

BEN
That's she's a girl? Yeah. I think she noticed the bigger chest thing.

Randell stops.

RANDELL
This is bad.

BEN
What's bad? What is "this?"

RANDELL
(isn't it obvious?)
Jo has a vagina.

An OLD WOMAN walking by heard this and gives a look.

RANDELL (CONT'D)
(to old woman)
What are you looking at? Vagina.
Vagina. Vagina...

The old woman quickly walks away disgusted.

RANDELL (CONT'D)
Nancy's a little abrasive sometimes.
I can see that. And sure, she's not exactly a spring chicken anymore--

BEN
Where is this going?

RANDELL
She's a wonderful woman is my point.
I know you guys are going through a tough patch but aren't you loading the gun a little early?

BEN
What are you talking about?

RANDELL
Befriending a new vagina? Hello!

BEN
Stop saying that word. You think
I'm interested in Jo?

RANDELL
Ben, we've both seen BLAME IT ON
RIO.

BEN
First off, good reference.

RANDELL
Only Michael Caine film I ever jerk-
off to.

BEN
Why'd you make it bad again? Nancy
and I are not on the skids. And
even if we were, which we're not,
Jo's not my type.

RANDELL
Oh, and I suppose you don't imagine
her naked.

BEN
No.

RANDELL
Bullshit. I met her five minutes
ago and already managed to picture
her in two different wigs. By the
way, did you know Demi Moore played
the best friend?

BEN
We're done talking about that movie.
Look at me. Look at me! There's
nothing going on between Jo and I.

Randell looks him in the eye for a long beat.

RANDELL
Okay, I believe you. Let's just
hope Nancy does. Practice on me.

BEN
Practice what?

RANDELL
Explaining the situation.

BEN
There's nothing to explain!

RANDELL

You know that and I know that. But does Nancy know that? No. And from the outside, I gotta say, it appears suspicious. You're fighting with your wife AND befriending a younger girl. Where I come from that looks like a guy putting the pieces in place for a separation.

(then)

C'mon, I'm Nancy.

(as Nancy)

You wanted to talk to me, Ben?

Ben sighs. He knows the quickest way out of this is to just pacify Randell.

BEN

Fine. Let's get this over with.

(to "Nancy")

I want to clear something up.

RANDELL

(as Nancy)

You chose THAT outfit to talk to me in?

(off Ben's look)

Sorry. Good so far. Go on.

BEN

If you got the impression that maybe there was something going on between Jo and I, I want to dispel it. There's not. I swear.

RANDELL

(as Nancy)

You're fucking Jo?!!

Randell smacks Ben hard across the face.

RANDELL (CONT'D)

It could go that way. I think you should be prepared.

Ben stands there asking himself the question - Why is this my friend?

BEN

Thank you. This was helpful.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODMAN BACKYARD - DAY

Ben and Jo are sitting at the patio table by the swimming pool. Both are wearing swimming attire.

The table is covered with a lot of empty food containers and drink glasses. Jo is looking over Ben's book proposal.

JO

I think you have too many animal ones up front. I'd put this one further back.

BEN

Did I tell you? Tim gave me another batch of questions. Including... Ready? -- "Why don't dogs eat cats when they catch 'em?"

JO

I was there.

BEN

Oh, that's right.

JO

Wow, turning senile already. I'm Jo, by the way.

Ben laughs and Jo suddenly SCREAMS in fright!

REVEAL: Nancy standing there, dressed in her cook's uniform.

BEN

Oh. Hi, Honey. We didn't hear you come in.

JO

(catching breath)
You scared me. Hi.

Nancy is not happy with what she sees.

BEN

Some of the guys came over for lunch.
(admitting)
And drinks. You just missed the others.

NANCY

Darn. I would've liked to have seen the others.

JO

I was helping Ben with his book proposal. Have you read these yet? They're really good--

NANCY

Can I talk to my husband for a sec?

Sensing this could turn into an argument, Jo grabs her bag of clothes and heads into the house but Nancy blocks her.

NANCY (CONT'D)
Go around the side.

Jo exits around the side of the house. Once she's gone...

NANCY (CONT'D)
Book proposal? I thought we talked about this.

BEN
The columns are already written. I just thought, you know, it won't hurt to send 'em out and just see if there'd be interest--

NANCY
Go to the market yet?

BEN
Not yet.

NANCY
Mail out the new batch of resumes?

Ben sees where this is going. He shuts down.

NANCY (CONT'D)
Yeah, I guess it was more important to do this with her while I was away.

BEN
Honey, I'm not hanging around with a twenty-year-old behind your back.

NANCY
Interesting how you guessed what this looks like on the first try.

Ben holds back a chuckle.

NANCY (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, how is this funny?

BEN
Randell said you'd think this.

NANCY
You and Randell talked about what I might think?

BEN
Look, I apologize if this looks like something it's not-- No.

(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)

You know what? I don't apologize.
This is you. I didn't do anything
wrong here.

