

THE ORANGES

by

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EXT. STREET - DAY

CLOSE ON: A GREEN CORNER STREET SIGN surrounded by a perfectly blue, late November sky. The sign reads simply -- "ORANGE DRIVE."

VANESSA (V.O.)
Two houses. Both alike.

We move down the middle of Orange Drive...

VANESSA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I guess you could say in dignity,
but that was before what happened,
happened. And what happened,
happened here on Orange Drive. In
West Orange New Jersey.

And stop on a fairly impressive, two-story BLUE COLONIAL HOME.

VANESSA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
House one. 1728 Orange Drive...

INT. 1728 ORANGE DRIVE - DEN - DAY

We PUSH IN on an averagely painted FAMILY PORTRAIT OF FOUR that hangs above the mantel.

VANESSA (V.O.)
In it you have my parents - David
and Paige Schiff. My brother Toby.
And me. FYI - I'm not this jowly.
This was painted 8 years ago.

EXT. ORANGE DRIVE - DAY

We jump back outside, looking at 1728 again.

VANESSA (V.O.)
And direeeeectly across the
street...

The camera SWINGS AROUND to reveal a similarly impressive GREEN COLONIAL HOME.

VANESSA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
House two. 1729 Orange drive.

INT. 1729 ORANGE DRIVE - DEN - DAY

We push in on FAMILY PORTRAIT OF THREE that was obviously painted by the same mediocre artist.

VANESSA (V.O.)

Here you have my parents best friends, Carol and Terry Bass. And their only child, Nina.

We hone in on NINA in the painting.

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

Nina Bass. The whole reason what happened, happened. I'll save her for last.

INT. 1729 - CAROL AND TERRY'S HOUSE - EVENING

Carol, Terry, David, Paige (all early 50's) and Vanessa (22) sit around the dinner table. There's laughter and wine and food.

VANESSA (V.O.)

If you're wondering what I'm doing at this dinner, the answer is -- I live at home, so it was either this or pick up something from Quizno's, but I find lately that Quizno's makes me burpy. Basically, this was a free meal.

The adults continue to have a good time.

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

Quick go around the room...

We slide around the table and briefly pit-stop on each person...

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

Carol's a therapist, which is odd because she's a terrible listener. Terry I don't really get at all. He loves gadgets. My mother's a Christmas-aholic who conducts a semi-professional caroling group. And my father works all the time. Not because he's ambitious, but so he doesn't have to be at home and deal with his failing marriage.

PAIGE

Carol, I love these napkin holders.
David, you should give them as
stocking stuffers at the office
this year.

DAVID

(trying)

Yeah, um, that's a great idea.

VANESSA (V.O.)

It's shocking they made it this
long...

Terry tries to engage Vanessa.

TERRY

Hey, Vanny, I read an interesting
article called "The Ikea
Conspiracy." It said --

VANESSA (V.O.)

Terry's mentioning this article -
that he already told me about last
week - because, yes, I work at
Ikea. And despite your preconceived
notions - I love it.

Vanessa is in fact wearing a blue IKEA polo.

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

And no. I'm not a freak. I don't
wear this all the time. I just got
off work.

CAROL

Terry, we need to call Nina. We
said 9:30.

TERRY

I'm on it.

Terry grabs a SPEAKER PHONE BOX from a cabinet and places on
the table.

TERRY (CONT'D)

David, you'll love this. Just
hooked it up. My cell phone
communicates wirelessly with this
speaker box. It works from anywhere
within a 600 foot radius.

DAVID

What about your home phone?

TERRY

Haven't used the home phone in over
two years.

(to Carol)

Carol, we should really get that
thing disconnected. It's a
dinosaur.

Terry plugs in the speaker.

TERRY (CONT'D)

Watch this. I don't even need to
take my cell phone out of my
pocket.

Terry leans over and talks INTO HIS PANTS with authority.

TERRY (CONT'D)

Dial Nina!

A soothing COMPUTERIZED VOICE is heard through the speaker
phone.

SPEAKER PHONE

"Dialing cell phone Nina."

VANESSA (V.O.)

Okay. Fine. If I have to explain
her, I will. Nina Bass. Where do I
begin?

EXT. OUTDOOR DANCE PARTY - NIGHT

We see NINA BASS (24), very beautiful, dancing at an intense
outdoor techno RAVE.

VANESSA (V.O.)

We were best friends from ages zero
to fifteen before she started
hanging out with Liz Gaines and the
fun bunch.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL PARKING LOT - FLASHBACK - DAY

15-year-old Nina smokes cigarettes with the fast crowd.
Vanessa watches from afar as she walks to class.

