

UNTITLED

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By

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A woman, about 30, lies in bed, her head propped up by four pillows. It's very dark -- we see only her silhouette. \*

VERONA  
(speaking to someone below  
her)  
Burt?

There's some shuffling under the sheets.

VERONA  
What's wrong?

More shuffling in the bed. A voice from under the covers.

BURT  
Nothing.

VERONA  
That's what I mean. Why'd you stop?

BURT  
I'm trying to figure out the best  
way to say what I'm about to say.

VERONA  
It's been a while since I waxed...

BURT  
No, no.  
(still trying to find the  
best way to say it)  
Uh. You *taste* different.

Verona sits up, sighing.

VERONA  
Please. Last time you complained  
about the taste I banned you from  
my region for a year. You want me  
to shower?

Burt emerges from under the covers and stares at Verona.

BURT  
No, you're clean. But you know a  
woman can taste different depending  
on various co-factors.

Verona sits up in a huff.

VERONA

I don't want to hear this. And I thought we agreed you wouldn't use the word "co-factor."

BURT

I said I wouldn't MISuse it. All I'm saying is that from what I've read about vaginal flavor--

VERONA

Jesus!

BURT

From what I've read, I know that abrupt changes happen when a woman's either menopausal...

(registering a new,  
momentous thought)

or--

\*  
\*  
\*

Verona slaps him as hard as she can.

INT. DRUGSTORE -- NIGHT -- CONTINUOUS

They're at the checkout counter with two pregnancy tests. It's evident they've pulled their clothes on hastily. Burt is still holding his face where Verona slapped him.

VERONA

Sorry. I don't know why I did that.

BURT

It's okay.

VERONA

Have I ever done that before?

BURT

Nope.

VERONA

It just seemed the right thing at the time.

BURT

It's okay. After the initial shock, it was kind of exciting.

BURT FARLANDER is white, about 30, looking like he could be either an assistant professor or a lunatic shooting people from a tower -- there's that funny-crazy look in his eyes.

He's very smart, very straightforward and earnest, but also eccentric -- the type of guy who's never done drugs, but has often gone camping nude. He reads widely but not deeply enough, and has many strange hobbies, which he indulges for short periods of time but with utter seriousness. The last such hobby was bear-tracking. He works in the insurance industry.

VERONA DE TESSANT is of mixed race - her mom was white, her father black. She's very cute, diminutive, a bit feisty. She's a medical illustrator and has the necessary combination of the artistic and the exacting. Of the pair, she is the more socially presentable and stable, and finds herself apologizing for her partner at least once a week. Still, she is devoted to him and he to her. Her beauty and sense of humor are alluring and inspire many admirers. \*

INT. CAR -- DRIVING HOME

Verona's driving.

VERONA  
I can't wait.

BURT  
What?

VERONA  
I'm pulling over.

BURT  
We're ten minutes away. No.

She pulls over.

BURT  
What're you...

Verona is already out of the car and pushing down her jeans.

BURT  
At least get off the shoulder!

Sounds of urine hitting gravel.

BURT  
It'll be less accurate out here.

VERONA  
What?

BURT

You're supposed to do this in a bathroom. The air out here is different. The alkaline...

VERONA

The alkaline? The alkaline? Just... please. I'm done. Hold this on the end here.

Verona hands him the stick. He holds it at a distance, the way you would a steaming pot, while she pulls up her pants.

VERONA

Lay it flat.

BURT

Lay it flat? Like on the road? Should I lay it on the road?

VERONA

No...on the dashboard or something.

Verona gets back in the driver's seat. They're in the car, staring at the stick, which has been placed on the dash.

VERONA

It's time. Turn on the light.

Burt turns on the light. It's far too dim to see anything.

VERONA

That's the light? That's your interior light?

BURT

What? Yes that's my interior light? What's wrong with my interior light? You've never had a problem with my interior light before...

VERONA

Just-- Shut up. Turn on the headlights.

She gets out and slams the door.

EXT. HIGHWAY SHOULDER -- IN FRONT OF THE CAR

They're both bathed in the white light of the headlights.

VERONA

Damn. I can't tell. I need a control sample. Here.

She hands him a second stick from the package.

BURT

No. This is insane. Let's do it in the bathroom.

Verona gives him a look. Burt turns away from the car. Sounds of urine hitting gravel.

VERONA

Okay, now bring it over here.

BURT

But you said not on the road.

VERONA

I don't care what I said. We need the light.

Verona lays Burt's stick next to the other one on the road. Her movements are meticulous, precise. Burt reads the instructions while they're waiting.

BURT

So basically one line is nothing, two lines is baby...

Verona holds up both test sticks to the beam of the headlight. One stick shows one line, the other two.

Burt grins.

VERONA

Holy mother of God.

-- TITLE, CREDITS --

EXT. COLORADO TOWN -- FIRST LIGHT OF DAWN

We see a quick montage of local landscapes -- mountains, trees, valleys, snow-capped peaks, ex-urban sprawl. This is where our couple lives.

The montage blends seamlessly into a new, strange kind of landscape.

The sun is rising over a hill. It's beautiful but also stark and perhaps even eerie, given that the hill is caramel-colored.

INT. BEDROOM -- FIRST LIGHT OF DAWN -- MONTHS LATER

We back up a few inches and realize that the camera has lined up so Verona's belly -- 5 months pregnant -- looks like a small round mountain, and the sun appears to be rising behind it. We hear vague sounds of scraping.

Verona wakes up, turns over, sees Burt sitting up, with a knife and a piece of wood. \*

BURT

Hey. I'm glad you're up.

VERONA

What are you doing?

BURT

What does it look like? I'm cobbling.

Verona is in disbelief.

BURT

I want to be a dad who knows how to carve stuff out of wood. I want our kid to get up in the morning and find me cobbling.

VERONA

You're not cobbling.

BURT

I am cobbling. Look. I've got a knife and some wood and I'm making a toy...

(looking at the shapeless  
blob of wood)

... stick. I'm *cobbling*.

VERONA

You're not. That's not what it's called.

BURT

Of course it is. How would you know? You don't have one of these.  
(indicating the knife)

VERONA

Burt, cobbling is *shoes*. That's why they're called *cobblers*. You're not cobbling. You're *carving*.

\*

Burt thinks for a while. It dawns on him that she's right. This takes some of the appeal out of it for Burt. He stops carving. He rests his pathetic wooden worm/stick on Verona's stomach.

BURT

Look, she likes it. I saw her kick.

VERONA

No you didn't.

BURT

I can do other things, too. I just bought a book about knots. 300 knots, and I'm gonna learn them all. And I'm gonna build a kiln. We've got to be ready!

Verona goes into the bathroom. We follow her.

VERONA

Remember we go to your parents' house at noon. Be ready for that.

Burt pops his head into the bathroom. He's now wearing goggles and fatigues.

BURT

I pushed it back to 12:30. I've got that family-defense class today.

VERONA

No, no, no. You've been so normal for the past few weeks...

BURT

I'll be back at noon. Might be later if we get into some hand-to-hand action. See you guys.

He leans down to kiss Verona's lips passionately and her stomach gently, and then walks out.

We follow Burt out of the house, where we see that it's a small ranch house, one step up from a trailer, attached to a small grungy yard. He gets into a crumbling old Toyota and drives off.



## INT. KARATE-TYPE STUDIO

\*

Burt is in a class with a dozen other men, lined up in neat rows. The instructor is a Navy SEAL-type, also wearing goggles. Behind him are inflatable models of a wife and two small children. The wife is wearing a halter top and the children both have (real) iPods attached to them.

INSTRUCTOR

Will you be there to defend your family?

BURT

(in unison with the others)

I will!

INSTRUCTOR

Do you have the skills to prevent them from being taken from you, leaving you bereft and emasculated?

BURT

(in unison with the others)

I do!

With that, the instructor steps over to Burt and gives him a kick round-house kick to the side of the head. Burt goes down. We see the instructor from Burt's perspective, hovering over him, the inflatable family in the background.

INSTRUCTOR

Not yet you don't.

## INT. HOUSE -- VERONA'S OFFICE/STUDIO -- MIDMORNING

The sounds of huffing and puffing. We think for a second that Verona's exercising or in labor. But we turn the corner and see Verona sitting at her drafting table, brush in hand, working on a medical illustration.

It's a cramped and messy place -- illustration board, a drawing table, canvases, hundreds of markers and small paint containers. All over the walls are insane photos of people and animals in mid-surgery.

Verona's on the phone, looking at a TV in the corner, where a prenatal exercise video is playing. On screen, there are three women doing supra-geeky aerobic routines.

They look like they're direct from 1986, with headbands and leg-warmers and poofy hair. The decor is ridiculous -- as if they're exercising in a "Price Is Right" living room interior. The saddest thing is that this is a brand-new pre-natal fitness DVD.

VERONA

I wish you could see this, Grace.

We see Grace, Verona's sister, on the other end of the phone.

GRACE is striking-looking: caramel-skinned, thin, curvy. She's immaculately dressed, projecting an air of sophistication and professionalism. She paces around her office at work -- a glass building in Phoenix, dramatic desert view -- with a hands-free device attached to her ear.

VERONA

You want to hear the rhyming couplets?

*Instead of reaching for a bagel  
Do another Kegel*

GRACE

No!

VERONA

You like that? Jesus. Grace, tell me: Do I have to be uncool for the rest of my life?

GRACE

What are you doing? You're talking to me while you're exercising?

VERONA

No, I'm just watching it. I've got a cranial surgery thing due Friday. Trying to finish it before dinner at Burt's parents tonight.

\*

We see that Verona is working on an illustration of a cranial operation. The subject's skin is peeled back, revealing the brain, and there's a scalpel entering the subject's front lobe via the nostril. It's incredibly graphic, and Verona is doing the work with incredible nonchalance -- she's snacking on cold lasagna set unsettling close to the open-brain illustration.

\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*

GRACE

They must be out of their minds excited.

VERONA

You have no idea.

(touching up part of the  
painting where a scalpel  
is inserted into the  
skull via the nostril)

I think part of them is happy to be  
the only set of grandparents. To  
have the baby to themselves.

\*

GRACE

Don't say that.

Grace looks at a photo of her and Verona's parents, on her  
desk. In it, their parents are chasing the two girls -- 6 and  
8 years old at the time -- in front of a big, funny old house  
in the country. In the picture, it's winter, a bit bleak.

\*

GRACE

You're so lucky to have them so  
close. Burt's lucky to have them  
both still--

\*

Now we see that Verona's looking at the same picture of her  
parents in her studio.

\*

VERONA

I know, I know. That's why we moved  
here. I think it's just a matter of  
setting some boundaries.

Lost in her thoughts, she lets her brush drift a bit.

VERONA

Oh shit. I just gave this guy's  
brain a vulva.

INT. CAR -- DRIVING TO BURT'S PARENTS' HOUSE

Verona is driving. Burt is holding ice to his head.

\*

BURT

So lame.

VERONA

What?

BURT

Forget it.  
(changing his mind)  
Wait. Tell me something.  
(MORE)

BURT (cont'd)  
Do I look like I can't jump from a  
two-story building?

VERONA  
Wha-

BURT  
Just tell me that. Just... let's  
say you see me on the street, and  
you have to make a judgment: can  
that guy jump from a second-story  
building or not?

VERONA  
Burt-

BURT  
Please. I need this.

VERONA  
(seriously)  
Yes. I think you could do it.

BURT  
See! But those fuckers were...  
Whatever. It doesn't matter.

They pass over a river. The landscape is wintery and spare.

\*

BURT  
I really want her to have an epic  
kind of childhood. I want her to  
run along the streams and to know  
how to work a canoe, and to be able  
to entertain herself when she's  
outside. I want her childhood to be  
Huck Finny, you know?

VERONA  
I had that.

BURT  
I know, that's what I mean. I want  
her to have what you had.

VERONA  
Without it being in Arkansas.

BURT  
Exactly.

Burt's cellphone rings.

BURT  
Burt Farlander.  
(listens)  
Oh you old so-and-so! Sorry about  
your Celtics, my friend. If you  
think Paul Pierce can carry more  
than a bucket of water, I have a  
bridge you might be interested in!

Burt laughs uproariously. This entire time, he's been speaking in the voice of a 50s radio announcer. Actually, it sounds eerily like Casey Kasem, and it's obvious that this voice-change Burt uses for clients drives Verona around the bend.

BURT  
Well thanks for calling back. I  
wanted to talk to you about  
hurricane season. I just.. No, I  
know you're covered, but are you  
covered-covered?

When it's clear the call will go on for a few minutes, Verona pulls the car over on the highway and gets out, shutting Burt/Casey Kasem inside.

Finally he motions to her that he's almost done. She gets back inside.

BURT  
(finishing up)  
Okay then. I will! I will! Ha ha.  
Yes. Yes. Oh please. You're too  
much. Okay now. Talk to you soon.

They drive for a few minutes in silence. Verona is contemplating divorce or murder.

BURT  
They expect that from me.

VERONA  
They expect you to sound like Casey  
Kasem.

BURT  
Listen, Rona, these guys are all in  
their fifties and sixties. We're  
dealing with hundreds of millions  
of dollars in insurance futures.  
They don't want to be dealing with  
some 31-year-old who didn't finish  
college.

Beat.

VERONA  
So Casey Kasem finished college?

Beat.

BURT  
Yes.

Silence for a few moments.

VERONA  
Do you think your mom's gonna grope  
me this time?

BURT  
She always gropes you. She loves  
you. She wants to be you.

VERONA  
Ten bucks your dad says I look  
glorious.

BURT  
Listen. He spent 18 months in  
prison, Rone--

VERONA  
White collar prison. They live  
better than we do.

BURT  
And now everything is *glorious* for  
him. The English muffins are  
*glorious*. The margarine is  
*glorious*. I gave him my old  
sandals, and those were  
"spectacular." But the baby is  
really important to them. Now that  
they're retired and I really think  
they're gonna build their world  
around little Zeus.

VERONA  
It's a girl. Her name isn't Zeus.

BURT  
(with purpose)  
Jesus, Rona. Think about it: Zeus.  
Excelsior. Farlander. Zeus  
Farlander. That's the name of a  
girl of ... of...

VERONA

Destiny?

BURT

Thank you. A girl of destiny.

INT. PARENTS' HOME

It's a very clean upper-middle-class home, a bit on the overwrought side -- lots of figurines and glass and mirrors. The door bursts open as Burt and Verona walk up the steps. We see GLENDA, who is about 60, very fit, wearing a jean jacket with a faux-fur collar, turned up. She has very short white hair, cut in that severe style favored by many women her age. Inexplicably, she's also wearing a headband.

GLENDA

(to Verona)

Oh! Look at you! You look so big.  
Good for you!

BURT

Your hair. What'd you do?

GLENDA

I cut it!

BURT

And the headband.

GLENDA

I know! I know! Come in, your dad's  
inside.

In the front hall, Burt stops upon a large fountain. It seems to be a sculpture of a colonial pilgrim pumping water from a tap into some kind of earthenware, held by a Native American woman. Both are smiling gravely.

In the living room, Glenda is already sitting on the couch, patting the cushion next to her.

GLENDA

Sit, Verona. Sit next to me and let  
me hear the heartbeat.

VERONA

You can't hear her heartbeat. The  
placenta's on this side--

Verona sits, trying to indicate that the placenta is on the outside, and thus muffles the sound of the heartbeat...

Too late. Glenda has already arranged her head on Verona's stomach. She has one hand on Verona's thigh and the other between her breasts and stomach. It's very intimate. Verona would be horrified if she were surprised, but she isn't.