Without responding, Nancy heads into the house.

BEN (CONT'D)

(so she can't hear)

Fuck you.

INT. SEATTLE WEEKLY - DAY

Ben is at his desk when Nancy's parents cross in.

BEN

Mister Barnes. Mrs. Barnes. What
a...pleasant surprise.

KATE

Our daughter called us--

MR. BARNES

I'll handle this, Kate. The mobile
home dealership I manage is rated
number one in the state. How do you
think I earned that distinction?
I'll tell you -- by not leaving work
early. I hope my presence here gives
you an idea how seriously we're taking
this situation.

BEN

Situation?

KATE

Nancy asked to borrow money.

MR. BARNES

Kate!

BEN

She asked for money?! Well..she
shouldn't have.

MR. BARNES

Well, she did. Said the Lord threw
you for a loop. That you lost your
job and things are getting tough--

KATE

Said you were living on fumes.

MR. BARNES

(to Kate)

You want to do this?

KATE

(to Ben)

We're not judging you--

MR. BARNES

Why would you say that? We are judging him. Let me do this.

Kate backs down.

MR. BARNES (CONT'D)

Obviously when our daughter says things are tough, we want to help. But as you know, I don't believe in handouts so you'll come work for me on the lot.

BEN

Whoa. Wow. I appreciate the offer. I really do. But I don't want to sell mobile homes.

MR. BARNES

You think I do? You think I said, "You know what I'd love to do for a career? Sell mobile homes. Those are the buyers I'd love to spend my days talking to." But things happened how they happened and now it's my job. I suck it in and do what I have to do to support my family. And you're gonna do the same.

BEN

Nancy and I will be fine. We're not gonna starve.

KATE

She said you were living on fumes.

Mr. Barnes gives Kate another look.

KATE (CONT'D)

I have a right to talk.

BEN

Mister Barnes, again, I appreciate the offer but we'll be fine. I have a plan.

MR. BARNES

Hear that, Kate? He has a plan. A plan that allows his family to slide into poverty and then climb back out. Very impressive. Isn't it, Kate?

Kate pauses. Mr. Barnes nods that it's okay to answer.

KATE

It is impressive.

MR. BARNES

Listen to me, Son. I hear this talk every day from my customers. How they'll climb back. How THEIR situation is temporary. And sure as rain, two years later they're back buying a porch extension. The odds are against you, Son. You know we have a plan too. And ours does not include our daughter ending up in a double-wide, drinking hooch and watching Nascar.

KATE

We didn't raise her to drink wine from a box!

MR. BARNES

(to Kate)

Nice.

She smiles proudly.

JO

You're a bonehead.

BEN

Jo--

Tim and a few others wander in.

JO

You obviously don't know what Ben's capable of.

MR. BARNES

Young lady, this is a personal conversation.

TIM

(amused)

He just called you a lady!

JO

Do you know Ben at all? Seriously, do you? He's clever. He's dedicated.

Jo picks up a copy of Ben's book proposal.

JO (CONT'D)

This book he plans to write?

(MORE)

JO (CONT'D)

It's gonna sell a million copies.
If anybody can pull off something
like this, it's him. Why don't you
try reading his stuff before you
spew out defeatist opinions?

She tosses the proposal into Mr. Barnes's hands but he doesn't even try to catch it. He lets it drop to the floor in a show of disrespect for her and what she said.

Kate picks up the proposal since he's not going to.

TIM

(sing song to Jo)
*You like the new guy. You like the
new guy.*

JO

(to Tim)
Shut up!

MR. BARNES

(to Ben)
When you're ready to be responsible
you know where the lot is. Until
then, not a cent.

He exits and Kate dutifully follows.

KATE

I smell bacon.

MR. BARNES

Not now, Kate.

KATE

I'm allowed to say what I smell.

They're out. Tim exits. Jo goes back to work.

After a beat.

BEN

Thanks for saying all that.

Ben starts to go back to work himself but can't -- there's something pressing he now has to attend to. He grabs his jacket and exits, on a mission.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

The coffee shop is busy when Ben comes storming in. He heads directly to the pass-thru between the dining room and kitchen.

BEN

Why'd you call your father?!

Nancy, some CUSTOMERS and BUSBOYS look up -- who's yelling?

A WAITER approaches to escort "the yelling man" outside but Nancy waves him off.

NANCY

I got this.
 (calling O.C.)
 Going on a break, Roy.

Nancy removes her apron and heads to the back door, signaling Ben to follow. She's now as pissed as he is.

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

Nancy walks out the kitchen door. Ben follows behind.

NANCY

If you ever embarrass me like that again--

BEN

Why'd you call your father?

NANCY

I need a stove. You don't seem to be taking that seriously so I'm exploring my options.

BEN

Did he tell you his terms? I'd have to work on his lot.

NANCY

Maybe you should.

BEN

I don't want to sell mobile homes.

NANCY

And I don't want to cook patty melts!