VANESSA (V.O.)

She also kissed and later gave a
hand job to Peter Fortunato even
though she knew I liked him...

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - FLASHBACK - DAY

15-year-old Nina and Peter Fortunato amateurishly make out against the lockers.

VANESSA (V.O.)

Anyway, she dropped out of college five years ago which was the last time she's been seen around here. According to Carol, she's lived in Costa Rica...

INT. DANCE CLUB - NIGHT

Nina dances at a Costa Rican dance club.

VANESSA (V.O.)

Ibiza...

INT. IBIZA DANCE CLUB - NIGHT

Nina dances with all sorts of Eurotrash.

VANESSA (V.O.)

Some ex-pat hippie beach in Bali called Kuta...

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

Nina dances at an all out full moon party.

VANESSA (V.O.)

And in a tent somewhere outside of Kyoto, Japan.

INT. DANCE CLUB - NIGHT

Nina dances amongst throngs of Japanese.

VANESSA (V.O.)

Okay, fine, I'm sure she did things besides dance with musky Eurotrash in these places. Terry mentioned something about building houses for the poor somewhere, blah blah blah, but I bet I'm not far off.

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO - NIGHT

We're outside a slightly run-down, artsy looking building. On the fourth floor - a PARTY rages.

VANESSA (V.O.)

Anyway, last summer she moved to San Francisco with this photographer "dude" she met named Ethan. Currently, they live in the Mission District eating burritos, selling ecstacy and pretending to be bohemians...

INT. NINA'S APARTMENT - SAN FRANCISCO - SAME

Inside the party, we follow a homemade, uneven BIRTHDAY CAKE as it's carried towards Nina. She looks drunk and beautiful in the glow of the candles.

VANESSA (V.O.)

Whatever. She doesn't fool me.

The unkempt revelers sing drunkenly.

PARTYGOERS

HAPPY BIRTHDAY DEAR NINAAAAA...

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TOOO YOOUUU...

The cake is carried by Nina's boyfriend, ETHAN (27). He's got the best dreadlocks a white boy can muster, several well placed tatoos and almost always carries an expensive CAMERA around his neck.

Nina beams, looking at Ethan with true adoration in her eyes.

NINA

(mouthing)

I love you.

Ethan breaks off a corner of the cake and smushes it in her mouth - then kisses her. Nina laughs through the kiss as icing covers their cheeks.

INT. CAROL AND TERRY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Back in the dining room. Where we left off. The speaker phone continues to ring.

CAROL

Why isn't she picking up?

TERRY
Cell service is notoriously spotty
in San Francisco.

VANESSA
Maybe your pants are blocking the
signal.

David laughs at Vanessa's joke.

TERRY
There's nothing wrong with the
signal. It's ringing.

Suddenly, a FEMALE VOICE answers. The sound of Nina's party
rages in the background.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)
(on speaker)
Hello?

TERRY/CAROL
(into the phone)
HAPPY BIRTHDAY, SWEETIE!!!

DAVID/PAIGE
Hey, Nina. It's David and Paige.
We're here too!

A beat, then the female voice begins to cackle...

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)
Oh shit...
(stoned laughing)
Hey Ethan! I think Nina's fucking
parents are on the phone...

INT. NINA'S APARTMENT - THE MISSION - MOMENTS LATER

Nina has a finger in her ear, trying to hear the phone call
as she weaves through the party.

NINA
(yelling into the phone)
...I didn't know I was having a
party! It was a surprise!

Nina mimes to her friend - give me a a drag off your
cigarette.

CAROL (O.S.)
Honey, we can't hear you!

NINA

Hold on!

Nina takes a good sized pull and heads onto...

THE FIRE ESCAPE - It's much quieter out there.

NINA (CONT'D)

Hey. Ethan threw me a surprise party. He's a really great guy.

INTERCUT: San Francisco/ New Jersey.

TERRY

We can't wait to meet him. I love those pictures you sent.

CAROL

Yes. I think more white people should have dreadlocks.

David jumps in to ease the tension.

DAVID

Hey, Nina, have you been out by Seal Rock yet? It's really beautiful there.

NINA

What? It's kinda hard to hear, am I on speaker?

DAVID

Seal Ro -- forget it, I'm just trying to keep things moving. Vanessa's here too.

VANESSA

It's true. I'm here.

Terry adjusts the speaker phone.

CAROL

Nina, honey, what day are you flying in for Thanksgiving?