JIM, Burt's father, enters the room. He is 65, handsome, successful, with hair longer than Glenda's, and is limping. A self-made man, he grew up poor but cultivates an air of incredible suaveness.

VERONA

Hey Jim! You're looking so much better! You can barely see where you broke it.

JIM

Thank you my dear. Verona, you look glorious.

Verona smiles at Burt.

GLENDA

Did you bring the pictures from the sonogram?

VERONA

We did.

Verona tries to get up but Glenda is burrowed into her so deeply that she can't move.

BURT

I'll get them.

Burt removes an envelope from Verona's purse. He starts to hand it to Glenda, but she's so busy groping Verona that he changes course and instead hands the envelope to Jim.

JIM

These are fabulous.

BURT

You haven't opened the envelope yet.

JIM

I can just tell. He's a beauty.

VERONA

It's a girl.  
(to Burt)  
Did --



BURT  
I told you that, Dad.

JIM  
She's a beauty.

Jim finally opens the envelope.

JIM  
Wow. Spectacular. Exquisite.

Glenda is now laying in Verona's lap.

GLEENDA  
Jim, do you want your glasses?

JIM  
I'm fine, Love.

Jim, struggling without his glasses, is looking at the pictures judiciously, like a doctor examining an X-ray. We cut to a shot of the sonogram, which is horrifying. A straight-on picture of the baby's face, it looks almost precisely like the skull of an alien with vast ocular cavities and a row of fangs.

JIM  
Talk about perfection!

GLEENDA  
So, how dark do you think she'll be?

VERONA  
Excuse me?

BURT  
Mom.

GLEENDA  
No, really. Jim and I were kind of disappointed when Burt's brother Courtney married that white woman.

Glenda indicates a wedding picture on the nearby end table, of Courtney -- shaggy and appealing -- next to a fake-smiling woman with what seem to be breast implants bursting from her low-cut wedding dress. \*

BURT  
Helena.

Glenda rolls her eyes at the name.

GLEENDA

Jim and I think it would be wonderful to have an African granddaughter.

JIM

Glenda, the correct terminology is African-American. It will be wonderful to have a granddaughter of African-American persuasion.

GLEENDA

Forget the semantics. We're all family. Verona, how black do you think she'll be?

VERONA

(looking to Burt for help)  
Uh, I don't really know...

GLEENDA

Because you know she won't be very dark at first. It takes a while for the pigment to settle in.

VERONA

Well, maybe we could leave her out in the sun for the first couple of days...

Glenda and Jim look at each other like this might be a valid option. A judicious look overtakes Jim.

JIM

Verona, are you on schedule?

Jim pronounces the word "shheduuel."

GLEENDA

Don't ask her that. Verona, we're just concerned about your tilted uterus...

Verona shoots dagger-eyes at Burt. He looks very surprised that his mom remembered this detail.

GLEENDA

Do you think that might present problems during delivery?

BURT

Okay, that's enough.  
(changing the subject)  
(MORE)

BURT (cont'd)  
So we've been reading all these  
books, trying to decide what kind  
of birthing experience we want to  
have...

JIM  
That's terrific.

BURT  
...and we think we want to limit  
the amount of people in the room.  
Or near the room.

GLENDA  
Oh you don't have to worry about  
that.

JIM  
Right. No sweat.

BURT  
And we decided that we don't want  
any videotaping.

JIM  
Right. I won't. Fabulous.

BURT  
But we really want you to share  
this with us. Your presence is  
really important.

GLENDA  
You are so right. We're so looking  
forward to it. We will definitely  
be there.

JIM  
And the only reason we won't be  
there is if we're living in  
Belgium.

Burt and Verona are dumbstruck. They have no idea what Jim's  
talking about.

GLENDA  
(sitting forward now and  
grinning maniacally)  
We have news.

JIM  
It's big.

BURT  
What is it?

GLEENDA  
We're leaving in June.

JIM  
We're finally doing it.

BURT  
You're leaving in June? The baby's due in July.

JIM  
Right. To Antwerp. City of Light.

BURT  
That's not--. No you're not.

JIM  
We are. It going to be superb.

BURT  
Don't say that word.

GLEENDA  
We thought you'd be proud of us. We've been talking about this for fifteen years and now we can finally do it.

BURT  
You're leaving a month before the baby's born? You're moving 3000 miles away from your grandchild?

GLEENDA  
It's more than 3000 miles, isn't it, Jim?

JIM  
I think so.

BURT  
I can't believe this.

GLEENDA  
There are planes, Burt.

JIM  
This is what we've been planning to do forever, son. You know that.  
(MORE)

JIM (cont'd)  
We'll make a fortune if we can  
declare residency over there.

BURT  
How long will you be gone?

GLENDA  
Just two years.

BURT  
Are you selling the house?

JIM  
Well, that's the best part. We were  
going to rent out the house, with  
the help of a very handsome  
gentleman named Fareed. But no  
one's come forward yet--

BURT  
How long have you planned this? Has  
our house--

At that moment, Burt sees, on the coffee table, a large ad in  
the paper offering the house he grew up in, for rent.

JIM  
It's just been running since  
Christmas.

GLENDA  
We heard from your old gym teacher!  
He came here with another man. They  
were both wearing...  
(gesturing up and down her  
leg to indicate stripes)  
... running suits.

This news is doubly disturbing to Burt.

GLENDA  
But if we don't get a renter in the  
next month, you guys can stay here  
while we're gone. You can have the  
house for the next two years!

Jim is gesturing around him, as if showing the house to his  
son for the first time.

JIM  
Outstanding.

Verona looks impressed with this idea. Burt, too, softens. They share a brief day-dream of their daughter running through the house, playing on the immaculate lawn, swimming in the pool. The idea grows on them by the minute.

The phone rings, shaking them from their reverie.

Glenda goes to the kitchen to answer it. We hear Glenda's excited voice off-screen. Meanwhile, Burt and Verona notice an unfamiliar sculpture in the living room.

BURT

That new?

It's a bronze sculpture of a young Native American woman, wearing little more than a cowhide bikini, raising her arms to the sky, nipples insanely erect.

JIM

Magnificent, isn't it? I was wondering when you'd notice. Twelve thousand dollars.

VERONA

I can't believe it.

JIM

I know! She's a Choctaw princess, I'm told.

(nodding seriously)

It's important that we honor our Indian... Our indigent ... our indigentous people.

Glenda returns, barely able to contain her excitement.

JIM

Was it Fareed?

Glenda nods.

JIM

Did he....?

Glenda nods quickly, barely containing her euphoria.

JIM

(turning to Burt and Verona)

Well, it looks like we have some more news for you two.

CUT TO:

IN CAR -- AFTERNOON

They're driving home from Glenda and Jim's house.

VERONA

They're very strange people. I  
always forget how strange they are.

Burt is fuming.

BURT

We can get different grandparents.  
The second they said "Belgium" I  
started thinking of ways to hurt  
them. We'll make someone else the  
grandparents. Our neighbors.  
What're their names?

\*

VERONA

I don't know.

BURT

They look old enough. We can give  
them nicknames and tell the baby  
that those are the grandparents.  
The baby won't know the difference.

VERONA

It really is an awful thing to do.  
They knew we moved here for them. I  
mean, we've only been here for a  
year and now... They'll miss the  
baby's first two years. It sort of  
takes selfishness to a new level.

This crosses a line with Burt.

BURT

It's not like *your* parents are  
doing anything.

VERONA

My parents are dead, Burt.

BURT

Still...

They drive in silence for a minute.

INT. BURT AND VERONA'S HOUSE --NIGHT

Verona enters, Burt close behind. She stops after entering, as if seeing their sad little home with new eyes. It's clearly freezing inside.

VERONA  
I can see my breath.

BURT  
I'll get the thing.

Burt pulls a space heater out from under Verona's desk. The second he plugs it in, the lights go out; he's blown a fuse.

The house is in total darkness.

BURT  
I'll get the candles.

The opening of drawers. A match is struck. This outage is routine. Now we see them in candlelight. The conversation continues as they get candles lit all over their small house.

VERONA  
There's nothing keeping us here.

BURT  
(busy with the candles)  
Huh.

VERONA  
Did you hear me? We could leave, too.

BURT  
(still not paying attention)  
Right.

VERONA  
Burt. I'm serious.

BURT  
Fine. Where do you want to go?

VERONA  
Anywhere. We don't have to live here. We can live wherever we want. I can do my job anywhere, and all you need is a phone, right?  
(MORE)



VERONA (cont'd)  
The only reason we're here is  
because your parents are here -- or  
were here.

BURT  
We don't want to go back to  
Chicago, do we? We did Chicago. And  
don't say Belgium.

Verona hadn't thought this far.

VERONA  
I don't know.

Now Burt is excited by the idea.

BURT  
We could go to Idaho. Fishing and  
everything. Lots of land. Idaho!

VERONA  
Lots of Aryans.

BURT  
Not *lots*. Some. And they're all in  
that one town. It's better that way  
-- we know where they are. Like ...  
druids and... Stonehenge.

Beat.

VERONA  
What about Phoenix? We could live  
near my sister. Think of that! Oh,  
that would make me so happy. And  
Lily and Sam live there.

BURT  
(almost remembering)  
Who are they?

VERONA  
You met at their going-away party.  
At the arcade.

BURT  
Good party.

VERONA  
They can be our friends in Phoenix.

BURT  
But they weren't our friends here.

VERONA

But they can be in Phoenix. They  
can be our new good friends when we  
live in Phoenix.

They sit for a moment, now surrounded by candles. The scene  
is oddly beautiful and romantic. \*

BURT \*

We won't need a space heater in  
Phoenix... \*

VERONA \*

Yeah, but the snakes... And all  
that turquoise... \*

BURT \*

(holding her from behind,  
his arms draped over her  
and rubbing her stomach)  
Wherever we go, Rona, I will  
protect you. From the cold.  
(kisses her neck)  
From the dark.  
(kisses it again)  
From the snakes.  
(once again)  
From the turquoise. \*

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE

Verona and Burt are waiting for the doctor to come in. Burt  
is playing with the stirrups.

VERONA

I don't want you on that side when  
the doctor's examining me.

BURT

Why not?

VERONA

Because you're not a doctor.

BURT

(examining some  
instruments in the  
cabinet)  
Rona, the only thing they've got  
that I don't is the nine years of  
schooling.

DR. HILL knocks on door and enters. She is young, blond, with a kind face and bad jewelry. Burt is displaying his hands, wearing Dr. Hill's rubber gloves. She stares at the hands, deeply confused.

DR. HILL  
How are you doing, Verona?

Dr. Hill speaks in a slow whisper, as if she's mixing her meds.

VERONA  
I'm good.

DR. HILL  
Nothing surprising?

VERONA  
No, everything's pretty predictable. I'll get a mole and then look in the pregnancy book under "moles" and it'll say "At this point you may be getting moles..."

A snap draws Dr. Hill's attention to Burt. He's just finished putting on rubber gloves, as if he and Dr. Hill will be performing the exam together.

VERONA  
This is Burt.

BURT  
I'm the husband.

VERONA  
He's not my husband.

BURT  
I'm the father.

Dr. Hill looks to Verona to confirm this, which she does with an almost reluctant closing of her eyes.

DR. HILL  
(putting on gloves)  
Okay. I'd like to listen to baby's heartbeat and see if it's as...  
(she hesitates, searching for the right word)  
*relaxed* as it was last time.

Dr. Hill smooths gel on Verona's stomach and uses a Doppler to listen to the baby. We hear the sounds of the heartbeat. Verona smiles. Burt smiles. Dr. Hill frowns.

DR. HILL  
It's still on the slow side. I  
don't think it's anything to worry  
about. Baby's just...

VERONA  
It's a girl.

DR. HILL  
She's just a little mellow.

BURT  
(his face lighting up)  
Could it mean she's an athlete?  
Athletes have slow heartbeats.

DR. HILL  
(dismissively)  
No. It's probably a bit soon to  
know if she'll be playing sports.  
(turning to Verona)  
Um... I'm going to do a quick exam  
down there.

Burt switches positions so he's standing near Verona's head.

BURT  
(to Dr. Hill)  
She hasn't been able to shave. She  
can't see down there and she won't  
let me do it. But it's a thicket,  
right? You almost expect thorns,  
blackberries--

DR. HILL  
(proceeding with the exam,  
ignoring Burt)  
Well, your uterus has expanded, so  
it's no longer tilted.

Verona gives Burt a triumphant look.

DR. HILL  
Everything else there is looking  
good. Nice job.

VERONA  
Thanks.

BURT  
 (now taking off the rubber  
 gloves)  
 Thanks.

Dr. Hill deposits her gloves in the garbage, and Burt does,  
 too, as if together they've just finished surgery.

DR. HILL  
 (suddenly wistful)  
 You're really, really lucky.

Verona and Burt recognize that Dr. Hill has things on her  
 mind. There's a long awkward pause.

VERONA  
 What about traveling? Is there any  
 reason I can't get on a plane?

DR. HILL  
 Where are you going? Don't say  
 Dallas.

VERONA  
 No. Phoenix. And a few other  
 places.

BURT  
 We're looking for a new place to  
 live.

DR. HILL  
 Wow. That sounds nice. To get away.  
 To keep going. Like a quest...

Dr. Hill says the word like a Tolkein wizard would, while  
 staring at the walls. Instead of medical charts or cheerful  
 pictures, there's a large self-portrait Dr. Hill has done.  
 It's insanely depressing, seemingly painted with mud and hay.

DR. HILL  
 Are you videotaping?

VERONA  
 Huh?

DR. HILL  
 (pointing to Verona's  
 stomach)  
 The stages? Your growth?

VERONA  
 Not yet.

\*  
 \*  
 \*  
 \*  
 \*  
 \*  
 \*  
 \*

BURT  
I am. I will.

\*  
\*

Burt has just found a new hobby.

\*

DR. HILL  
You seem really happy, Verona.

VERONA  
I am. I do feel happy. Sort of  
exuberant.

DR. HILL  
(saying the word like it's  
completely foreign)  
Exuberant.  
(thinking on it)  
Well, be prepared. After birth, a  
lot of people -- a lot of my  
patients at least -- experience a  
severe depression after giving  
birth. There's the usual baby  
blues, but then there's the real  
deal. It'll drag you through the  
clouds till you can't see the sun.

Burt and Verona begin feeling depressed, then and there.

DR. HILL  
Just let me know and I can write  
you a prescription. Most of my  
patients are on Zoloft and they ...  
love ... it.  
(she takes a pad and rips  
off the top page; it's  
pre-written -- she gives  
the same drugs to  
everyone)  
Actually, here's a script just in  
case.

She pauses a moment, staring into the eyes of her self-  
portrait.

DR. HILL  
Just keep the end result in mind.  
When you have your baby, it'll be  
*just great.*

There is no way Dr. Hill, or anyone, could have said this in  
a less convincing way.

INT. DENVER AIRPORT -- DAY

Burt and Verona are sitting at the gate. They look not unlike Dustin Hoffman and Katharine Ross at the end of *The Graduate*: they've made a big decision and now are very unsure about it. \*

BURT

Now I'm wondering what we're doing.

VERONA

We're going to Phoenix. On an airplane. This is where they keep the airplanes.

BURT

But in general. Are we nuts?

VERONA

We'll look around. See if we could live there. We agree we need to be near some kind of family, some friends -- something, some connection, someone we know. So we'll see Phoenix, see my sister--

BURT

... and our new closest friends...