Nancy takes out a cigarette and lights it.

BEN

You're smoking again?

Nancy doesn't answer. Isn't it obvious?

BEN (CONT'D)

I can't write the column AND work for your dad.

NANCY

Then stop writing the column. You're gonna have to stop eventually.

BEN

If I stop writing the column they'll find someone else to take over. I'd be giving it up forever.

NANCY

So? You yourself said you can't do it once you go back into computers. Or did you forget we decided you're going back?

BEN

You decided. I didn't.

Nancy is getting frustrated. She didn't realize this argument was still open in Ben's mind.

NANCY

Still wanna have kids?

BEN

What kind of question is that?

NANCY

Do you?

BEN

Yes.

NANCY

How are we gonna do that with no health insurance? I know! We'll buy it though my catering company-- Oh, wait, I can't start that until YOUR dream comes though. And when will that be again? A year from now? Two years? Forever?

BEN

It won't be forever.

NANCY

You don't know that! You want me to actually say it? Is that what you want? Okay -- I don't want to give back my stuff. How's that?

(calling out)

I LIKE NICE STUFF. I'M MATERIALISTIC.

(back)

There. You made me say it out loud. You made me sound ugly. Happy now?

She takes his hands in hers...

NANCY (CONT'D)

(kindly)

For ten years we've been working off the same set of plans. Plans we made together. It's time we cash in for all those years of struggle.

BEN

I just need a little more time. The proposal was just sent out. Maybe the publishers will all hate it. But at least I'll know--

Nancy lets go of his hands.

NANCY

I don't know what more to say.

A WAITER sticks his head out the kitchen door.

WAITER

Roy wants you back inside.

NANCY

Tell him I quit.

FADE TO:

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Nancy and Ben enter in silence. It was a long ride home.

The light on the answering machine is blinking -- there's a message. Nancy pushes the play button...

PERSON (V.O.)

(through speaker)

This is Nagi Preston. Head of Human Resources at Valarion Industries. A position just became available. I know it's short notice but I was hoping we could meet tomorrow at 11. Let me know. I'm at 555-9453.

The machine BEEPS and hangs up.

Ben looks at Nancy.

BEN

Ask, and ye shall receive, Ye of Little Faith.

INT. SEATTLE WEEKLY - DAY

It's the next morning. Ben is dressed in a suit, sitting at his desk. He's in the middle of a conversation...

BEN

(into phone)

..Right... I was just wondering if you had any idea if he's read it yet?... I know it was only e-mailed this morning, it's just... I understand... I'm sure he is... Thanks.

Ben hangs up and stares off into space, deep in thought.

CUT TO:

EXT. COASTAL HIGHWAY - DAY

Ben is driving down the scenic highway, the Cascades on the horizon.

As he's done many times before, Ben rolls down the window to feel the wind on his face. But today he's not enjoying it.

EXT. HIGHWAY TURNOFF - SHORT TIME LATER

Ben has pulled off and parked the car.

He gets out and, like a sailor about to board a submarine, tries to take in as much fresh air as he can.

What a view! He climbs onto the roof of his car to get an even better look. He holds out his outstretched arms and looks to the horizon. So much space. So much beauty right under our noses. And this will probably be the last chance he has to enjoy it before his life in computers starts again and he goes back down in the submarine, away from the fresh air and the view. And the freedom.

Ben looks at his watch, adjusts his tie in the reflection in the Land Cruiser's window and begrudgingly climbs back in to drive to his interview.

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET - DAY

Ben pulls up and finds an empty parking space in front of a LOOMING GLASS TOWER -- the type that houses high-end law firms and corporate headquarters.

Ben tries to see the top of building but is forced to block the reflected sun from his eyes.

He takes a deep breath and heads towards the lobby entrance.

FADE TO:

INT. SEATTLE WEEKLY - DAY

Ben is at his desk. He's still wearing his suit from the earlier interview but his tie is now loose.

Tim stops off at Jo's desk.

TIM

I'm going to the other building. I thought you might want me to pass out some flyers there too thank you very much Tim what a nice offer.

Jo hands him some flyers.

JO

Thanks.

(Tim waits)

It was hard enough for me to say that. Don't push it.

Tim exits, leaving Ben and Jo alone. She gently tosses a flyer onto his desk.

JO (CONT'D)

(re: flyer)

I'm throwing a party tonight. I know you probably won't want to come but you can. If you want.

Ben is looking at his computer screen.

BEN

Oh, my god! Oh, my god!! Somebody's gonna buy it!

JO

Your book?

BEN

I just got an email. They want to publish it!

Jo comes around to look at Ben's screen.

JO

Are you kidding?!--

NANCY (O.C.)

You didn't even bother to show up?!

Ben looks up and sees Nancy storming in. Before he can say anything, she verbally lashes into Ben.