NINA

Oh, Mom, I'm sorry, I don't think I can make it.

CAROL

You promised that when you were back in the country...

NINA

I know, but Ethan's photography
show is up next week and it's a big
deal.

CAROL

Your family is a big deal.

TERRY

We haven't seen you in two years,
Nina, since we visited -

CAROL

You haven't been home in five -

NINA

I know, but... - Can you take me
off speaker please?

TERRY

I can't go off speaker without
disconnecting the call first,
honey. It's a complex system.

Drunk PARTYERS come near the window of the fire escape. Nina
shuts the window.

NINA

Fine, look, I know you're not going
to like this, but ---- Ethan and I
are getting married! He proposed
two weeks ago. On his birthday.

A long, tense pause.

NINA (CONT'D)

It was really sweet. He took me to
Baker beach which overlooks the
Golden Gate Bridge. The sun was
setting. He got on one knee and
everything.

More silence.

VANESSA

He proposed on his birthday?

CAROL

I don't understand.

NINA

I'm in love with him.

TERRY

That's terrific sweetheart, but
you're only 24 years old.

CAROL

Nobody gets married at 24 anymore.

NINA

People get married when they're 17.

CAROL

Not white girls from New Jersey.

NINA

Oh my God, you're unbelievable.

CAROL

You've made some very questionable,
very hurtful decisions in your
life, and you don't need to add to
the list by marrying some loser kid
with zero future.

NINA

Well, if you think he's such a
loser, how about this -- don't come
to the wedding!!!

And with that, Nina hangs up. A loud dial-tone blasts out of Terry's speaker.

CAROL

Jesus, turn that thing down!

INT. NINA'S KITCHEN - LATER

The party winds down. A sea of empty beer bottles and half-eaten potato chips. Nina barely listens as some dumpy new-agey guy named CIRCLE waxes poetic, fueled by beer and mushrooms...

CIRCLE

It doesn't matter that your
mother's a colossal pain in the
asshole, because you have Ethan.
And love from a lover lessens the
need for love from the parent. You
and Ethan totally get each other,
that's beautiful. I'd kill to have
that with a woman.

After this romantic soliloquy, Circle turns to his left and VOMITS into the sink.

NINA
Circle! Uch.

Nina looks exhausted.

NINA (CONT'D)
That's it!

She walks into the LIVING ROOM.

NINA (CONT'D)
Party's over. 4:30. Time to go
home!

As the stragglers begin to slowly move towards the door, she scans the room.

NINA (CONT'D)
Ethan?
(then)
Amy, have you seen Ethan?

Nina heads down the hall and checks THE BEDROOM - it's empty, but she notices a light under the BATHROOM door.

NINA (CONT'D)
(approaching)
Ethan?

She knocks.

NINA (CONT'D)
Ethan, are you in there?

ETHAN (O.S.)
Hold on a sec.

NINA
C'mon, I want to get everyone out
of here. Circle just barfed in the
kitchen.

We hear rustling, then the door opens. A HIPPYISH BLONDE races past Nina - her shirt partially unbuttoned.

The bathroom door slowly swings wide. Ethan sits on the toilet with his head buried in his hands.

NINA (CONT'D)
Oh my God. You are such an asshole!

Nina looks like she just got punched in the face. She fills with anger and is about to unleash a fury from the depth of her soul, but instead... she breaks down and begins to cry.

Ethan reaches for his CAMERA which sits on the sink and snaps a photo of Nina's distraught face.

ETHAN
Wow. Raw emotion.

INT. SAN FRANCISCO AIRPORT - MORNING

Nina stares out the window, watching the baggage handlers load her plane.

ANNOUNCEMENT
Rows 25 and higher. Boarding rows
25 and higher for Newark Liberty
International Airport.

EXT. WEST ORANGE, NJ - SIX HOURS LATER

An airport TAXI turns onto a quiet suburban street. Nina gazes out the back seat window. Her face looks empty. "How the fuck am I back here?" The taxi makes another left.

EXT. DAVID AND PAIGE'S BACKYARD - SAME

Paige and Carol lay perfectly constructed lamb kabobs over the coals. It's November, the pool is covered, but they're barbecuing.

PAIGE
It's not like any of this is new.
It's fine. It'll be fine.

CAROL
What did the couples counselor say?

PAIGE
We haven't been going. David and I
know where we stand with each
other. That's how we've lasted this
long. Somehow it works.
(wiping her forehead)
Why is it 73 degrees in November?