Burt can't remember their names. He still has no idea who these people are.

VERONA

Lily and Sam. And then we go to Hartford for your job interview.

BURT

My what?

VERONA

(exasperated)

Oh god. Your interview. You're meeting with Providential Life to see if they'll give you a better commission. You set it up. \*

Verona removes a small plastic bag full of pre-cut carrots from her bag. She eats them as they continue talking.

BURT

So then from Hartford we go home?

VERONA

No. Did you look at the itinerary?  
I stapled it to your jacket.

(Burt locates it -- it's  
actually stapled to the  
inside of his jacket)

We go from Hartford to Montreal.  
Montreal's where I think we should  
live if we don't live in Phoenix.

BURT

Okay. Montreal.

VERONA

This is exciting, if you think  
about it. We're completely  
untethered, Burt -- this is a dream  
scenario!

BURT

Yeah!

They sit for a long, awkward moment. It's not particularly  
dreamy. Verona keeps eating her carrots.

In front of them, the DEPARTURES lists dozens of  
destinations, from Houston to London to Mexico City.

VERONA

Then again, it seems weird, to just  
decide on a place and move there.

BURT

C'mon! How did the pioneers do it,  
Rona? They just spun that globe,  
picked a spot because there was  
gold there, or ... wheat ... and  
then the whole family got moving,  
in their covered wagons and with  
their horses and oxen. They  
traveled through rain and sleet,  
over mountains and plains, and then  
three-fourths of them died on the  
way. We're just following in their  
footsteps, honey.

Burt lunges for a kiss, and they do, open-mouthed, until Burt  
pulls away.

Burt spits out a mouthful of carrots. Now Verona begins  
hacking the carrot shrapnel from her throat. Carrots all over  
the airport carpet.



A dozen people are watching them. Verona and Burt are used to this. Their mouths carrot-free, they go back to making out.

INT. RENTAL CAR -- PHOENIX

They're parked at a 7-11. Verona is in the driver's seat of the rental car while Burt is inside the store.

Verona is on the phone with Lily.

VERONA

Sure... That sounds fun. We'll get there. No problem.

Burt is still in the store, trying on a visor that says PHOENIX IS PHANTASTIC. Now he's holding two bottles of wine up to the glass for Verona's approval. She points to the one on the left.

VERONA

It'll be good to see you, too.  
What? Of course I can walk. I'm only six months! What? No. No. Not much. Okay. See you there.

Burt emerges from the store with the wine. To comment on the incredible heat of Phoenix, he is walking in slow-motion, as if swimming through molasses. By the time he's near the car, he's on his knees.

VERONA

(to Burt, who is now  
laying beside the car)  
Lordy. I forgot about Lily's mouth.  
She's a good person -- I mean, the  
best when you're really in trouble -  
- but the shit that comes out of  
her mouth...

BURT

(still laying on the  
pavement)  
Like what?

VERONA

She just asked if my discharge  
smelled like broccoli.

BURT

(curious)  
Huh.

(MORE)

BURT (cont'd)  
(beat)  
Does it?

VERONA  
Just... (dropping the subject)  
You think we can bring wine to a  
dog track?

BURT  
(still laying on the  
pavement)  
Chardonnay? Sure.  
(realizing what she's  
actually asking)  
Wait. Are we going to a dog track?

VERONA  
Yes.

BURT  
Hold on.

He goes back into the 7-11.

EXT. GREYHOUND TRACK -- AFTERNOON

Verona and Burt -- who is now wearing the PHOENIX IS PHANTASTIC visor -- get out of the car and wander through the complex. At the fence near the track, they find LILY and SAM, with their two children. LILY is 40, average-looking, a bit matronly, wearing red cowboy boots which someone has told her look sexy. SAM is rigid, with a mustache and short, gelled hair. He wears a button-down shirt and shorts that are a size too small. Their children are ASHLEY, 10 years old and a tomboy, and TAYLOR, 6 years old and on the pudgy side. He's wearing a shirt that also says PHOENIX IS PHANTASTIC.

Lily is turning to tuck in Taylor's shirt when she sees Burt and Verona.

LILY  
(rushing toward Verona)  
Oh god, look at you! You're only  
six months in! Jesus, you're *huge*.  
And your *face*! It's like you're  
half Chinese. Wow. Come here and  
give us a hug! Sam, come give a hug  
to the most beautiful woman in the  
world!

Sam walks over. Lily sees something in Sam's face that indicates he has no idea who these people are.

LILY

Verona and I were desk buddies in Chicago! At the agency! That was before she broke out on her own...

(to Verona)

I still have no idea where you learned how to paint the insides of dead people. So fucking disgusting, girlfriend!

(now to Burt)

She's so talented! Our little artiste!

Sam is still fuzzy.

LILY

You met them at our going away party. At the arcade.

Now Sam remembers. Almost.

SAM

Good party.

Sam gives Verona an awkward hug and shakes Burt's hand. He's holding a half-full plastic cup of white wine. He sees the bottle of wine in Burt's hand.

SAM

Oh good.

(taking the bottle)

I was almost out. Can I get you guys something?

VERONA

Water.

BURT

Beer would be good.

Sam gulps the contents of his plastic cup, chucks it into the garbage and walks toward the concession stand.

Taylor is sitting on the ground, holding a Crayola marker and a racing form, circling the dogs he thinks will win. Ashley is standing against the fence, watching the action on the track, wishing she were living a different life.

VERONA

So you're in Arizona! You're Arizonans! I can't believe how big the kids are. Taylor's so handsome!

LILY

(laughs skeptically)

Well, thanks. We're gonna do something about the ears. You see them? He looks like a trophy. You know what I mean, one of those trophies with the arms on it?

Lily is finding herself hugely amusing. She has been told a few times that she should do stand-up comedy, and in her mind she's constantly testing out her material.

Lily now turns her attention to Ashley.

LILY

This one has that dyke look.

(wrinkling her nose)

Doesn't she? Isn't that weird? She's only ten but I'm sure she's a dyke. She's gonna be a point guard for the WNBA. Aren't they all lesbians? I think that's weird, how the lesbians sort of rule that whole sport. Walk for Verona, Ashley. Show us your tough-girl walk. Go butch on us.

Ashley doesn't move or turn around.

LILY

Oh now she's shy. And look at her ass -- she's got... what is it, Sam? Junk in the trunk? She's got junk in her trunk. I don't know if the dykes go for that or not. Burt, you worked with a dyke, didn't you?

BURT

(whispering -- not wanting the kids to hear more of the conversation)

Yes, I--

LILY

(louder, defiant)

I can't hear you.

BURT

(now in a louder whisper)

I just ... don't know if we should be talking like this in front of the kids.

LILY

Oh god. It's just white noise to them.

We see the kids for a second, and it's clear that they're hearing every word.

Sam has returned with the drinks, and a corkscrew for the wine.

SAM

(holding the corkscrew,  
indicating the concession-  
stand workers)

Those bastards didn't want to give me this. Fuck those motherfuckers. Redneck pieces of redneck shit.

Burt is taken aback. Sam switches back to perfect congeniality.

SAM

What's your line again, Burt? Lily was telling me but it was all gibberish coming from her.

Burt takes a swig of his beer and seems very thankful for it. He and Sam take a few steps toward the track -- having their own conversation while Verona and Lily have theirs.

BURT

It's not that complicated, really. I trade insurance futures. Just like you get insurance, insurance companies need it themselves...

SAM

Dammit, right! Shit. Of course it would come to this.

Sam is speaking in an urgent whisper, as if he's finally figured it all out.

BURT

What?

SAM

They made us afraid of everything. Insurance for insurance for insurance. Bunkers and bubbles and ... aw hell. This country is shit. Shit shit shit.

(MORE)

SAM (cont'd)  
But everyone else in the world is  
just the flies on our shit, am I  
right?

Burt has nothing to say. On the track, there is a brief  
ceremony saluting the soldiers killed in Iraq.

SAM  
Watch the big one, number 8. I've  
got eight bills on him to place.

Sam pats Burt on the back and throws a steely-eyed glare  
across the greyhound track.

LILY  
(throwing her voice over  
from the conversation  
she's having with Verona)  
Hey Sam, I used to have boobs,  
right? Verona doesn't remember, I  
don't think. I had nice tits,  
right?  
(indicating her kids)  
They sucked me dry.

SAM  
This is correct. I married a busty  
woman, and now--

LILY  
Now they look like rolls of  
quarters stuck into two thin socks.  
Are you ready for that, Burt? I can  
tell you're probably a boob-man.

Burt forces a weak chuckle. The dog race ends.

SAM  
Ah shit.  
(to Burt)  
Looks like dinner's on you.

Sam downs his wine.

SAM  
Let's do it.

CUT TO:

INT. RESTAURANT ABOVE THE RACETRACK

LILY  
So Burt, you excited about all  
this?

Burt thinks she means the dog track.

BURT  
Yeah, this is the best one I've  
seen, I think.

He looks around approvingly.

LILY  
No, the baby, dummy. Does this mean  
you guys will finally get married?

SAM  
(to Lily)  
They're not married?

LILY  
I told you that. Burt wants to, but  
Verona doesn't see the point.

SAM  
The point? Insurance, for one. If  
anyone, you should understand that,  
Bart. Does anyone ever call you  
Bart? That'd be sort of funny.

BURT  
No.

SAM  
Well, we didn't have insurance when  
Ashley was born.

LILY  
We thought we did and then we  
didn't. And I couldn't get it --  
pre-existing condition.

Burt and Verona are expected to know what this condition is,  
but they don't. She twirls her finger around her ear.

LILY  
I'm crazy.

A wild giggle escapes her mouth.

LILY  
Or whatever.

SAM  
(pointing to Ashley with  
his thumb)  
That girl cost us \$24,000. Had to  
borrow from every relative we were  
still speaking to.

LILY  
Every time she's acting up or  
whatever, you can't help thinking,  
"We shelled out 24-thou for *this*?"

Lily lets out a cackle. She thinks she's hilarious.

LILY  
(laying a hand on Ashley's  
shoulder)  
You know I'm kidding, honey.

Ashley wants to disappear.

VERONA  
I just don't think the certificate  
and a huge wedding will change the  
way we feel about each other.

LILY  
At the very least, it'll keep you  
from taking off in the middle of  
the night when there's trouble.

Sam is nodding vigorously.

\*

LILY  
I almost left Sam about a dozen  
times. The kids don't know that.

\*

The kids, of course, are right in front of them.

LILY  
But then you start thinking of the  
wedding, all that money--

SAM  
(pouring himself another  
full cup of chardonnay)  
\$46,000 for ours. It was worth  
maybe \$31.



LILY

(sighing)

I hope you guys move here. We're having a hell of a time getting into the social world here. Seems very cliquish. Or maybe it's something about Sam they don't like. I don't know what it is. We didn't get into the good golf club.

SAM

Run by a Pakistani couple! How do you like that? My family goes back to the Santa Maria. I get turned down by a Paki named Taqi.

Lily and Sam are greatly amused by this, though it's clear he's used this anecdote a few dozen times.

LILY

You really think you might come down here?

VERONA

(looking around, as if judging the liveability of Phoenix based on the dog track)

Well...

LILY

Okay, it's not perfect. But what is? No place is perfect, just like no marriage is perfect. Sam and I have both had...

(searching for an appropriate word)

*dalliances*, and we're still plugging away. Good as ever. But families are fucked up. They're created that way. There's no way around it, so there's no use pretending it can be all roses and love and that shit.

EXT. PARKING LOT OF DOG TRACK -- EVENING

LILY

(gushing, utterly sincere)

Well, that was wonderful.

Sam walks by, throws the bottle of wine, now empty, loudly into the garbage can, and heads into the parking lot to find the car. The kids shuffle after him. He says nothing to Burt and Verona -- he's either too drunk or has forgotten them completely.

LILY

You know, people will offer all sorts of advice to you, but whatever you do, don't listen to any of it. Kids are resilient -- and they're genetically predetermined anyway. They'll be fine no matter what.

Ashley has wandered off and is leaning into the window of a pickup truck -- talking to two middle-aged cowboys. Taylor is nearby, picking gum off the hot cement.

EXT. HOTEL POOL, PHOENIX -- LATER THAT NIGHT

Burt and Verona are sitting on deck chairs by the pool, positioned side-by-side, very much like sunbathers. It's about 9 o'clock and quite dark.

BURT

You think that's right, that all families are inherently screwed up, that we can't hope for any kind of normal happiness?

VERONA

I don't.

Beat. The sound of crickets.

BURT

Wait. You don't what? You don't think it's possible, or you don't agree with her?

VERONA

You *know* I don't agree, Burt. I hate that attitude -- "Everything's broken so let's  
(putting her feet on the ground and stomping, as if crushing the shards of a vase into dust)  
break everything again and again and again."

BURT

But you're the one who won't get married. If you're so optimistic...

VERONA

But it's beside the point! I'm saying we can be perfect, we can be happy, and it doesn't have anything to do with paper titles or a ring or a \$42,000 wedding-- Was it \$42,000?

BURT

It was, but it was only worth \$31.

They chuckle and stare into the starry sky.

BURT

Did you hear what Lily was saying about her boobs? Did you know her when she had boobs?

VERONA

She was huge.

This is very disturbing news to Burt. He hadn't thought of this, and would miss Verona's medium-sized chest.

BURT

Oh god.

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Burt and Verona are moving about the room, unpacking and changing into their sleep clothes.

BURT

So how do you prevent that? You don't wanna go flat, do you?

VERONA

No, but I don't know how much control I have over it.

BURT

Was your mom... Did she breastfeed you guys?

VERONA

I don't know.

BURT  
You don't know?

VERONA  
She died when I was twenty-four. I  
didn't get around to asking her.

INT. HOTEL -- CONTINUOUS

Burt and Verona are laying in bed. Burt is rubbing stretch-  
mark cream on Verona's stomach and hips. It's a delicate  
moment, but Burt can't leave the subject alone. \*

He jumps up and grabs Verona's wallet and finds her pictures  
of her parents. \*

VERONA  
What are you looking for? \*

BURT  
Did your mom have... I can't tell  
from these... \*

VERONA  
She looked like me, Burt.

BURT  
After she had you guys, too?

Burt is beginning to brighten.

VERONA  
Yes.

Now Burt realizes he shouldn't be grinning about the size of  
Verona's dead mother's breasts. He takes a more studious  
approach.

BURT  
But she might not have breast-fed  
you guys...

VERONA  
Please, Burt.

BURT  
What?

VERONA

This is the most interest you've ever shown in my mother, and it's about her boobs. It's making me not like you.

BURT

I just think we need to do the research. I think we need to know what kind of strategies there might be. I mean, I see plenty of older women who still have their boobs. So there must be a way to keep them. You like your boobs, right?

VERONA

Yes.

BURT

So you'd want to keep them if you could...

VERONA

Sure.

BURT

Good. So I'll do the research. I'll figure out what it takes. I'm sure there are some guidelines.

Beat.

BURT

Some tricks. Together we'll do this. *I'll* do this. For you.

INT. HOTEL -- LATER, CONTINUOUS

Burt and Verona are laying in bed, spooning, each looking out the window at the pulsing highway beyond.

BURT

I have good news.

VERONA

What?

Burt turns onto his back and stares at the ceiling, his hands folded across his chest.

BURT  
I decided wood-carving is just as  
good as cobbling.  
(now whispering, with much  
gravitas)  
Our daughter's father will be a  
wood-carver.

He puts his leg over hers. She reaches back, grabbing his  
ass, and pulls him closer. They drift off to sleep.