NANCY (CONT'D)

They called to ask why you didn't show up for the interview. So I called the head hunter. Maybe HE knew. He didn't even know who you were! HE DIDN'T EVEN FUCKING KNOW WHO YOU WERE!!--

BEN

They bought my book!

Ben points to his computer screen, hoping this will squash her anger and turn it into joy.

NANCY

(thrown)

What?! Do you even see me here?!

BEN

They just e-mailed. They're gonna buy my book!

NANCY

You blew off a job, Ben! A REAL job!

BEN

I don't need a job now. I'm gonna get an advance! Could be...

(pie in the sky)

..a hundred thousand dollars!

(pointedly)

We can buy your stove now.

NANCY

I also need a car. And liability insurance. And a line of credit... I need a BANK LOAN, Ben. They don't give those to people who write answer man columns. That hundred thousand? It's gonna have to last us the rest of our lives!

She's starts to exit but realizes she has more to stay.

NANCY (CONT'D)

You orchestrated this well. Gotta give you credit. Put my dreams on hold so you can stay here and pretend you're still young. Play hacky-sac, discuss the latest Green Bay albums...

JO

Green DAY.

NANCY

Shut the fuck up!!

Nancy storms out in disgust. Ben just sits there, annoyed.

After a beat...

JO

Gonna go after her? I really think you should go after her.

Ben doesn't.

BEN
Want to get some coffee? Or a strong
drink?

Garrison crosses though at just this moment.

GARRISON
Woodman. My office. Now.

Ben gets up and follows Garrison.

INT. GARRISON'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Garrison gestures for Ben to take a seat. He looks at Ben for a long beat, trying to get a reading. Finally...

GARRISON
Fight it. Fight it with all the
power you have and come out the other
side victorious!

Beat.

BEN
Is that from a movie?

GARRISON
I just made it up. Cigar?

BEN
Sir, I got a lot on my mind right
now--

Garrison takes a bottle from his desk.

GARRISON
Shot of rye?

Ben shakes his head. Garrison pours a shot, downs it himself and gets down to business...

GARRISON (CONT'D)
What you do in your private life is
between you and your tin god. But
know this -- sleeping with Jo would
be a big mistake.

BEN
Is that what this is about--

GARRISON
Don't interrupt. Let's set the scene --
you sleep with her. It's great. She's
25 years old and hot.

(MORE)

GARRISON (CONT'D)

How can it not be? You wake up three times during the night to do it again. Because unlike women our age, she doesn't yell at you to quit and go back to sleep--

BEN

Sir, I'm getting a little uncomfortable here--

GARRISON

Then what? THAT'S the question that has haunted middle-aged men for centuries. Then what? You'll try and discuss movies but she never saw 'em. She'll try and discuss rap music but you'll be yelling, "Get me outta here!" so loud inside your head you won't be able to hear. She's young and hot, sure, but also stupid. They're all stupid when they're young and hot. Now, ask yourself, is that the future you want?

BEN

I think I will have a shot.

Garrison pours Ben a shot. Ben downs the shot and almost spits it out. That wasn't alcohol!

BEN (CONT'D)

What is this?!

GARRISON

Warm tea. I don't actually drink. I just like the affectation.

(then)

You can go now. I just wanted to give you something to think about.

Ben gets up to leave. Before he's out the door he stops and turns...

BEN

You're wrong about Jo being stupid. She's not.

Ben exits.

INT. SEATTLE WEEKLY OFFICES - MOMENTS LATER

Jo has her stuff ready to go.

JO

Coffee or booze? What's your poison?

BEN
 You know what? I think I'm gonna
 take a pass.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The house is dark. Ben enters.

BEN
 (calling out)
 Hello?

Ben turns on a light and notices the answering machine
 BLINKING. He crosses over and pushes the button.

NANCY (V.O.)
 (through speaker)
*I'm staying at Janet's. Don't bother
 calling. I don't want to talk to
 you.*

The machine BEEPS.

Ben picks up the phone and dials Janet's number.

JANET (O.S.)
 (through headset)
 Hello?

BEN
 It's Ben. Put Nancy on please.

NANCY (O.S.)
 (through headset)
*What part of, "Don't call," didn't
 you understand?*

She hangs up.

Ben considers calling back but heads to the car instead.

EXT. JANET AND RANDELL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ben drives up and parks in the driveway.

Through a front window he can see Nancy sitting with Janet.
 Nancy sees Ben pull up.

NANCY
 (to Janet)
 See? What'd I tell ya? Doesn't
 listen.

Ben walks to the front door but Randell comes out of the
 house and intercepts him midway up the path.

RANDELL

Let's go for a beer.

Ben tries to get past but Randell is now blocking Ben's way.

RANDELL (CONT'D)

It's "girls only" in there. C'mon,
she's not gonna talk to ya.

Ben tries to get past Randell again but Randell is not gonna let that happen. Ben accepts his fate and walks to Randell's car with him.

INT. BOWLING ALLEY BAR - NIGHT

Black walls with splashes of color on them lit by black light, pinball machines, TV screens displaying state Lotto numbers...