IN THE POOLHOUSE

Beers in hand, David and Terry take in David's newly renovated backyard hideaway. There's wall to wall carpeting, a stereo, a plasma TV, and a beaten up red leather sofa.

TERRY

Great "man cave." I gotta build
myself one of these.

DAVID

(teasing)

It's rugged, independent, and the
carpeting really pulls it together.

Terry notices a bed PILLOW and a DOWN COMFORTER balled up on
the sofa.

TERRY

What's up? You sleeping out here?

DAVID

(lying)

Uh, no, I was reading last night
and I passed out.

Terry looks at David with a raised eyebrow.

EXT. ACROSS ORANGE DRIVE - TERRY AND CAROL'S HOUSE - SAME

Bzzzzzzz. Head bowed, sunglasses on, Nina rings the bell to
her parents' house. Her old house.

No answer. She knocks on the door. No answer.

INT. VANESSA'S BEDROOM - SAME

Vanessa watches Nina from her bedroom window.

VANESSA

Well, look who's home.

EXT. TERRY AND CAROL'S HOUSE - SAME

Nina stands there, not knowing what to do. She notices her
parents' cars in the driveway. Then it hits her -- she spins
to see David and Carol's house across the street. (We catch a
quick glimpse of Vanessa ducking out of the window frame.)

EXT. DAVID AND PAIGE'S BACKYARD - SAME

David, Paige, Terry and Carol talk around the grill. The
doorbell rings. David calls out.

DAVID

Vanessa! Can you get that?!

But he gets no response. He closes the grill and heads inside.

EXT. DAVID AND CAROL'S HOUSE - DAY

Nina rings David and Carol's bell. The door opens.

DAVID

Nina? Wow, hey. It's been so long,
you look great.

David hugs her. These two have always had a good connection.

DAVID (CONT'D)

I thought you weren't coming back
for Thanksgiving?

NINA

Yeah, well...

Over Nina's shoulder, David spots her LUGGAGE sitting on the lawn across the street. Three large suitcases, two overstuffed duffel bags... a lot of stuff.

DAVID

What's going on?

NINA

Are my parents here? I'm locked out.

DAVID

They're in the back. They're making me barbecue.

(seeing she's emotional)

Everything okay?

Then we hear Carol's voice as she comes from the kitchen...

CAROL

David, Paige wants to know where you put--

She sees Nina and stops cold in her tracks.

NINA

Hi, Mom. I'm back for Thanksgiving.

Carol is stunned to see her daughter. Nina musters a smile. Her tail between her legs.

INT. NINA'S OLD ROOM - SHORT TIME LATER

Nina looks around her old bedroom which now has two chairs, an end table, lamps, and three bookshelves. Carol explains.

CAROL

It's a second den. If your father's in the den, and I want some privacy I come here. You made it clear you weren't coming back.

NINA

No, no, it's fine, it's just...it's weird to see.

CAROL

There's an inflatable mattress you can put in the corner, or there's a pull out couch downstairs.

NINA

This is fine. It's only for a few days.

CAROL

Why? Where are you going to now?

NINA

I don't know. Someplace. I haven't figured it out yet.

CAROL

It's okay to actually spend time with your parents, Nina. Your poor father -

NINA

Can you hold off on the guilt trips for a little while, please. It's been a rough twenty four hours. I promised I'd be home for Thanksgiving and here I am. My life conveniently fell apart for you.

CAROL

Well, don't blame me because that boy broke up with you.

Nina just throws up her hands - "you're impossible."

NINA
I'm gonna go take a shower.

As she grabs her bag.

INT. DAVID AND PAIGE'S KITCHEN - SAME

David brings in bottles and silverware from the BBQ. Paige does the dishes. David comes up behind her and puts his arms around her waist.

DAVID
I was thinking we should go to that place that Steve and Megan spoke about. With the pool and the in-room spas...

He kisses her shoulder.

DAVID (CONT'D)
We could go this weekend.

PAIGE
Stop, I'm doing the dishes.

DAVID
It'll be fun.

He kisses her neck....

PAIGE
David. Not now.

DAVID
C'mon, the counselor said we needed to make love.

PAIGE
Well, that's one of the reasons we stopped seeing the counselor.

Paige continues with the dishes.

INT. CAROL AND TERRY'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Carol is by the bathroom door as Nina comes out wrapped in a towel.

CAROL
I apologize for what I said about Ethan.

NINA
Uch, were you waiting for me?

Nina heads towards her SECOND DEN BEDROOM.

CAROL
I'm not your enemy, Nina. When
you're a parent you'll understand
what it feels like when your child
hates you.
(beat)
If you're wondering, that's your
cue to say I don't hate you Mom...