INT. CAR -- DRIVING TO SISTER'S HOTEL

Burt and Verona are driving to meet her sister, Grace. Grace  
works as a concierge at a very high-end hotel in Phoenix.  
Burt is driving, and this is a problem. He tends to push the  
accelerator down in bursts, making anyone in his vehicle  
seasick.

VERONA  
This is why I don't let you drive.

BURT  
Tell me one more time why we're not  
staying at the hotel where your  
sister works?

VERONA  
They've been booked for year. A  
conference of Belgians who now live  
in the southwest.

BURT  
No. Belgians?

As Burt pulls the car into the hotel parking lot, he sees  
three men, perhaps Belgian, walking on the sidewalk. He honks  
angrily.

BURT  
What the fuck with the Belgians all  
of a sudden? For thirty-three years  
I have no interaction with Belgians  
and now they're fucking up every  
aspect of my life.

Burt honks at another group of Belgians, this batch including  
some children. They look startled and utterly innocent.

Burt parks the car. Verona adjusts her dress over her belly  
and turns to Burt.

VERONA

Listen. Grace has been dating some guy named Rob, who seems nice but she thinks he's boring. He likes going to steakhouses, that kind of thing.

BURT

Wait, was that a good thing, or a bad thing, the steakhouses?

VERONA

Bad.

BURT

Like an Outback Steakhouse? Ruth's Chris Steak House?

\*  
\*

VERONA

I honestly don't know. But we need to make him seem cool. She likes you, Burt. She'll value your endorsement of this guy.

They get out of the car and make their way through the parking lot.

\*  
\*

BURT

So you want me to make steakhouses sound cool?

VERONA

And sherbet.

BURT

No. Not sherbet.

\*

VERONA

Apparently Rob's family lives around here and they had her over for dinner. They served sherbet.

(registering Burt's  
confusion)

Instead of sorbet. This was a big deal for Grace. It made her sad.

Burt is still at a loss.

VERONA

We just need to make him seem like a good, decent man. And also an exciting sort of guy. I don't know.

(MORE)

VERONA (cont'd)  
We'll figure it out. And don't look  
at her tits.

BURT  
I'm over it. I was good last time.

VERONA  
But she's bigger now. She went on  
the pill and now she's complaining  
about getting new bras and  
everything.

Burt's eyes light up.

BURT  
Huh....

There's a long pause, where Burt tries to figure out the best  
way to make his suggestion, and while it dawns on Verona that  
he's about to say what he's about to say.

BURT  
Why don't you go on the pill?

VERONA  
I'm pregnant, moron.

INT. HOTEL -- LUNCHTIME

While waiting for Grace, Verona and Burt see a MOM with her  
two kids, 5 and eighteen months. The mother, white, is  
talking to her kids very loudly, as if everyone nearby should  
be interested in hearing what she says to her children -- and  
all aspects of her fascinating child-rearing.

MOM  
Yes, Martin Luther! That's a fern!

Burt and Verona keep watching. Verona is getting annoyed.

MOM  
Yes, that's a cactus. And the  
plural of cactus is...

MARTIN LUTHER  
Cacti?

MOM  
That's right! Oh Amelie, you've  
dribbled on your new French dress!



The mom looks around, expecting everyone in the vicinity to smile at the wonder of childhood and her spectacular little family. She finds only Verona, staring her down with a look of unmitigated disgust.

VERONA  
(to Burt, between her  
teeth)  
Performance moms. Nothing goes un-  
narrated.

BURT  
There's Grace.

Grace is saying goodbye to a group of Belgians. She sends them onto their tour bus and turns to see Verona and Burt.

GRACE  
Hi!

VERONA  
Hey!

GRACE  
Wow, look at you! Finally showing!  
You are radiant! Luminous!  
Effervescent! Hey Burt!

She gives Burt a quick but very tight hug. She and Verona think nothing of it, but Burt is in a momentary daze.

GRACE  
You guys want to eat here, or go  
out...?

BURT  
We don't want to go out there...  
for a while. Feels like we're being  
cooked.

GRACE  
Yeah, it's hot.

BURT  
No, I mean truly. Think about it.  
If you were actually being cooked  
by someone, that's what it would  
feel like. As if God had formed us  
from clay, but it was the kind of  
clay you needed to *bake*, as opposed  
to the kind you just leave out to  
dry.

GRACE  
(meaning it)  
Wow, Burt. That is so stoney!

BURT  
Well, it's the Bible. QED.

INT. HOTEL RESTAURANT -- MIDDAY

Mid-conversation:

GRACE  
Two days ago he asked me if I like  
movies. Like movies are something  
some people don't like. He actually  
posed the question like it was some  
great conversation-starter.  
(imitating his voice)  
"Do you like movies?"  
(looking into her salad)  
It was painful.

BURT  
I wish someone would ask me that  
sometime. That's a probing sort of  
intelligence, I think.

GRACE  
Really?

BURT  
He doesn't assume the obvious.

GRACE  
But the way he dresses! He wears  
basketball jerseys without any  
shirt underneath.

BURT  
It's Phoenix.

GRACE  
But he's so white!

BURT  
Is he buff?

GRACE  
No.

BURT

Most basketball players aren't. Or they didn't use to be. You ever see the Celtics from the 70s? They were mostly white and not very buff. Is this guy from Boston?

GRACE

I think his family is from Boston.

BURT

There you go.

GRACE

He drives a Cabriolet.

BURT

Great design. Good mileage.

GRACE

He uses the word "robust."

BURT

Lots of things are robust!

GRACE

He took me to Long John Silver's.

BURT

(to Verona)

I thought you said it was a steakhouse.

GRACE

When I told him I didn't want the steakhouse, he took me to Long John Silver's.

BURT

He's being sensitive to your needs and desires. You say no turf, he goes surf. He's a quick thinker.

GRACE

But every time I have an issue with something, he just accommodates me. I tell him not to wear bleached jeans and he doesn't wear them. I think he read somewhere that he's supposed to laugh at my jokes, so for a week he would literally double-over every time I made an attempt. Like this:

(MORE)

GRACE (cont'd)  
(she demonstrates by  
throwing her head  
forward)  
You know, like even when he was  
driving. I had to ask him to stop.

Verona gives Burt a look, like he needs to step up for Rob.

BURT  
This guy seems like a goddamned  
champ, Grace. He seems awesome. I'd  
marry him if it wasn't against the  
law here.

Grace now sees through the gambit. Verona gives Burt a  
withering look.

BURT  
I'll get the check.

Burt leaves the table and walks to the front desk. In a few  
seconds, he's talking to the woman there, older and with a  
sizable chest.

VERONA  
Look at him. We're having a baby  
that might have three feet or one  
eye and the thing he's most worried  
about is whether or not I'll keep  
my boobs.

GRACE  
I think that's sexy.

Burt returns. He winks at Verona, like he's got news for  
later.

BURT  
So I'm meeting Rob at the driving  
range?

GRACE  
Yeah. Hey thanks, Burt. It means a  
lot to me. Just... get a feel for  
him.  
(mock-dramatically)  
Tell me if I can be as happy with  
him as Rona is with you.

Young Martin Luther, son of the Performance Mom, has appeared  
at their table.

KID  
 (pointing to Verona's  
 stomach)  
 Baby!

PERFORMANCE MOM  
 (delighted)  
 Right, Martin Luther! This woman is  
 about to have a baby -- any day  
 now!

VERONA  
 Or in three months.  
 (giving the mom a fake  
 smile)  
 Thank you.

The kid is still at Verona's side, inspecting her. The  
 Performance Mom thinks she has an audience and is thus more  
 delighted than ever.

PERFORMANCE MOM  
 Martin Luther, tell the pretty lady  
 what you know about babies.

The boy says nothing. He's frozen up.

PERFORMANCE MOM  
 C'mon, tell the nice people.

The boy directs a malevolent look at his baby sister.

PERFORMANCE MOM  
 Martin. You're being rude--

KID  
 (still staring at his  
 sister)  
 Babies like to breathe and are good  
 at hiding it. I put a pillow over a  
 baby and I thought she wasn't  
 breathing but then she was. She was  
 sneaky. She was breathing the whole  
 time. But I'll try again.

Ashen-faced, the Performance Mom and her kids leave.

Burt's phone rings.

BURT  
 I'm gonna take this on the way to  
 meeting Rob. I'll see you guys  
 later.

He leaves.

BURT

(on phone, in loud, Casey  
Kasem voice)

Ned! I can't believe you're not  
hiding under a rock with the way  
your Titans played last Sunday! Ha  
ha ha... What? Yes siree I had  
money on it!

Grace wistfully watches him walk away.

GRACE

You got lucky, sister.

Verona ponders this for a second. She's inclined to cut the  
compliment with self-deprecating humor, but she refrains.

VERONA

Yeah. I know.

INT. BATHTUB SHOWROOM

Verona and Grace are walking through the aisles, touching the  
bathtubs and fixtures. This is a high-end showroom for  
decorators, and people with a lot of disposable income.

VERONA

So what would you think if we moved  
here? You could be Auntie Grace all  
the time. We could drive Burt  
crazy.

GRACE

I would love it, Rone. You have no  
idea. But I don't know if I'm here  
for the long haul.

VERONA

But you're looking at seven-  
thousand-dollar tubs!

GRACE

I can sell my house for twice what  
I paid for it. I can live five  
years off the profit. So... I just  
might do that. I don't know. And I  
wouldn't want you moving all the  
way here just to see me leave.

They walk through the showroom.

VERONA

It's strange how we live, don't you think?

GRACE

How do you mean?

VERONA

You're younger than me, you're single, and you live in a 4,000-square-foot house. Burt and I are having a baby and we rent a three-room ranch.

GRACE

It's only because I try when it comes to money, Rone. You have your head in other places. I'm always going to be good at making money because I *like* making money. Why? Because I'm good at it. I don't have a talent like you do.

VERONA

My talent is drawing people's organs. I wouldn't glamorize it too much.

GRACE

Get in.

Grace is sitting inside a large white tub set atop giant claw feet.

VERONA

I don't need to get in. It's a nice tub.

(now really looking at it,  
noticing something)

Looks like the one we used to have at home.

GRACE

Come on. I'll pretend to wash your hair.

Verona sheepishly steps into the tub and sits with her back to Grace. Grace takes her hair into her hands and kneads it, pretending to lather shampoo into it.

GRACE

When was the last time you went back?

VERONA

Home? I haven't. Not for ... a while. When are you gonna sell that place, anyway?

GRACE

You mean when are we going to sell it?

\*

VERONA

I told you I don't want anything to do with it. You did the estate sale, you sell the house, too.

GRACE

I feel funny selling it at the prices they're offering. I'm going to wait -- I have a feeling the neighborhood's going to turn around. Just need some families to come back.

\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*

VERONA

It's weird to think the baby won't have grandparents from our side.

GRACE

Yeah...

VERONA

It hits you again when these things come up. When there are places they should be but can't be.

GRACE

Ah ha.

VERONA

What?

GRACE

Now I know why you won't marry that good man.

VERONA

That's not it.

GRACE

You don't want to have Uncle Mark or someone else walking you down the aisle...



VERONA

It's not--

GRACE

And giving you away! That would be sad, I guess. I can understand that. I'm not looking forward to it myself. Maybe I'll elope...

Verona's eyes are wet, but Grace can't see this. They sit in silence for a moment.

GRACE

It's not good to think about.

VERONA

No, it's not.

GRACE

Let's go.

Grace steps out of the tub and then offers Verona a hand up. Verona struggles but gets herself up and out.

INT. HOTEL -- EVENING

Verona is on the floor, doing pre-natal yoga stretches. Burt bursts in.

BURT

That was the most boring afternoon of my life.

He throws himself against the wall, as if shipwrecked and finally finding dry land.

BURT

It's hard to explain. He was wearing Dockers. Everywhere -- on his legs, on his head, his feet...

VERONA

Thanks for not saying anything to Grace.

BURT

He had a Dockers shirt, a Dockers phone holster...

VERONA

I'm sorry, honey.

BURT

I can't figure out how a guy can be *that* boring. Even while he was boring me, I thought maybe I could study it, like, be *interested* in how boring he was. But even that failed. I was bored by being bored by him. It was unprecedented.

VERONA

Well, I know she probably won't stay with this guy, but at least we might ween her off the bad boys. Since high school all she wants is the bad boys. Even the guy she was engaged to was a bad boy.

BURT

The florist?

VERONA

Yeah.

BURT

The florist from Japan was a bad boy?

VERONA

He was really rebellious.

BURT

What... Too much baby's breath?  
That kind of thing?

Verona is struggling to get off the floor.

VERONA

I'm so tired of being big.

Burt helps her up.

VERONA

I'm tired of not having sex.

BURT

Do you want to have sex?

VERONA

No.

Burt stares blankly.

VERONA  
We haven't had sex in a month.

BURT  
But you don't want to have it now.

VERONA  
No.

BURT  
We had sex last week.

VERONA  
No. You came on my boobs.

BURT  
Oh. Right.  
(quickly losing himself in  
a reverie)

VERONA  
It'll be months before I get my  
shape back.

BURT  
So we don't have sex for a while. I  
was prepared for that. This is one  
of those dips we go through. There  
are periods when you don't have  
sex, Rone. I mean, what if I got  
into a horrible boating accident,  
and was covered in third-degree  
burns on most of my body? We'd do  
without sex then, right?

Verona can't believe this. She grabs the ice bucket and heads  
to the door. She stops.

VERONA  
I'm pregnant, Burt. You didn't get  
in a boating accident. And how do  
you get burns in a boating  
accident?  
(opening the door)  
We don't even HAVE a boat.

BURT  
Yeah but--

She closes the door on him. Relief. We follow her all the way  
down the hall, in utter silence. She savors the quiet, the  
respite from Burt's mouth.

She gets the ice, and when returning, slows down as she comes upon the door, almost knowing that as soon she opens it, he'll begin again -- as if the conversation had never paused.

She takes a breath. She opens the door. She was right.

BURT

Funny you mentioned not having a boat. I meant to talk to you about that. I want the baby to grow up knowing the joys of the high seas. I want to raise her on the water. I want the salt water running through her veins!

Verona throws herself onto the bed and buries her face in her pillow. Burt misinterprets this as a sign that she's still upset about being big.

BURT

Rona? C'mon. Don't be sad. You're not that big. And you're still super-sexy. Hot even.

She buries her face deeper.

BURT

Oh honey. I'll always love you, even if you're *enormous*. Even if it takes you MONTHS to lose the weight! A year! I'll love you always, Rone -- even if you GAIN weight after the baby.

Verona makes no sign she's hearing him.

BURT

(now quieter, as if he's saying something really poignant now)  
Even if you gain so much weight I can't find your vagina.

She screams into the pillow.

BURT

(now whispering)  
Really. You can write that in stone, in your heart. I ... will ... love you ... even if... I can't find your vagina.

INT. PLANE -- ON WAY TO HARTFORD

Verona is listening to the baby's heartbeat with a portable Doppler machine.

VERONA  
Her heart-rate is still pretty slow.

BURT  
What is it?

VERONA  
Like 115.

BURT  
That's normal enough, right?

VERONA  
It's supposed to be between 120 and 160.

BURT  
She's just mellow. Mellow's good.

VERONA  
I don't want mellow now. I want lively now, mellow later.

BURT  
I think it's fine.

VERONA  
It's because you don't want to fight. We should fight more. Get her riled up.

BURT  
Didn't we fight last night?

VERONA  
We *discussed*. We need to *fight*. You never raise your voice.