SFX: BOWLING PINS being STRUCK throughout scene

Randell and Ben sit at the bar. Ben has two empty glasses in front of him and is a good way through his third. He's not drunk but he certainly is loose.

BEN

She's never been tied to a beeper.
She doesn't know. That's her problem.

RANDELL

That definitely is her problem.

Randell signals the bartender to bring another round.

BEN

Wants to cater out of our kitchen!
What the fuck, right? That's not
taking a risk?

Randell clicks his drink against Ben's in agreement. It's clear that Randell would be agreeing that the sky was green if that's what Ben said.

BEN (CONT'D)

I get a once-in-a-lifetime shot but
she's like, "You're too old to follow
your dream." Who want to be with
that? I want to be with somebody
who believes in me, ya know?

Ben pulls out his cell phone and starts to dial Nancy to give her a piece of his mind.

RANDELL

Whoa, whoa, give me that. No fuck
you calls to the wife on my watch.

Randell takes Ben's cell phone away. He signals the bartender to bring Ben another drink.

BEN

How long is she making you keep me away?

RANDELL

Couple more hours. If I bring you back before midnight Janet said I don't get laid for a month.

Ben downs what remains of his third drink and pulls Jo's flyer from his pocket.

BEN

Let's go to a party.

EXT. STREET IN FRONT OF JO'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Randell's car pulls up in front of Jo's house.

A party is in full swing, overflowing onto the front lawn. A lot of KIDS IN THEIR TWENTIES are in varying stages of intoxication.

MUSIC: Eminem's "Shake That Ass for Me" can be heard.

EXT. JO'S FRONT LAWN

Randell and Ben walk across the lawn towards the front door.

RANDELL

You weren't kidding about being the oldest ones here.

Randell grabs Ben to make him stop.

RANDELL (CONT'D)

Do what you want but Wing Man Rules are in effect for me. If I get too wasted, you do what?

BEN

(by rote)

Pull you out before you have sex or vomit a third time.

They knock knuckles and continue to the open front door.

INT. JO'S FRONT ENTRANCE

The music is now very loud.

SOME GUY sees Ben and Randell coming up the walkway.

SOME GUY
 (calling O.C.)
 Hey Jo! Your neighbors are here to
 complain.

Ben and Randell enter the house just as Jo hurriedly crosses
 through. She stops when she sees Ben.

JO
 You made it!

They exchange greetings.

BEN
 (impressed)
 This house yours?

JO
 My mom's. She's away until Tuesday.
 Listen, I have to deal with something
 in the kitchen. There's a bar and
 some kegs out back.

Ben gestures for her to go. She quickly races off to deal
 with whatever it was.

A CUTE GIRL in a swimsuit walks by.

RANDELL
 Let's split up to cover more ground.

Randell follows the girl. Ben heads off to find the keg.

EXT. JO'S BACKYARD

It's more crowded than inside the house.

There's a self-serve bar -- some kegs, a bucket of beers,
 opened bottles of hard liquor... Off to one side is a pool
 filled with a dozen people.

The music is even louder out here. It's like we're inside a
 jet engine.

Ben wanders through the backyard, checking everything out.

INT. JO'S LIVING ROOM

Randell was following the cute girl but suddenly stops when
 he spots a coffee table with a large BONG on it.

RANDELL
 (to himself)
 Hello, Mother.

Two stoner guys, JOEY and NED, both 19, are sitting on the
 couch. It's clear they found the bong awhile ago.

Joey spots Randell approaching.

JOEY
(sotto)
Authority figure.

RANDELL
How you guys doin'?

Joey and Ned are now sitting up as straight as they can.

NED
Just sitting here minding our Ps and
Qs and whatever else, you know...
stuff.

RANDELL
(re: bong)
Mind if I..?

The weight of the world has been lifted from their shoulders --
they're not busted. They both grin widely.

JOEY
(new best friends)
I'm Joey.

NED
And I'm Joey-- Oh shit!
(to Joey)
Dude, I thought my name was your
name for a second!

Joey and Ned start LAUGHING. There has never been anything
funnier in the entire world.

They continue to laugh until the end of time.

INT. JO'S DEN

Ben is leaning against a wall enjoying the atmosphere. It's
like his college days all over again.

TWO GUYS approach Ben.

GUY #1
Excuse me, sir? When you were growing
up, were there cell phones?

Ben isn't sure why he's being asked but shakes his head, no.

GUY #1 (CONT'D)
See? He is old.
(to Ben)
He thought you just had some aging
disease.

BEN

C'mon, it's not like I grew up with horse shit on the streets.

GUY #1

What was that like? You know, no cell phones?

GUY #2

Was it boring? I mean, you could only talk to people who were actually in the car.

Some more people have begun to gather around including Barry and Tim.

BEN

Know what was worse? Before email if you didn't write stuff down, there wasn't a record of it.

This never even occurred to them.