BURT  
Fine. Okay... You did something wrong and I'm mad about it. Man, I am cross. Real mad.

VERONA  
No. It has to be convincing.

BURT  
Should I swear?

VERONA  
No. Just raise your voice.

BURT  
(suddenly screaming)  
You cunt-sucker!

Half the plane turns.

VERONA  
(in an urgent whisper)  
I didn't mean *now*!

BURT  
But the element of surprise is  
crucial! You've never heard me say  
cunt-sucker, have you?

Verona has sunk so low in her seat that she's talking into  
her breasts.

VERONA  
No!

BURT  
See? I'll get that heartrate up.  
I know what I'm doing.

He pats her hand. She's still recovering.

INT. CAR -- DRIVING TO HARTFORD CAMPUS

They drive through a nice part of Hartford, and the beginning  
of a tree-filled college campus.

VERONA  
This is nice.

BURT  
Yeah. I haven't seen Ellen in ... I  
have no idea when I saw her last.

VERONA  
I can't believe you thought to call  
her.

Beat.

BURT  
Shit! My interview!

VERONA  
It's tomorrow.

BURT  
How do you know?

She opens his jacket. The itinerary is no longer stapled to the lining of his jacket.

VERONA  
What did you do with it?

Burt smiles. He's got it figured out. He reaches down and takes off his shoe. He looks, but finds nothing inside. Now the other shoe. Nothing.

VERONA  
What?

BURT  
I wore the wrong shoes.

They drive onto campus.

VERONA  
So is Ellen a full professor, or an associate or...? And which side is she on -- she's a first cousin?

BURT  
Well, she's not technically my cousin. Her mom was an old friend of my dad's. I have no idea how. They started calling us cousins when we were kids. You met her at my brother's wedding.

VERONA  
She seemed really angry. She called the band racist.

BURT  
She doesn't think white people should play soul music.

Verona scoffs.

BURT  
Be nice.

EXT. AFTERNOON -- SMALL COLLEGE CAMPUS

They get out of their car and look around. Burt is trying to call Ellen; he gets no answer.

VERONA

You didn't get the address?

BURT

She told me to call when I got to campus.

The first person they see is a professor -- a woman of about 38, with a baby in a stroller.

BURT

Excuse me. You wouldn't happen to know where Ellen Forney-Fisher's office is?

PROFESSOR

Ellen Forney-Fisher.

(she says the name with a remarkable amount of distaste)

Well I do know, as a matter of fact. She's in Altgeld Hall. Room 340. In the corner.

BURT

You think she's there now? We're early.

PROFESSOR

Well, if she's not in her office, she'll probably be around campus. She'll be the mom without the stroller.

They thank the professor and head toward Altgeld.

INT. ALTGELD HALL -- DAYTIME

They're walking through the halls of the building, looking for the room number.

VERONA

She doesn't have a stroller? I thought you said she got some big trust fund.

\*

\*

\*

\*

\*

\*

\*



BURT  
 She did. Her mother married a  
 Vanderbilt. Or a Carnegie. Which  
 one did the pants?

\*  
 \*  
 \*  
 \*

They arrive at the office. The door says LN HYLAND.

VERONA  
 I thought her name was Ellen. What  
 does L N stand for?

It dawns on Verona that "Ellen" is spelled "LN."

VERONA  
 No.

BURT  
 She must have changed it. Don't say  
 anything about it. Please.

He knocks on the door.

LN (O.S.)  
 It's open!

They open the door upon a horrifying sight. There is a woman standing behind a desk. The woman has one baby in a sling, and this baby is sucking on her left nipple. On the desk stands a four-year-old boy. He is sucking on her right nipple.

LN  
 (waving)  
 Hello!

The four-year-old peels his lips from the nipple and waves, too.

FOUR-YEAR-OLD  
 Welcome!

LN gestures them forward, in a "Come in! Come in!" sort of way. Burt and Verona are frozen. LN is about 37, blond, attractive, with luxurious curly hair. She's wearing a woven poncho.

LN  
 Come here, give me kisses!

Verona and Burt proceed, their feet leaden.

LN tucks her breasts back under her blouse and charges toward Burt and Verona. The four-year-old wipes his mouth with the back of his hand.

LN

How are you two? Look at you!  
You're hardly showing! What a  
beauty you are, Verona. I thought  
something might have been wrong  
when you were so late.

BURT

Sorry about that. I blacked out.

LN

How inventive! You used to be so  
prompt, Burt. What are you doing to  
him, Verona? He was always on  
time... C'mon.

(getting her bag and  
indicating the four-year-  
old)

I have to get this one to crafting.

The four-year-old puts on what seems to be a coat -- no, it's  
a cape, black and velvet -- and they all leave the office.

EXT. CAMPUS -- LATE-LATE AFTERNOON

They're walking through the quad, on the way to their cars.

BURT

Sorry about that. We tried to call  
you.

LN

Oh yeah. I never answer the phone  
when I'm feeding. Not fair to the  
children.

They walk past a protest -- dozens of students with signs  
(THE CIA TRAINED BIN LADEN) objecting to CIA recruiting on  
campus.

BURT

We got directions from a woman. She  
seemed to know you. She had a baby,  
very tall?

LN

Oh god. Ruby Eng. She hates me. I  
breastfed her baby.

VERONA

You what?

LN

I was babysitting and the child was fussing -- he was starving, didn't want the bottle. So I fed him. Took to me right away. I shouldn't have told her; she didn't appreciate it. She has lactation problems. Now she won't let me babysit, or get near her husband. How paranoid is that? So should we eat in? Out?

BURT

How about *in*? We've been traveling all day. Staying home would be so nice.

LN

Okay... Let's think of what I have at home...

VERONA

Let *us* get the food! We have a car. We can go to the store and get whatever we need. It would be our pleasure.

LN

Oh that's great. Look at you, so helpful. I guess it's in the blood.

Verona has to take a second to figure out how many ways she was just insulted. They're still walking through campus.

LN

I'm so glad you guys got pregnant so easily. To be honest, I had my doubts, given Verona's tilted uterus. Oh, here I am.

(indicating her car -- a Prius)

I'll see you at the house.

INT. RENTAL CAR -- ON WAY TO GROCERY STORE

Verona is driving. Fuming.

VERONA  
(furious)  
You told her I have a tilted  
uterus?

BURT  
I don't know. It might have been my  
mom. Is your tilted uterus a  
secret?

VERONA  
Yeah my tilted uterus is a fucking  
secret!

Something occurs to Burt.

BURT  
Oh really, you fucking bitch? Your  
fucking uterus is a motherfucking  
secret? Well fuck you!

Verona is shocked.

Burt grabs the Doppler from the bag.

CUT TO:

INT. GROCERY STORE -- AFTERNOON

Burt is pushing the cart through the aisles.

BURT  
Why don't we divide up? You get the  
wine and some beer and I'll get the  
pasta and vegetables.

VERONA  
I don't want to get the wine.  
People give me bad looks when I buy  
wine.

BURT  
You're being totally paranoid.  
Rone, you have to trust me on this.  
Nobody even notices you now that  
you're pregnant.

VERONA  
That's supposed to make me feel  
better?

Verona goes to the wine section. She selects a few bottles, red and white, and a six-pack of beer. As she makes her way back to Burt's cart, heads are turning, old women are whispering. A mother pushing her child in a cart hisses.

She reunites with Burt near the checkout line.

BURT  
We need a gift.

VERONA  
Oh god. Really?

BURT  
We should. My parents will kill me  
if we don't.  
(alighting on an idea)  
A stroller! They don't have one!  
We'll be heroes. Look!

He points out the window, across the parking lot, to a BABIES  
R US.

VERONA  
If you check out, I'll get the  
stroller.

Burt is suddenly distracted. He's spotted one of the check-  
out women, about 50, with large breasts.

BURT  
(already making his way to  
the checkout)  
Good plan, good...

CUT TO:

EXT. BABY STORE

Verona loading a stroller into the back of the car.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. GROCERY STORE

Burt is talking intensely with the large-breasted checkout  
woman. He's got the checkout pen (the one on the spiral cord)  
and he's taking notes on an empty paper bag.

BURT  
So you're saying the trick is--

WOMAN

You gotta stop breastfeeding at 6 months.

BURT

Interesting...

There's a loud buzzing or beeping sound from outside. Burt and the woman briefly look up but then resume their conversation.

WOMAN

And drink whole milk. And beer, lots of beer. Good for the mams.

BURT

(admiring her chest)

They ARE good...

The noise from outside continues. They again look up, trying to find the source of all the racket.

WOMAN

And the thing about stretchmarks-- Wait. Is she with you?

They both look up to see:

CUT TO:

INT. CAR

Verona leaning on the horn. It's been her the whole time, watching Burt through the glass, furious.

INT. LN'S HOUSE -- EVENING

Burt and Verona ring the bell.

VERONA

One question about LN's boobs and I throw you through that window.

She's pointing to a second-story window.

BURT

That one, huh? Okay. Gotcha.

LN opens the door, wearing a long flowing hippie robe-dress -- something like Joseph's technicolor dreamcoat.

LN

Namaste!

\*

Burt and Verona = blank looks.

\*

LN

Come in! Come in! The spirit within  
me salutes the spirit within you!

\*

\*

\*

They step inside. We see that there's an elaborate cubby-hole  
like set-up of shoes and slippers.

\*

LN

If you don't mind...

Verona picks out a pair of black knitted slippers. Burt is  
left with one option: an elf-like pair, with pointed toes.

LN

Welcome to greater Hartford!

\*

VERONA

Here, we brought you something.

\*

Burt goes back to the porch to retrieve it.

\*

LN

(to Verona)

That is so sweet. Aren't you a  
dumpling?

Burt presents the stroller, assembled, to LN. LN looks at it  
like a rolling mound of pig shit is coming toward her.

LN

Oh no... no, no. We don't use  
those. No. Take it away.

BURT

What?

LN

This *is* my house. Respect that, at  
LEAST! Take that thing away.

Burt begins to roll the stroller into a side room.

\*

LN

No! The porch. The door! Out!

Burt opens the front door and wheels it out.

\*

BURT  
What the hell, LN?

LN  
Burt. I love my babies. Why would I  
push them away from me like that?  
(demonstrating with an  
aggressive move of  
pushing a stroller, as if  
off a cliff)  
No. We do *continuum* here.  
(in a hush, still  
traumatized)  
Yes. *Continuum*.

VERONA  
What is that -- continuum?

LN  
Continuum?

VERONA  
Yes.

LN  
(as if any mother-to-be  
should know)  
Continuum.

LN and Verona stare each other down for a second.

VERONA  
Please, LN, you should just cut the  
shit and tell me.

Burt raises his eyebrows.

VERONA  
(to Burt)  
Sorry.  
(faux-sweetly, to LN)  
I can't wait to hear.

Verona's tone can't keep LN from preaching the gospel.

LN  
The Continuum movement recognizes  
that the world will give your baby  
plenty of alienation and despair in  
good time, so while we can we  
should hold them close.



BURT

So you can't push the kid in a stroller?

LN

No, no. Why do you think this country is so dysfunctional? Why we feel disconnected from our homes and loved ones?

VERONA

Because of strollers?

LN

In this house we *carry* the children. We keep them *attached*. We don't sever the biological ties at first opportunity.

BURT

What about sleeping?

CUT TO:

INT. FAMILY BEDROOM

Burt and Verona are standing behind LN, who is showing them a smallish, dimly lit, wood-paneled bedroom, dominated entirely by a huge mattress. It's almost twice the size of a king-size bed.

LN

We have *one* bed. Sleep-time is their *most fraught* time, when they most need to know that their progenitors are near. Hi Roderick.

It wasn't clear at first, but RODERICK, LN's partner, is laying on the bed. Roderick is tall, lanky, with longish dirty-blond hair and a broad open face. He turns over and greets them with a lazy wave. Both kids -- WOLF, 4, and NEPTUNE, 2 -- are laying with him, attached, in slings. They look barely able to breathe.

\*  
\*  
\*

BURT

Hi. I don't think we've met.

Burt tries to crawl over the bed on his knees, to shake Roderick's hand. Roderick makes almost no effort.

RODERICK

Yes we have. Burning Man. 1997.

Verona looks at Burt, aghast. Burt quietly acknowledges that this is true. \*

\*  
\*

Burt and Verona take in the room. There are about two dozen pictures of seahorses on the walls.

VERONA

What about sex?

RODERICK

What about it?

VERONA

You go out to the car or what?

LN

No we don't go out to the car. Are you planning to *hide* your lovemaking from your kids, Burt? Do you know what that does to a child, to have their parents' expression of love kept a *secret* from them?

RODERICK

That's why I have an Electra Complex.

BURT

Which one is that again?

VERONA

That's when a woman wants to do her father.

(to Roderick)

Do you mean Oedipal Complex?

RODERICK

Don't try to diagnose me, Verona.

BURT

(nodding toward the paintings)

Why the seahorses, Rod?

Roderick tries to answer, but emotion has overcome him.

LN

In the seahorse community, the males give birth.

She gives Roderick a sympathetic look, as if to apologize.

RODERICK

The female inserts her ovipositor  
into the male's brood pouch. That's  
where she deposits her eggs.

LN

(with such tenderness)  
If I could, I would lay my eggs in  
your brood pouch.

RODERICK

(barely choking out the  
words)  
I know you would.

Burt and Verona are utterly stricken. \*

CUT TO:

INT. LN'S HOUSE -- EVENING -- DINNER TABLE

At dinner, Verona, Burt, Roderick and LN are joined by LN's  
son, WOLF, the four-year-old, wearing a sweater hand-made  
from hemp. NEPTUNE is on LN's lap, playing with something on  
LN's neck -- it appears to be a vial of blood. \*

LN \*

It's so good to have you two here. \*

VERONA \*

(looking at the placemats,  
which look like abstract  
watercolors) \*  
These are very unusual. \*

LN \*

Wolfie and Neptune helped make  
them. Didn't you, Wolfie? \*

Wolf nods proudly. \*

RODERICK

So are you counting on this job  
interview tomorrow? At.. Where is  
it?

BURT

Providential. Not really. I already  
do fine. This would just be a  
better commission rate.

RODERICK

It's weird what you do, isn't it,  
Burt? You sort of make money from  
people's fears. The more the  
government and the media scares us,  
the more cash you haul in.

Burt doesn't take Roderick very seriously.

BURT

Nice to see you out of bed,  
Roderick.

FOUR-YEAR-OLD

Would you like a dolma?

BURT

What is it?

FOUR-YEAR-OLD

It's an amuse-bouche.

BURT

What?

FOUR-YEAR-OLD

It means "pleasing to the mouth."  
To whet your appetite.

BURT

Okay. Right. Thank you.

He takes one.

LN

Have you decided on a doula?

BURT

(holding up the appetizer  
Wolf gave him)  
I have one. Delicious.

LN

A doula, not a dolma.

VERONA

We're not using a doula.

LN

A midwife?

BURT

(finally catching on)

Nope. No. Midwives and doulas are for when the husband is clueless or doesn't want to be involved. I am neither of those things. You know, I did successfully apply a tourniquet to a man and I've been doing some reading about the birth process...

LN

The tourniquet? I was *there*. It was *camp*. We were *twelve*. Don't you think Verona might need someone who understands the female experience?

VERONA

We haven't decided yet exactly what we're doing--

BURT

We don't need some stranger in the delivery room who looks like Joan Baez.

LN

Who what?

BURT

You know this is true. Every midwife I've seen -- they always look like Joan Baez. You know, with the short hair and the  
(demonstrating)  
pointy, lady sideburns.