GUY #2

Woooowww. That must've been like pioneer days.

BARRY

You think time machines will go back to when you were a kid?

They all look at Barry -- what?

BARRY (CONT'D)

Planes can't go back too far 'cause there won't be airports to land at.

GUY #2

Good point.

BARRY

I'm afraid to use a time machine. What if I go back too far and get stuck?

TIM

You'll never have access to a time machine. Don't worry about it.

BARRY

How do you know?

Tim hits Barry in the shoulder. Hard.

BARRY (CONT'D)

Ouch!!

TIM
If you did you'd come back and skip
this party so you wouldn't get hit.

Tim hits him again.

BARRY
Ouch!! Stop!

TIM
It has to be hard. You have to not
want to come back.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Randell is talking to the CUTE GIRL from earlier.

CUTE GIRL
Are you really a swim instructor?

Randell crosses his heart.

RANDELL
Do you have a swimsuit with you?

EXT. JO'S BACKYARD

The group of people around Ben has grown larger. He's holding
court. Everybody is mildly wasted and having a good time.

GUY #1
Okay, here's one you won't get --
"Say hello to my little friend."

BEN
Al Pacino in SCARFACE. Universal
Pictures. 1983.

Everybody CHEERS.

As a reward, Ben is passed a shot of tequila from a large
collection of already poured shots.

GUY #2
(yelling out)
No one gets left behind!!

They all get passed a shot and down them. When one person
drinks, they all do. It's only fair.

Jo wanders through and sees Ben is in his element. He spots
her from across the room and smiles -- good party.

She smiles back but is suddenly whisked away by another party-
goer.

INT. JO'S LIVING ROOM

It's a little later. Ben is leaning against a doorway admiring the still large crowd.

A YOUNG GIRL crosses in and smiles. Ben smiles back and she scoots past him. Was she flirting or is Ben too tipsy?

DERRICK, a liquor delivery guy, 45, crosses to Ben and puts a clipboard in front of him.

DERRICK

Need your signature at the bottom.
There's a twenty dollar charge if
the kegs aren't back by five PM.

BEN

This isn't my house.

DERRICK

(skeptical)
You're just a guest?

Ben nods. He goes back to watching the party.

DERRICK (CONT'D)

What's it like?

Ben looks at him, not understanding the question.

DERRICK (CONT'D)

Hanging out with girls this young?

Ben sees it was a sincere question. A question that probably wasn't easy to ask.

BEN

It's... nice.

Derrick nods. Ben is The Man. They bump knuckles and share a bond between old guys.

EXT. HOT TUB - 4 AM

The party has died down.

Jo is in the hot tub next to the pool. Ben wanders over, beer in hand. Not too many others are around.

JO

There you are.

Ben pulls up his pant legs, sits on the edge of the hot tub and puts his feet in. He lets out a long sigh.

BEN

Aaaahhhh. That feels good.
(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)
 (off her look)
 Old people like to soak their feet.

He leans back, takes a big breath and exhales. He looks up at the stars.

BEN (CONT'D)
 God, I want this life again. Staying
 up late. Listening to loud music.
 Not having to wear suits.

Beat.

JO
 Want a blowjob?

Ben tenses up. He doesn't answer for half a second. He's shocked and confused and filled with alcohol. Finally...

BEN
 (weakly)
 No.

She moves closer to Ben's legs which are hanging over the edge of the hot tub.

JO
 You sure?

BEN
 No. I mean yes, I'm sure... Stop...
 Stop!

She backs off. Ben has pulled himself back to reality.

BEN (CONT'D)
 I'm married.

Beat.

JO
 You mad?

BEN
 No. Of course I'm not mad. I'm
 flattered. I just--
 (how to explain)
 Look, you're a beautiful girl...

JO
 (giggly to make-believe
 friend)
 He just called me beautiful.

BEN

..I'd like nothing more than to have sex with you right now--

JO

I didn't say anything about having sex.

BEN

Whatever. It's just...

JO

Hey, I get it. You were arguing with your wife so I thought maybe you'd like a little comfort. I was wrong.

Beat. And another beat.

BEN

This is awkward now.

JO

Little bit.

Finally...

BEN

A little comfort? That's all a blowjob means to you?

JO

Yeah. Well, I don't just hand 'em out to anyone. I have to like the guy.

BEN

God, I am old.

JO

I'm sorry.

BEN

Stop apologizing.

JO

No, I wrongly deducted that you might want a blowjob and then have anal sex with me and my three girlfriends tonight. It was my mistake.

This breaks the ice. Ben laughs. The awkwardness is now gone.

JO (CONT'D)

Want another beer?

Ben nods. Jo gets out of the hot tub...

JO (CONT'D)

In my defense though, you haven't exactly been giving off vibes like you care about her.

BEN

Whoa, hold on a sec.

Jo stops.

BEN (CONT'D)

You really got that impression? I care about my wife more than anybody in the world.

JO

(really?)

Okay.