LN

(changing the subject)

How's Jim?

BURT

My *parents* are fine, LN. They're moving to Belgium.

LN

Belgium? Whose idea was that? Sounds like Glenda's.

BURT

What does that mean?

LN

Uncle Jim was always more of a romantic. He wouldn't have chosen Belgium. Don't tell me they're going to *Antwerp*.

BURT

Just stop. You're way inappropriate about my dad. And don't call him Uncle Jim. He's not your uncle. Just ... gah.

VERONA

Burt--

BURT

Dammit, LN, you've always done this. You and your mom always got too involved in my family. We really -- just don't give us advice about the birth, okay?

RODERICK

Alice Walker says there's nothing more important than how you enter this world, and I agree with her. My mom had a hospital birth -- the stirrups, the drugs, the machines. And she wonders why I can't hold down a job, why I can't walk into a dry cleaners without vomiting. It's astonishing, her complicity in everything. And when I'm twelve she catches me with some peyote and I'm like, "What'd you expect? You started it with the epidural."

BURT

(putting his silverware  
down)

I'm going to ... put some quarters  
in the parking meter.

Everyone knows there are no parking meters for miles, but no one says a word. Burt walks out the front door.

EXT. LN'S DRIVEWAY

Verona has followed him outside. They're standing in the gravel driveway.

BURT  
I'm sorry about that. If I didn't  
have to be almost related to her, I  
wouldn't even bother.

VERONA  
It's all right.

BURT  
I swear I didn't tell her about  
your tilted uterus.

VERONA  
Thanks.

They hug, and this leads to a small kiss, which leads to a  
passionate one, which leads to some groping. The action is  
getting heated.

VERONA  
Stop.

BURT  
What?

VERONA  
We shouldn't do this here.

BURT  
What? Why?

VERONA  
Do you know what it does to a child  
to have their parents' friends'  
lovemaking kept a secret from them?  
What if I came and Wolfie didn't  
get to witness it? I don't want an  
Electra complex on my conscience.  
C'mon--

She takes off her shirt and pretends to walk back toward the  
house.

BURT  
Okay, okay. Let's go.

He grabs her from behind and tries to lift her to wheel her  
around. He grunts involuntarily -- she's heavier than he  
expected -- and never quite gets her off the ground.

INT. HOTEL -- LATER THAT NIGHT

Burt and Verona are in the hotel room, both trying to capitalize on the sexual mood.

VERONA  
Okay, no more talking about LN.

BURT  
Right.

VERONA  
But she is nuts, right?

BURT  
She's an awful person. An unholy  
union of intentions and  
pretensions.

Burt is lying in the bed and Verona is putting on a nightgown, something distinctly unflattering. We see Burt examining the nightgown, forming a thought.

BURT  
Hey Verona...

Verona immediately can sense that an unsolicited remark about her appearance is coming.

VERONA  
No thanks.

BURT  
Can I tell you something?

VERONA  
No. Burt. C'mon, don't blow it.

BURT  
I just want to tell you one little  
thing.

VERONA  
Burt, I'm helping you out here.  
(kneeling on the bed,  
crawling toward him)  
Just stop talking. I don't want to  
hear it.

BURT  
You don't know what I'm going to  
say.

VERONA  
I do.



Verona goes into the bathroom and closes the door. Burt gets up and stands on the other side.

BURT  
Verona. Listen.

No response.

BURT  
Verona.

Nothing.

BURT  
Please.

She opens the door.

VERONA  
What?

BURT  
I was just going to say that I  
don't think you look good in that.

She screams a frustrated scream and walks out of the room.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL LOBBY -- LATER

Verona is sitting in the lobby, on the couch, in her nightgown. She's watching TV with the HOTEL MANAGER, Indian and in his 60s. Burt takes a second to process the scene, and then awkwardly sits between Verona and her new friend.

BURT  
Sorry. I'm such a jerk.

Verona says nothing. There are tears of frustration in her eyes. She gets up and walks toward the elevator. Burt follows.

BURT  
Man am I stupid.

Nothing from Verona.

INT. ELEVATOR -- CONTINUOUS

BURT

I am the worst. I know it.

Verona seems to be softening.

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

They walk in and Burt embraces Verona from behind, his hands around her waist. Verona relents, resting her hands on his.

BURT

What can I do? Say it. Anything.

Verona smiles, thinking of something.

BURT

You want me to come on your tits?

Now she bawls.

EXT. HARTFORD -- LUNCH

Burt's interview is over. He and Verona have gathered at a cafe. Verona is at the counter, alone.

VERONA

Can I get a small latte?

BARRISTA

Are you sure?

VERONA

Am I sure about what?

BARRISTA

It has caffeine.

VERONA

That's the point.

The barrista points to Verona's stomach. Now Verona gets it.

VERONA

Just give me the latte, Doctor. And a muffin.

She gets her drink and muffin and finds Burt and sits down. He has his laptop open.

VERONA

Oh god. The myth that people are nicer to pregnant women... White men cut me in every line because I'm slower -- they think I'm weak. And every woman thinks the baby's theirs, that I've asked them to judge me. The only people who know how to treat me are black men.

At that moment, a black man in the cafe, maybe on the effeminate side, notices her.

BLACK MAN

The goddess is alive!

VERONA

(to Burt)

See?

(stirring her coffee)

How was the interview?

BURT

Oh god.

VERONA

What?

BURT

It was so weird. He kept saying things about how I didn't look like my picture, how he expected someone else... He was confused. It was awkward.

VERONA

Huh.

(something dawns on her)

Oh no.

BURT

What?

VERONA

Your website.

BURT

What about it?

She grabs Burt's laptop and types in a url. Up pops Burt's website, which features information about insurance futures, and Burt's business philosophy, and, over the name BURT FARLANDER, a picture of a handsome, silver-haired 58-year-old man, in a perfect suit, sitting on the corner of a desk.

BURT  
That was your idea.

VERONA  
I thought it fit the voice. Sorry.

They sit in silence.

BURT  
How long till the flight leaves?

VERONA  
Six hours.

Beat.

VERONA  
LN signed us up for a birth class.

BURT  
Of course she did.

VERONA  
We haven't been to one. We have nothing else to do.

Beat.

VERONA  
Could be funny.

\*

INT. BIRTH CLASS -- AFTERNOON

We join Burt and Verona as they're leaving for a mid-class break. They file out of the room with all of the other couples. Trailing behind is CONNIE, the woman running the class. She looks exactly like -- or is actually played by -- Joan Baez.

CONNIE  
Ten minutes and come back. The hard part is over.

VERONA  
(whispering to Burt)  
I'm actually surprised. This class  
has been almost completely normal.

BURT  
She's not all bad.

Verona goes to the bathroom. Burt is at the vending machines when he's approached by a man of about 35, bearded, athletic - he looks like a 70s-era football player.

BEARDED GUY  
You gonna watch?

BURT  
Excuse me?

Burt has his hand inside the machine, trying to retrieve his Twizzlers.

BEARDED GUY  
Which side of the curtain you gonna  
be on?

BURT  
In the delivery room? I'll be right  
there. I'm gonna watch every  
minute.

BEARDED GUY  
Don't do it.

BURT  
I'm gonna do it.

BEARDED GUY  
Don't do it, man. Those movies we  
watched (indicating the  
classroom)... They don't show  
anything.

BURT  
You've been through this?

BEARDED GUY  
Yeah. My first wife. Listen. How  
big a man are you?  
(indicating Burt's pants)  
Let's assume you're average.

He takes Burt's Twizzlers and peels one strand of licorice off the bunch.

BEARDED GUY

Now, for years now, your Twizzler  
has had a nice, warm, compact  
docking bay waiting for it, right?

Burt tries to straighten the Twizzler, which has drooped.

BEARDED GUY

Now you're sitting in the delivery  
room, thinking "miracle of life,"  
"spectacle of birth," right? But  
here's your Twizzler. And here's  
the size of a baby. Once that  
humanoid comes out of your wife,  
are you ever gonna be able to see  
your wife's -- excuse me -- tootie  
the same way again? No sir. That  
space is no longer yours. It's like  
they built a superhighway in your  
childhood bedroom.

BURT

A what? Where?

BEARDED GUY

My first wife did 1000 Kegels a day  
and I swear she had the loosest  
slot outside of Reno. I shit you  
not -- I could stick a baby right  
back in there with the hole she  
had. Wouldn't need a lubricant.  
Ask me how much sex we had after  
that.

BURT

No.

BEARDED GUY

None. Now ask me why we got  
divorced.

BURT

No.

BEARDED GUY

Ask me why my son is living in  
Mexico City with a semi-  
professional soccer player they  
call The Bandito.

BURT

No.

BEARDED GUY  
 Stay behind the curtain, my man.  
 Don't be a hero.

CUT TO:

INT. CLASS -- LATER

There are five or six other couples there, fairly nondescript; if anything, they're a bit on the artsy side. They're gathered in a semi-circle. \*

CONNIE  
 Okay gang. Now, finally: If there's one thing I want you to take away from this, it's that the placenta...

Here she removes the towel that has been covering a jar. Inside the jar is what appears to be some kind of long-pickled sea squid.

VERONA  
 (in an urgent whisper)  
 Oh Jesus. No. \*

The squid is purple, red, and tentacled. Burt's jaw drops open. He loves it.

CONNIE  
 ...is not your enemy....

She lifts the jar and begins walking it around the room.

VERONA  
 Oh lord god.

CONNIE  
 It's not some disgusting thing to be thrown away at first opportunity. As you may know, in some cultures...

VERONA  
 That's always bad, when they say "in some cultures..."

Burt is still enthralled.

CONNIE  
 ... the placenta is buried in the backyard after a birth.  
 (MORE)

CONNIE (cont'd)

In others, it's cooked and eaten by  
the family....

Burt is still wide-eyed, while Verona looks pale, and is  
listing heavily, as if seasick.

CONNIE

I want to introduce another option,  
one that I've had the pleasure of  
seeing work very well with many  
couples at this facility. Are there  
any artists here?

All but two of the attendees raise their hands. Everyone's an  
artist. Burt raises his, too. The one actual artist in the  
room, Verona, has her arms folded.

CONNIE

So you know the pleasures of  
working with archival-quality  
watercolor paper. Now imagine the  
power of a relief print of your  
placenta, if applied to high-  
density archival watercolor paper.

She holds up a sample. Oohs and ahhs ensue. There is general  
agreement among the attendees that this is a superb idea.

BURT

Why do those look familiar...?

VERONA

Oh no.

It dawns on Burt and Verona that this is what LN's placemats  
were -- laminated placenta prints.

CONNIE

Now you're probably wondering, "How  
big should the paper be? And how  
many good transfers can you get  
before the placenta becomes too  
dry?"...

Verona sighs loudly, leans her head on Burt's shoulder, and  
closes her eyes.

INT. HOTEL -- LATER THAT AFTERNOON

They're packing to leave for the airport. Burt finds  
something in his suitcase -- the video camera.



BURT \*  
 Damn. We've totally forgotten to be \*  
 documenting. \*

VERONA \*  
 You're not serious. \*

BURT \*  
 Rone, you want no record of this \*  
 whole miraculous transformation? \*

VERONA \*  
 I want no cheap ugly grainy video \*  
 record of this miraculous \*  
 transformation. \*

Burt's already got the camera out and is hooking it into the \*  
 tripod. \*

BURT \*  
 Let's go. Get naked. And get up \*  
 against the window there, with the \*  
 light. It'll look cool. \*

Verona not-so-reluctantly complies. Soon she's undressed and \*  
 standing near the window, with a soft light falling on her \*  
 curves. \*

BURT \*  
 That's nice. Nice. Now stand on the \*  
 chair. \*

VERONA \*  
 What? \*

BURT \*  
 Please? You want it to look \*  
 artistic, don't you? Stand on the \*  
 chair. Like this. \*  
 (indicating one leg up, \*  
 like a flamingo) \*

Soon she's in the desired position, and Burt gets the video \*  
 camera ready. \*

BURT \*  
 So glad I brought the tripod. It's \*  
 gonna be good... Okay, ready? \*

VERONA \*  
 Ready. \*

Burt turns the camera on. His eyes go wide. \*

BURT

Oh Jesus.

VERONA

What?

Through the viewfinder, we see that there's a tape already in the camera. The frame shows a very un-pregnant Verona, naked, standing in much the same position as she is at the moment. The contrast is interesting: in the video, the color is lurid and cheap. Just beyond, in the hotel room, Verona is illuminated softly, and looks ethereal.

VERONA

What is it?

Burt is watching, eyes popping.

VERONA

You didn't bring the tape.

BURT

(in quiet awe)

It's in the camera.

Verona comes down off the chair and around to Burt. Together they slowly sit down on the edge of the bed.

VERONA

Oh god. I haven't seen this since  
we made it.

Burt and Verona sit attentively on the edge of the bed. The tape begins. It's a homemade sex video. The camera has been left on a bookshelf by their bed, and has captured Burt and Verona engaging in a relatively standard sex session.

We watch Verona and Burt as they watch the tape, and the look that comes over their faces is one of utter melancholy. They miss those days.

A song begins as Verona and Burt both begin to get teary. That song is "The Way We Were." We watch them watch themselves humping, and the lyrics begin.

*Memories  
Like the pages of my mind  
Misty watercolor memories  
Of the way we were...*

INT. AIRPLANE -- EN ROUTE TO MONTREAL

\*

"The Way We Were" continues, wall-to-wall.

Verona is sitting on the plane, alone, peaceful. The seat next to her -- Burt's -- is unoccupied.

Suddenly he appears behind her. Screaming. Though we can't hear him, it's clear he's cursing loudly. Verona's eyes open. Everyone on the plane turns, aghast.

"The Way We Were" continues.

INT. MONTREAL HOUSE -- NIGHT

Verona and Burt are outside a beautiful walk-up in a clean and charming neighborhood of the city.\*\*

VERONA

We went to the same college as these guys. We graduated the same year. How can they be so grown up while we're...

BURT

Immature? Stunted? Confused? American?

They ring the doorbell. The chime is a novelty -- the sound of a mild electric shock, and someone reacting to it:

DOORBELL

Zzzzt. Ahhh!

Burt plays with the doorbell for a minute -- Zzzzt! Aaaaaah! Zzzzzzt! Aaaaaah! A 5-year-old Chinese girl answers the door.

VERONA

Hi. Are your parents home?

YOUNG GIRL

They're in their room.

BURT

Hey Abigail. Abby. Remember me?

She shakes her head. Burt is mildly hurt.

VERONA

Should we come in?

ABBY

Yeah.

Abby leads them into the house and into the TV room, where four kids are splayed out all over a system of couches. The kids are JAMES, 16 and white; on his lap is STUART, a 6-year-old South African boy. Nearby is KATYA, 10, an adoptee from Kazakhstan wearing a huge rainbow afro wig. Together they're all watching *The Sound of Music*.

ABBY

It's almost over.

Verona and Burt are encouraged to sit and watch.

The movie is at the point where the Von Trapp children perform their "So long, farewell," song. Just after the song - - and before any Nazis appear, the movie abruptly ends, and the credits roll. The lights come on and the kids begin to sit and stand up.

BURT

Wait. What--

TOM

Shh.

TOM GARNETT, the father of the children, appears. He's about 37, handsome, unaffected, dressed to go clubbing. He walks through the room, touching all of the children's heads in a very comfortable and very affectionate way. He's a big-hearted, magnanimous guy. Each of the kids loves the attention -- their bond with him is undeniable -- though Stuart, who thinks he's a dinosaur, tries to bite Tom's hand.