BEN

Wait. What?

JO

Nothing.

BEN

Don't give me that. What?

JO

It's just-- You really want to keep talking about this?

BEN

Yes.

Jo isn't sure it SHE does. Oh, why not?

JO

What are you doing here? You say you care about your wife yet here you are, in a hot tub with me.

BEN

Yeah. NOT getting a blowjob. I haven't DONE anything wrong. God, this is so frustrating! There's nothing going on between us.

Jo takes in these words for a long, long beat.

JO

(stoic)

I know.

BEN

(realizing)

Oh my god. You thought...

She avoids eye contact.

JO

Hey, I also thought you wanted a blowjob. You're a hard person to read.

She starts to exit.

BEN

Hold on. Let's talk about this--

She stops and turns...

JO

You depress me, you know that? Most of us will never get what we want. We're not smart enough for the high-paying job or pretty enough to get the handsome guy... But you... "I think I'll publish a book." Boom. It happens. You're the Golden Child. You realize that, Ben? You can be rich. You can be famous. You can get free blowjobs from girl's half your age. You're a fucking rainmaker! You can have anything you want. Anything. And you waste it. 'Cause you don't know what you want. That's depressing. If someone as smart as you can't figure out how to grab happiness out of Life, what hope is there for me?

She exits.

EXT. STREET - DAWN

A taxi comes to a stop. Ben gets out. Randell stays inside.

RANDELL

You sure about this? Let's go to Denny's. Life-altering decisions should not be made without a hearty breakfast first.

Ben gives Randell a handshake through the window, signifying the answer is no.

Randell taps the window between the front and back seats signaling the taxi to drive away.

BEN'S POV: Mr. Barnes's mobile home dealership is across the street.

FADE TO:

EXT. MOBILE HOME DEALERSHIP - NOON

Ben has just finished giving MR. AND MRS. DEGAN a tour of one of the mobile homes. They walk down the 3 or 4 stairs out of the home and onto the pavement.

Ben is wearing an ill-fitting sports jacket with BARNES HOMES embroidered on the label.

Ben hands them a large brochure.

BEN

My card's in there. Let me know when you're ready to move into quality.

Ben shakes their hands and tries not to throw up. The Degans exit to their car and Ben walks into the large double-wide that acts as the lot's sales office.

INT. MOBILE HOME DEALERSHIP SALES OFFICE

Ben trudges over to his new desk and plops into the chair. It's not even noon and already it's been the longest day of his life.

He looks out the windows and sees strands of bright-colored flags flapping in the breeze between the model homes.

We hear nothing but MUZAK.

MR. BARNES (O.C.)

Posture!

Mr. Barnes has come out of his office. Ben straightens up in his chair just as Kate Barnes enters.

MR. BARNES (CONT'D)

(to Kate)

You're early. Lunch isn't for another ten minutes.

Through the window we see a new buyer walk onto the lot.

MR. BARNES (CONT'D)

(to Ben)

Customer.

Ben barely stifles a sigh as he attempts to lift what feels like 500 pounds of body weight from the depths of his chair.

MR. BARNES (CONT'D)

Never mind. I got 'em.

(to Kate)

Get me turkey on a roll and a ginger ale.

Mr. Barnes exits the sales office.

KATE

I'm surprised to see you here.

BEN

I thought about what you guys said.
You were right. My dream shouldn't
come at your daughter's expense.

Kate takes a hard look at Ben. She can see he doesn't want
to be there.

KATE

My husband made the same decision,
you know.

Kate gestures at the window so that Ben will look. They see
Mr. Barnes outside, dealing with the prospective buyer.

KATE (CONT'D)

Years ago he bit the bullet and
decided to walk away from his dream.
It's funny how things have a way of
working out. Lawrence may no longer
be the happiest man on the planet
but now we have security. We have
all this. I think he made a good
trade, don't you?

(then)

I'm going to the lunch truck. Can I
bring you back anything?

Ben shakes his head politely. Mrs. Barnes exits.

Ben picks up an issue of TRAILER SALES and flips through it,
looking for some poison.

We continue to hear MUZAK.

NANCY (O.C.)

You don't answer your phone?

Ben looks up and sees Nancy has entered while he was reading.

BEN

Randell took it last night--

Ben stops. It doesn't matter. He comes around from behind
the desk.

BEN (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. For everything. I'm
gonna go back into computers.

NANCY

Ben, I don't want to squash your dream--

BEN

Randell asked what's the one thing I wanted, more than anything in the world. I figured it out. You know what it is?

NANCY

A pill that makes vegetables taste like cheesecake. You told me--

BEN

It's you. Until recently I didn't know I was unhappy. I knew I was tired and frustrated, but I didn't know I was unhappy. And you know why? Because I wasn't. You made the struggle fun. And if you can make tough times seem enjoyable, I can only imagine what living the good life alongside you is gonna be like.

NANCY

What about the book?

BEN

I turned 'em down.

NANCY

Call 'em back. I want you to become a writer.

BEN

(thrown)

Can cigarettes trigger bi-polar disorder?

NANCY

I read the proposal.

BEN

How?

NANCY

My mom slipped it to me this morning.

BEN

Your mom? How'd she get a copy?

NANCY

Jo threw it at my dad or something-- Does it matter? I read it.

(MORE)

NANCY (CONT'D)

It was great. I never suspected it'd be THAT good. I have no doubts now that you can pull this off.

Ben wants to be excited but he's holding back, making sure all his bases are covered...

BEN

What about not wanting to struggle anymore?

NANCY

That was all based on fear. I was afraid we'd be struggling forever-- Okay, you know what? I'm getting mad. Say, "Thank you," before I change my mind again!

Ben hugs Nancy. He's now officially excited.

BEN

Thank you for letting me give my dream a shot.

Ben goes in for a kiss but Nancy pulls back.

NANCY

Your dream? What happened to the royal we?

Ben goes in for the kiss again. Again Nancy pulls back.

NANCY (CONT'D)

(warning)

Don't mess this up! Our baby eggs don't have a lot of time left.

Nancy lets the kiss happen. It's a good long kiss.

Mr. Barnes comes back into the office.

MR. BARNES

What am I running here, a brothel? Pull out some RF-200 brochures and restock the display.

BEN

I quit.

EXT. MOBILE HOME DEALERSHIP LOT

Ben and Nancy walk out of the sales office and down the steps of the porch.

BEN

Let's walk home.

NANCY

It's a long way.

BEN

So? It's not like we have jobs to get to.

They start to walk off the lot.

Mr. Barnes comes out onto the porch and yells to Ben...

MR. BARNES

I'm only paying you for a half day!

Ben spots Kate returning from the lunch truck.

CLOSE ON KATE

She smiles.

BACK TO SCENE

Ben realizes Kate knows what just took place. He smiles back, acknowledging his appreciation for what she did.

EXT. STREET

Nancy and Ben walk down the street on their way home.

BEN

There's a record store a couple of blocks from here. Let's stop in.

NANCY

Pick up some copies of The Weekly?

BEN

Actually, I want to see if they have any Loggins and Messina albums. I gotta throw SOMETHING back your way.
(then)

You ever notice that the people struggling are usually the ones with the best music?

They continue to walk.

NANCY

You're going to think this is crazy but I have an idea...

FADE TO:

EXT. BACKYARD - EVENING (ONE YEAR LATER)

INSERT: "One Year Later"

CLOSE ON a picnic table filled with food.

We continually and slowly PULL BACK to discover...

An outdoor BBQ is taking place. 10 or 15 PEOPLE including many of those we've met already are mingling and talking on a large porch. Ben is revealed in an apron at the grill.

VOICE (V.O.)

*Why do moths fly into light bulbs?
I'll tell you. It seems the little
guys are pretty romantic -- they
look at the night sky, see the Moon
glowing brightly and think, "I wanna
go there." Filled with impossible
dreams they are, these little buggers.
Just like you and I.*

By now we're far enough back to see that this porch is attached to a nice and shiny MOBILE HOME.

We continue to PULL BACK...

Nancy comes out from the home with a SMALL BABY GIRL in her arms and puts her in a highchair. She then crosses to Ben and takes his BBQ tongs to show him what he's doing wrong at the grill.

We continue to PULL BACK...

VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

*The difference is they actually try
to make the trip. As the sun sets
they head for the bright light, hope
and excitement in their little moth
hearts until -- Wait! That light's
not The Moon!! Smack! Headfirst
into a porch light.*

We are far enough back to see that the mobile home is situated on the HILLTOP near the highway turnoff Ben used to stop at.

We continue to PULL BACK...

VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

*The impact knocks 'em senseless--
dazed and blind they struggle, banging
against the glass, with each hit
growing more tired, more confused.*

The faint image of A MOTH is slowly superimposed over the screen, fluttering around a bulb. It grows more clear as the dialogue progresses.

We now see a SECOND MOBILE HOME next to the first one and a sign that reads: WOODMAN CATERING.

VOICE (CONT'D)

*So, why do moths fly into light bulbs?
Because they're stupid. They can't
tell a planet from a porch light.
But keep watching. Because every
now and then you'll see a moth who,
whether by force of will or sheer
luck, will manage to regain his
bearings.*

We now see three new DELIVERY TRUCKS parked in front of the "catering wing" of the property.

We continue to PULL BACK...

VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

*A moth who will somehow learn to
distinguish between a bright light
and a magical glowing one.*

We now see the entire hilltop, the "Woodman Estate" and a priceless view of the Seattle skyline in the distance.

VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

*And while his brothers and sisters
continue to beat themselves against
the glass, he slowly flaps his way
to The Moon. Free.*

We follow the superimposed moth as it flies up from the Woodman's hilltop and into the night sky towards the moon.

FADE OUT.

THE END