Tom now motions Burt out of the room. Verona follows and the three of them huddle in the kitchen. Tom gives hugs to both Burt and Verona.

TOM

Great to see you guys!

(to Verona)

You look amazing, Verona. Perfect.

BURT

So, uh...

Burt gestures back to the TV room.

TOM

We sorta edited it.

BURT  
You cut out the Nazis.

TOM  
Yeah. We kinda figured, What's the point, you know?

BURT  
They haven't caught on?

TOM  
Not yet. Not even the oldest. Or maybe he has, but he plays along. You won't tell them about the Nazis?

BURT  
No.

TOM  
(genuinely relieved)  
Thanks man. I appreciate that. There are always people who want the kids to know everything right away -- sex! war! genocide! But we think the longer we can keep them from knowing about the Nazis, the better. They heard something about Pol Pot a few months ago and I was doing spin control for a week. Hey Munch!

MUNCH, Tom's wife, walks down the stairs and greets everyone. Munch is casual, confident, with a huge and convincing smile. She's also preppy, almost conservative-seeming at first glance.

They all go back into the family room.

TOM  
Kids, this is Verona and Burt. Your mom and I went to college with them.

Munch is staring at Verona, with sudden tears in her eyes.

Abby, the 5-year-old, pulls up a kids' chair so she can stare at Verona's stomach; Munch keeps a strange distance. \*  
\*

Meanwhile, Stuart, the 6-year-old, takes Burt's hand and leads him to a corner of the couch. He positions Burt to sit as if he's lounging on the couch, about to take a nap. Stuart then climbs onto the arm of the couch.

Burt sits on the couch.

STUART  
Lie there.

BURT  
Okay.

Stuart arranges Burt so he's on the couch, resting against one end, as if taking a nap.

STU  
Close your eyes.

BURT  
Okay.

Burt closes his eyes.

BURT  
Gah!

Stuart has jumped from the arm of the couch, onto Burt's stomach, feet first.

BURT  
(to Munch and Tom)  
What the hell was that?

MUNCH  
That's Garfield. You're John. The cartoon. You're napping, he leaps on you. This is the game.

STUART  
Do it again.

Burt complies. Again Stuart jumps on him, which hurts like a mother. This continues as someone is tapping Verona on the shoulder.

TOM  
(seeing over Verona's shoulder)  
You have a visitor. Someone important.

Verona turns around. There is a tall person, very small-faced, wearing a raincoat. It's Abby, sitting on the shoulders of her sister Katya.

ABBY  
(in very serious, KGB  
voice)  
Ma'am.

VERONA  
Yes.

ABBY  
I have a question for you.

VERONA  
Yes.

ABBY  
Do you know the way to San Jose?

TOM  
Okay you guys. We have to go now.  
Your mom and dad are going to tear  
up the town. James'll watch you.

Burt is still on the couch, getting assaulted by Stuart.

BURT  
(with eyes closed)  
How many times does John get woken  
up by Garfield?

Blank stares all around. It could take a while.

STUART  
Close your eyes.

TOM  
We'll get the car and meet you out  
front. James, we'll be back late.  
Lock up and give Katya her  
medicine. And you have my cell.

JAMES  
I do. Have fun.

Burt slips away from Stuart and meets Tom near the hall --  
they're putting on their coats.

BURT  
Who's that? The tall one... You  
would have been about 18...

TOM  
James? He's not mine. He's a kid  
who lives down the street.  
(MORE)

TOM (cont'd)  
He worked on our crew over the  
summer, good with wood, drywall,  
and ...  
(as if it just occurred to  
him)  
I guess he lives with us now. His  
dad's a meth addict. His mom's a  
bassist. Good kid. Wants to be an  
architect.

EXT. GARRETT'S HOUSE

Verona and Burt are walking down the steps, on the way to the  
street. Verona clutches Burt's sleeve.

VERONA  
(rapturously)  
This is the family I want. Every  
part of it. The kids from all over  
the world--

BURT  
So you want to adopt?

VERONA  
Yes!

BURT  
(pointing to her stomach)  
What about this one? Should we  
trade her in? I bet we could get  
two Chinese girls, or three  
Russians--

VERONA  
No. I want her, and them, too. I  
want to live in a big house like  
this, with all the kids, and the  
couches, and carpets, and have  
everyone laying all over each other  
like that. This is a family.

BURT  
Yeah. It works. It's real.

VERONA  
We should move here. Montreal.  
These guys'll be our best friends  
and our daughter will be friends  
with all these kids. And she won't  
have any of the American baggage!  
(MORE)



VERONA (cont'd)  
She won't have to pretend to be  
Canadian when she backpacks through  
Europe... Think of that.

Tom and Munch screech to a halt beside them, driving a small,  
older sports car. Munch is already drinking from a flask. Tom  
is at the wheel and is wearing driving gloves.

TOM  
Let's do this.

INT. TOM'S CAR

Tom is driving very fast. Verona and Burt are in the back  
seat. They're passing the flask around. Music blares. They've  
gone into high party mode with incredible speed.

VERONA  
So you still find time to go out?

TOM  
We're out a lot, I guess. Depends  
on when. You have to find that  
balance. I mean, the kids want you  
there, but not all the time. They  
need air as much as you do.

BURT  
I think we're moving here.

TOM  
To Montreal? We already won the  
competition? Over Hartford? Over  
Phoenix? Hell yeah!

MUNCH  
That's wonderful news.

TOM  
Let's toast. Does anyone know a  
toast?

No one knows a toast.

MUNCH  
Okay. So... Yay for Burt and Verona  
moving here. Probably if they're  
not stupid.

They all cheer.

INT. BAR -- NIGHT

They're at a casual bar, eating dinner while a jazz combo plays in the background. Tom and Burt are turned toward the band. Munch and Verona are having a private talk.

MUNCH

So did it take you guys a long time  
to get pregnant?

VERONA

I think it was the first shot.  
Beginner's luck.

MUNCH

Oh. That's wonderful.

It's clear that Munch doesn't really find that news so wonderful.

MUNCH

Any problems so far?

VERONA

Not so far.  
(now sensing that she  
shouldn't be smug about  
this)  
I've been crying a little more than  
usual.

MUNCH

Me too.

VERONA

You're not *pregnant*, are you? You  
look--

MUNCH

No, no. No.

A couple walks by and sees Munch's drink on the table. They assume Verona is drinking while pregnant, and give her a withering look.

VERONA

I can't stand it.

Tom leans in.

TOM  
We need to eat real food. I need  
bacon.

MUNCH  
(to Verona)  
He needs bacon.

INT. INTERNATIONAL HOUSE OF PANCAKES -- MIDNIGHT

The four of them are in a booth. Tom is feasting on a large stack of pancakes, with an enormous side of bacon. The other three are drinking tea. Burt has a piece of apple pie.

TOM  
(his face full of pig fat)  
Wait. So you're still not married?  
Burt, when are you going to  
propose?

BURT  
Propose? All I do is propose.  
(to Verona)  
Verona, will you marry me?

Verona does a quick shake of her head, as if she's saying no to fresh pepper on her salad.

MUNCH  
(to Verona)  
Is this true? It's you who's behind  
this?

VERONA  
I can't see the point.

MUNCH  
There isn't any, really. Not unless  
you have parents who care one way  
or the other, which you don't.  
Maybe there isn't really a point.  
Is there a point, Tom?

Tom shakes his head.

MUNCH  
It's a nice tradition, though.

BURT  
Your wedding was nice.

MUNCH

It was, wasn't it?

Now Tom has finished his bacon and is ready to expound.

TOM

You know what you need to be happy?

Munch rolls her eyes.

TOM

You need this.

Tom is holding up the maple syrup.

TOM

Here's you two guys.

He takes two sugar cubes from the bowl on the table.

TOM

Or wait.

He replaces one of the sugars with a brown one.

VERONA

Thanks, Tom.

TOM

Okay. So you have you two. And  
let's say here's the baby.

He takes a smaller brown cube and adds it to the plate.

TOM

And here's your house.

He uses toothpicks to enclose the three of them in a very crude house, with a coaster for a roof.

TOM

But what is this? Is that home, is that a family? No, no. Course not. That's just the raw material -- the people, the walls, the furniture, your jobs, maybe a nanny or grandmother. The basics. That's not a family, that's not a home. The thing that binds it all together is this.

Now he holds up the maple syrup.

BURT

Awesome.

He begins to pour it all over the sugar and toothpicks.

TOM

This is love.

BURT

I knew it.

TOM

This is your love, guys, your patience, your consideration, your better selves. Man, you just have no idea how good you can be! But you have to use all of it.

(the syrup is everywhere now, inches of it)

It's not like simple brick and mortar, where you use a little layer of mortar between the bricks. With this, you have to use TONS of it. For every brick, there's a half-ton of mortar.

VERONA

I thought we were doing syrup.

TOM

Mortar, syrup, whatever. It's the same. It's the glue. It's all those good things you have in you -- the love, the wisdom, the generosity, the selflessness, the patience. Patience at 3am, patience after work, patience when you feel like your life is passing you by and you're waiting for your baby to burp -- you have to amp that patience aspect so much it'll make you sick.

Reaction shot from Burt, who is staring at the mess of syrup and sugar and coasters.

TOM

And you have to be willing to make the family out of whatever you have. We've got a Chinese girl, a South African AIDS baby, a Russian orphan.

(MORE)

TOM (cont'd)

We've got a teenager from down the street who wanted some stability -- he likes to eat dinner at 7 every night. So he cooks for us sometimes -- anything to know that at 7, he'll be at a table, with six other faces, a plate of hot food in front of him. But the point is largesse, is breaking the piggy bank of your own love. Man, you have to be so much better than you ever thought!

MUNCH

And once a week Tom and I go out and at least one of us comes home wasted... And it works, I think.

BURT

And the kids never know.

TOM

Once in a while Munch gives me a hickey and I wear a turtleneck the next day. The kids are none the wiser.

INT. STRIP CLUB -- LATER

Burt and Tom are at a table near the stage, both of them drunk. There is a sign near the bar that reads AMATEUR NIGHT.

BURT

There are a lot of couples here.

TOM

It's Montreal. World capital of this kind of shit. Where's Verona?

BURT

Bathroom. Where's Munch?

Tom points to the stage, onto which Munch is crawling. Cyndi Lauper's "Girls Just Want to Have Fun" kicks in and Munch begins dancing.

Burt watches, aghast and fascinated. Munch is at first awkward, beginning a routine, but then grows more comfortable. She knows what she's doing, and has done it before. She takes off her blouse, revealing a slinky tank-top.

BURT

Uh oh. She's using the pole now.  
Don't you want to say something?

TOM

Nah. Let her go.

Munch continues to dance -- a desperate sort of dance, a dance of loss and defiance. The song, when you really listen to it, is a sad one, too.

*Someone takes a beautiful girl  
And hides her away  
From the rest of the world...*

Verona walks into the room at that moment. She sees Munch on the stage and freezes. After a moment, her eyes and Munch's meet; volumes pass between them.

TOM

(to Burt)

She had another miscarriage.

BURT

When?

TOM

Thursday.

BURT

No. Just *this* Thursday-- ?

TOM

Yeah.

Beat.

TOM

Hell, Burt. We've had too many miscarriages. They take so much out of you. This is her fifth. I know she loves all those kids like they were her own blood, but...

They watch Munch. Verona hasn't moved -- she's still standing, frozen. The song is, in this context, powerful, searing, and Munch's dance is one of great melancholy and raw power. At this point, Verona turns to Burt, and they lock eyes. Tom continues talking to Burt, oblivious.

TOM

I wonder if we've been selfish,  
people like us.

(MORE)

TOM (cont'd)  
 We wait until we're thirty-five and  
 then we're surprised that the  
 babies aren't so easy to make  
 anymore...

All the while, Burt and Verona are staring at each other.  
 They know how lucky they are.

TOM  
 ...And every day another million  
 fourteen-year-olds get pregnant  
 without trying... I just wish I  
 could make it work for her. If I  
 could fix it all and just grow a  
 baby for her. It's terrible feeling  
 this helpless, man. You just watch  
 these babies grow and then fade and  
 you don't know if you're supposed  
 to name them or bury them or... I'm  
 sorry.

The song is ending and Munch is stepping down from the stage  
 to many cheers.

Tom helps Munch off the steps and she sits on his lap,  
 holding him fiercely.

From either side of the couple, Verona and Burt stare at each  
 other intensely, feeling very lucky. \*

INT. MONTREAL HOUSE -- NEXT MORNING \*

Verona wakes up, hearing what seems to be a muffled  
 conversation. She looks over and sees that Burt's not there. \*  
 She looks around; the voice she hears is close, and is \*  
 Burt's, but he's not visible. She looks in the bathroom: no \*  
 Burt. She opens the door to the bedroom: no Burt in the \*  
 hallway. In fact, whenever she ventures from the bed, the \*  
 voice grows fainter. \*

Eventually she squats down, realizing that Burt is -- could \*  
 he really be? -- under the bed. She finds him there. He's on \*  
 the phone. Finally he sees her. \*

BURT  
 (to the phone) \*  
 Hold on a sec. Rone's up. \*  
 (to Verona) \*  
 It's Courtney. \*  
 (back into the phone) \*  
 No. I'm telling her now. \*  
 (MORE)



BURT (cont'd)  
(back to Verona)  
We're going to Miami.

\*  
\*

CUT TO:

Verona and Burt are getting dressed in a hurry.

VERONA  
Why didn't he tell you sooner?

BURT  
He's embarrassed. He's my brother.

VERONA  
I don't get it. Grace would have  
told me right away.

BURT  
This is different. It's  
embarrassing if your wife leaves  
you. She just *left*, Verona. They  
never fought, nothing. That's a  
sign that there's some other guy,  
or she was just bored or whatever.  
It's hard enough that he's a  
dentist. He's already sensitive  
about that kind of thing.

VERONA  
About being left.

BURT  
About being boring. Helena was--  
It's not fair to say now, but she  
was always a reach for him. She was--  
- he knew I wasn't that crazy about  
her. I felt like she always had one  
eye open for something better.

VERONA  
Poor Courtney. How old is  
Annabelle?

BURT  
Eight.

VERONA  
Jesus.

BURT  
I know, I know.

They walk downstairs. The entire family is eating waffles.  
Tom and Munch are wearing turtlenecks.

ABBY  
You guys want blueberry or  
chocolate?

CUT TO:

INT. PLANE

This time, the plane ride is more melancholy. They have a lot on their minds. Verona sleeps across Burt's lap. All around them are soldiers -- National Guard of all ages -- on their way to or from Iraq or elsewhere.

INT. TAXI -- DAYTIME -- MIAMI

Burt and Verona ride, still preoccupied by the news of Courtney's wife's departure. The stunning scenery has no effect on them.

EXT. COURTNEY'S OFFICE -- AFTERNOON

They arrive at Burt's brother's office. It's in a small house just outside of Miami's downtown. The skyline is visible in the background. It's a cozy dentist's office with signs out front that welcome kids.

INT. BROTHER'S DENTAL OFFICE

It's cozy inside too, though the waiting room is decorated with posters and memorabilia celebrating the supremacy of the 70s art-rock band YES.

Sitting at the appointment window is not an adult secretary but a girl of eight. She has a pencil behind her ear. This is ANNABELLE.

She hears the bells when the door opens, but doesn't look up.

ANNABELLE  
Are you Mrs. Alvarez?

VERONA  
No. Are you ... eight?

Annabelle looks up and brightens when she sees Verona. Burt emerges from behind Verona and Annabelle's face explodes into a phosphorescent smile.

ANNABELLE

Burp!

BURT

Hey Bellbottom! Come here.

Burt's niece is cute in an awkward sort of way, with dark rings around her eyes. Seeing Burt has her face contorted into a wild sort of grin.

She can't wait -- she crawls through the window and jumps off the edge and into Burt's arms. Burt lifts her over his head and then hugs her for a long moment.

BURT

(whispering into her hair)

Hi sweetie-pie poop-a-loop. I missed you so much.

Annabelle is too deep in a bliss-high to speak. She rests her chin on Burt's neck and chews her gum silently, her tiny finger playing in Burt's hair.

The moment is broken by a loud yelp from inside.

PATIENT

Holy mother of god!

In a few seconds, COURTNEY, about 37, with shaggy hair and glasses, emerges. There's blood on his uniform.

COURTNEY

(wiping his hands)

Hey! I thought you weren't coming till tonight.

BURT

We got an early flight.

COURTNEY

Verona! You look fantastic.

He gives her a warm hug. While they embrace, he sees Burt and almost instantly tears up.

COURTNEY

Hey brother.

BURT

Hey brother.

BURT

Can you leave now?

COURTNEY  
Yeah. Maria?

Maria, a young dental assistant, walks in.

MARIA  
Yes?

COURTNEY  
Can you finish Mr. Hyland?

MARIA  
I don't--

COURTNEY  
Do your best.

EXT--MIAMI STREET--DAY

They leave the office and walk out to the street. Courtney looks up at the sun as if he hasn't seen it in weeks.

COURTNEY  
I'll drive. You hungry? I'm here.

They arrive at his car. It's a new Volvo.

BURT  
Nice.

Courtney can't find his keys.

COURTNEY  
I had em here.

He looks in his backpack. No luck. He checks and rechecks his pockets.

COURTNEY  
Belle, did I give em to you?

ANNABELLE  
No.

Now he's looking under the car.

BURT  
You think they're under the car?

COURTNEY  
Shush! I have a spare down here.  
(fumbling)  
(MORE)

COURTNEY (cont'd)  
(from under the car)  
GODDAMMIT.

He gets up, and slowly composes himself.

COURTNEY  
(adopting a tone somewhere  
between saccharine and  
about-to-explode)  
Bella, are you sure I didn't give  
them to you? Remember that  
sometimes you're wrong. You were  
wrong yesterday when I asked if you  
had already brought in the mail and  
then we didn't see that check that  
Dad needed. Remember that?

Annabelle nods.

COURTNEY  
So do you have them?

ANNABELLE  
I'll go inside.

Courtney is vibrating. His frustration is far out of  
proportion to the problem at hand.

BURT  
C'mere, big brother.

Burt takes him aside and they huddle.

BURT  
Hey. This isn't you. I can't let  
you snap at Bella that way.

COURTNEY  
I know, I know.

BURT  
I don't blame you, Cort. I mean,  
this whole thing...

Burt sees Annabelle as she emerges from the office without  
the keys. Seeing all four of them standing by the corner, a  
cab slows, and Burt hails it.

BURT  
Get in.

Courtney complies and they all pile in.

EXT. WATERFRONT RESTAURANT -- EVENING -- LATER

They exit the restaurant and walk along the South Beach promenade. Verona and Annabelle walk ahead, inexplicably giving military salutes to everyone they pass. They pass a parent with a five-year-old boy on a leash. Annabelle and Verona exchange looks.

Burt and Courtney walk some distance behind.

BURT

Have you heard from her?

COURTNEY

Not a word.

They walk a few steps.

COURTNEY

Isn't that strange? She was never like that, really. She was kind of *normal*, right?

BURT

She was pretty normal.

COURTNEY

You know how many times I've checked our messages? I check them ten times an hour. I got all the lines to bounce to my cellphone. Maybe she was kidnapped.

BURT

But you said she left a note.

COURTNEY

Yeah. But it might have been coerced....

Beat. Courtney comes to his senses.

COURTNEY

I guess not. It's so weird. I've never felt so emasculated. I feel like such a chump. And the rage!

BURT

(remembering the car-key episode)

Yeah.

COURTNEY

I have to invent new ways of dealing with it every night. I destroyed all the lawn furniture.

BURT

What'd you use?

COURTNEY

Nine iron.

BURT

(interested)

Not a wedge...

COURTNEY

I'm so confused, though. Part of me is so angry I don't want to ever see her again. I mean, I have all these daydreams of her in prison, and getting painful tattoos all over her body. And on the other hand I just want her back and things to be the same.

BURT

Belle seems okay.

COURTNEY

Yeah. That's even weirder.

BURT

What'd you tell her?

COURTNEY

At first I said it was a business trip. I made the mistake of telling her it'd be five days. I actually thought that was a conservative estimate. I thought I'd have figured it out by then. Then five days went by and Belle wanted to know where she was. So I said her grandpa died.

Burt looks mildly shocked.

COURTNEY

It took her mind off of her mom for a while.

They walk.

COURTNEY

I really need help. With what to do next. Sorry I called. I just... If she's really gone for good, I need to know what to say. It's wrong to say Helena was murdered, right?

BURT

That might be traumatic.

COURTNEY

Yeah, but there's finality there...

INT. COURTNEY'S HOUSE -- LATER THAT NIGHT

Courtney, Burt and Verona are all sitting on Annabelle's bed, acting out a story together.

COURTNEY

And then the bullfrog said...

Silence. All eyes are on Verona.

VERONA

Wait, was that me? I'm the bullfrog, too?

The answer is yes. Verona looks at the page.

VERONA

(adopting the voice of a bullfrog)

Where is my crown? I need my crown!

COURTNEY

And to that the wolverine said:

BURT

(in a German accent)

"You vill nevah have your crown, stinky bullfrog! I have buried it under zah giant acacia tree! Ha ha ha ha ha!"

Burt's wolverine voice and maniacal laugh are a bit over the top.

COURTNEY

And so the story ends. At least tonight it does. Say goodnight to Uncle Burp and Verona.



Burt and Verona each lean down and give hugs to Annabelle, who seems desperately happy that they're there.

Annabelle settles into bed and then looks at Verona.

ANNABELLE  
Your boobs are soft.

VERONA  
Thanks.

ANNABELLE  
My mom's are harder.

VERONA  
Okay.

EXT. COURTNEY'S PORCH -- LATER THAT NIGHT

Burt and Courtney and Verona are on the porch. Verona is asleep on an Adirondack chair.

Courtney pulls something from his wallet.

COURTNEY  
You see this?

It's Annabelle's new school picture.

BURT  
(examining it)  
That's cute. What's on her upper lip?

COURTNEY  
Carrot juice.

BURT  
Huh.

COURTNEY  
She just took this on Monday.  
Remember when we had to wait weeks for the school pictures? Anyway... So this is the picture. I don't see the carrot juice on her mouth when she leaves the house. I'm never going to see these things. Moms see the carrot juice on their daughters' mouths. Moms know when their daughters aren't dressed right.

(MORE)

COURTNEY (cont'd)

Moms go shopping with them, and make sure their hair doesn't look spazzy. In one fell swoop Helena has changed this girl's life from a normal one, where she can be popular and all that, to the distinct likelihood that she's going to be introverted, a poor dresser -- one of those girls who looks longingly at the girls who have new shoes and the right backpack...

VERONA

(suddenly awake)

At least it was carrot juice. Not whisky.

COURTNEY

It's just the beginning, though. Things devolve from here. I'll be spending every waking moment trying to reconstruct a normal life, but everyone around will have more tools, more money, more ability to form a regular family. And Annabelle will always be the girl without a mom.

INT. COURTNEY'S HOUSE, GUEST BEDROOM -- MUCH LATER

Verona wakes up, notices Burt's not there. She hears his muffled voice, looks out the window and sees him on the back patio, with a phonebook open, pacing while talking on his cellphone.

She comes downstairs and joins him.

VERONA

What are you doing?

BURT

I'm looking for her. I'm calling anyone she knew. Her old company, her friends --

VERONA

At 2 in the morning.

BURT

Right. Element of surprise.

Verona notices the broken patio furniture -- victims of Courtney's frustration.

VERONA  
Stop, please.

Burt sits down. Then stands up. He's so agitated he can't stay still. Finally he gets onto Annabelle's trampoline -- a big rectangular one, 3 feet off the ground.

BURT  
(now jumping)  
What kind of goddamned person would leave her daughter?

VERONA  
(watching him go up and down)  
I don't know. Maybe not such a strong person. Please stop.

BURT  
(not stopping)  
And there's nothing we can do. She's gone. This family can't be fixed. That's it. What if one of *us* freaks out like that?

VERONA  
We won't. And it *can* be fixed and you know it. And if you don't stop jumping I will find a way to hurt you with that shovel.

She points to a large iron shovel. Burt stops jumping.

BURT  
C'mere. Sit down.

He pulls her onto the trampoline. Soon they're both on their knees, facing each other.

BURT  
But really -- what if something happens to one of us and makes us crazy? Like what if I walk by a construction site and something falls and my frontal lobe gets chopped off and my personality is altered and then I'm not a good dad. What if that happens?

Verona doesn't know how much she should humor him.

VERONA

We'll be careful walking near  
construction sites.

BURT

And what about Munch?

VERONA

She'll be careful near construction  
sites, too.

BURT

No really. Don't you just look at  
her and want to give her everything  
she wants? It's insanely unfair  
that she can't--

VERONA

Of course it's unfair. She can't  
conceive, and bad parents still get  
to be parents, and good parents die  
when their daughters are in high  
school. So what.

BURT

I'm sorry, Rone.

VERONA

All we can do is be good for this  
one baby. We don't have control  
over much else.

BURT

Let's get married at least.

VERONA

Never.

Burt's visibly disappointed. He really thought she'd say yes  
this time.

VERONA

But I'll never leave you.

BURT

(dejected)

Yeah.

VERONA

I promise.

BURT

Okay.

(pause)

You promise to never marry me because you don't want to marry me without your parents there -- and I get that -- and you promise to never leave me. But do you promise to never leave this baby we're having? Unless maybe part of your brain gets knocked off by an I-beam?

VERONA

I do. And do you promise to stop talking about your ability to find or not find my vagina after I give birth?

BURT

I do. And do you promise to let me cobble--

VERONA

Carve.

BURT

To carve in my spare time and teach our daughter the lure of the great Mississippi?

VERONA

I do. And do you promise to never try to make art out of my placenta or any other bodily discharge?

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAMPOLINE -- CONTINUOUS -- LATER

They're lying down now, face to face. Burt has found a tarpaulin and pulled it over themselves.

BURT

I do. And do you promise to let our daughter be fat or skinny or any weight at all because we want her to be happy no matter what and eating disorders are too stupid and cliché for our daughter?

VERONA

I do. And do you promise to raise this kid without fear -- without child-leashes and fences and without buying into the insane and almost totally unfounded child-abduction paranoia crippling our nation?

BURT

I do. And do you promise, if I get one of those parasites that creeps up your nose after you go swimming in certain shallow lakes and then slowly eats your brain and you die within a week, that you'll lie and tell our daughter that her father was killed by Russian soldiers in intense hand-to-hand combat so he could save 850 Chechnyan orphans?

They're both fading now. Verona's eyes are closed.

VERONA

Yes, Chechnyan orphans... I do... And do you promise that sometime tonight we'll figure out where the hell we're going to live with this baby, coming very soon into this world?

BURT

I do.

EXT. COURTNEY'S BACK PATIO -- MORNING

Burt and Verona are entwined on the trampoline. They've fallen asleep there, after talking half the night.

Annabelle comes outside, crawls onto the trampoline and kneels next to them. She pokes Verona's breast.

ANNABELLE

They really are softer.

Burt and Verona wake up.

ANNABELLE

You're supposed to come inside like normal people and eat food that normal people eat, inside like normal people.

She goes inside. Burt and Verona follow slowly. They catch themselves, remembering what they decided the night before.

VERONA

I had a dream we made a really  
strange decision.

BURT

I think it's the right one, though.  
Don't you think?

VERONA

I honestly have no idea. All I know  
is that I can barely breathe just  
thinking about it.

ANNABELLE

(at the door, waiting)  
Are you normal people or not?

INT. COURTNEY'S HOUSE -- MORNING

They're all eating breakfast. We catch them mid-conversation. Burt and Verona have figured out where they're going next -- where they're probably going to live -- and have just told Courtney.

BURT

You're welcome to come. There's  
room.

COURTNEY

It sounds good. I think it's the  
right thing for you guys. But no, I  
better stay here for now.  
Annabelle's in the school play.  
She's the lead.

VERONA

(to Annabelle)  
Really? What's the play?

ANNABELLE

(with a mouth full of  
oatmeal, using her spoon  
to make a stabbing  
motion)  
Medea.

COURTNEY

But maybe someday. I don't know. Is  
Grace coming?

VERONA

Ew. You can't go after Grace now. I know you always lusted after her but that would be too weird.

COURTNEY

Hey -- I was just asking. Idle curiosity.

Burt winks at him; they share a lascivious sort of look, both thinking of Grace.

INT. BURT AND VERONA'S CAR -- DAYTIME -- ROLLING HILLS

It's late Spring. Verona is a month or so more pregnant. Burt and Verona are driving through an unfamiliar landscape. Hilly, semi-rural, beautiful, maybe a bit run-down.

BURT

Is it starting to look familiar?

VERONA

(uncertain)

I think so... I want it to... But I also want it to be new, you know? New for us? New enough to feel like we found it? Does that make sense?

BURT

It does.

VERONA

(seeing something)

Oh god, I remember *that*!

They both look at a tree in front of someone's yard, decorated with a dozen kinds of fruit -- apples, oranges, bananas, pineapples. The owner has strung fake fruit from the branches.

VERONA

I have to call Grace.

(she dials)

Yup, we're almost there.

(pause)

No, I'm fine.

(pause)

It is! That's why I called. We just passed it. Pineapples! Yes. No, I didn't see the cantaloupe...

(to Burt)

Wait, that was it.



They've just missed a turn. \*

VERONA \*  
 (to Grace) \*  
 I'll call you after we get there. \*  
 Love you. \*

She hangs up. Sighs. Burt backs up. \*

BURT \*  
 You ready? \*

VERONA \*  
 I am. Are you? \*

BURT \*  
 I am. \*

They head down a narrow winding road canopied by wisteria and kudzu. Burt is clearly in heaven; it's the landscape of his dreams. \*

EXT. BEAUTIFUL SEMI-RURAL CULDESAC

They pull up to a Victorian house, three-storied and grand, though in disrepair.

VERONA  
 Oh! I forgot how beautiful it is.

We realize this is Verona's childhood home, the same house we saw in the photo in Grace and Verona's offices. It's dilapidated but full of character and potential.

They park and get out of the car.

There's a creek running through the property; a bridge over it connects the driveway to the front door. Burt is astounded, taking it all in.

BURT  
 I love your parents so much right now. They were geniuses. This is what I want for our baby.

Tears burst from Verona.

As they walk toward the front door, Verona leans on Burt for strength. She hasn't been back home in 10 years.

At the doorway, Burt opens it and Verona has to steady herself on the frame. She slowly slides down until she's sitting, overwhelmed.

Burt sits with Verona, looking around the house, inside and out.

BURT

This is really us, don't you think?

VERONA

I think it is. I fucking hope so.

We pull back until we're outside the door. The door closes.

THE END.