Nina softens a little.

NINA
I don't hate you.

Nina lets her guard down. Carol gently moves Nina's hair away
from her face and tucks it behind her ear.

CAROL
I really get furious thinking that
someone's hurt you.

NINA
Just don't say I told you so.

CAROL
Look, don't think I'm crazy, this
is just a thought, but... Toby will
be home for Thanksgiving.

Nina pulls away.

NINA
Oh my god...

CAROL
He's gotten very attractive, that's
all I'm saying. Wait 'til you see
him. He's working for the Federal
Trade Commission.

NINA
So you date him.

CAROL
It's not like you two don't have
history.

NINA
We kissed! Once! Ten years ago!

CAROL

He's always liked you. Paige says --

NINA

Mom, I just had my heart trampled on. Can you try to hold off a few days before pimping me out?

Carol digs in her heels.

CAROL

Fine. But I am going to tell you this for your own good. You need to move on with your life. You need to have a real relationship. With a real man. Someone with a job and a life. It's time you grew up and stopped running away.

NINA

You're right. I'm being selfish. The best thing I can do right now is focus all my energy -- and fulfill your insane suburban fantasy where I marry your best friend's son!!

(then)

You call the catering hall and I'll go lube my vagina.

And on that Nina goes into her room and closes the door.

INT. TERRY AND CAROL'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - LATER

CLOSE ON: TOBY sitting at the Thanksgiving dinner table. He hasn't just "gotten very attractive" as Carol said. He's, well... fairly gorgeous. He used to be scrawny, but he's filled out and come into his own in his 27th year.

PAIGE

China? Toby, that's great.

TOBY

There's twelve of us in the delegation. I'm really just assisting my boss, but the goal is to tie our trade agreements to stricter environmental regulations. Things are a mess over there.

CLOSE ON: Nina who sits directly across from him, somewhat in shock. He was always cute but this is ridiculous. Toby's warm and confident without a stitch of pretension.

DAVID

You're gonna have a great
experience.

PAIGE

Honey, what about Christmas?

TOBY

Don't worry, Mom. We fly back on
the 24th.

NINA

(off her game)

That sounds really great, Toby.

Terry struggles to open a bottle with a OVERLY COMPLEX, BUT
IMPRESSIVE WINE CORKER.

TERRY

You know, ultimate frisbee has
gotten huge in China. The Beijing
club team came in second at Worlds.

TOBY

Well, if I see a game, I'll tell
them I grew up across the street
from the guy who invented it.

TERRY

It wasn't just me. It was me, Jared
Kass and Joel Silver. Joel gets
most of the attention being a big
movie producer and all.

POP! Terry finally gets the bottle open.

CAROL

Finally.

TERRY

Tough cork. Okay, who's drinking?

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Nina enters with a stack of dirty plates. She carries them
with an experienced waitresses' skill. She finds David trying
to scoop vanilla ice cream onto pieces of apple pie.

DAVID

(flicking the spoon)

C'mon...

The ice cream sticks to the spoon.

NINA

Try some water. You dip the spoon
in warm water before scooping and
the ice cream slides off.

Nina goes to the sink, fills a glass with water and brings it to David.

DAVID

Where'd you learn that trick?

NINA

Ice cream school.
(she smirks)
I've worked at a lot of restaurants
in the last five years.

David dips the spoon in water. He takes a scoop and the ice cream slides right off.

DAVID

Nice.

Nina scoops her finger into the ice cream carton and pops it in her mouth.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Your Mom told me what happened with
that Ethan guy.

NINA

Yeah, he turned out to be pretty
much of a dick.

DAVID

You doing okay?

Nina looks at David. She appreciates being asked.

NINA

Yeah. I'm fine. Thanks.

Nina picks up one of the pie ala modes, hops up on the counter and digs in.

NINA (CONT'D)

So how's the liquor advertising
business? Finding new ways to push
booze onto minors?

DAVID

(chuckling)

Actually, I just got a promotion.

(MORE)

DAVID (CONT'D)
Senior vice president of creative
accounts.

NINA
Congratulations. This something you
wanted?

DAVID
Absolutely not. They just gave it
to me. But it doubles my expense
account - and that's where all the
fun is. How's the pie?

NINA
The crust is salty. Where did you
get it?

DAVID
I don't know. Paige picked it up.

NINA
Yeah? How's that whole thing going
for ya?

DAVID
Paige? Um, It's good. Everything's
good.

NINA
Sounds like paradise.

DAVID
It's fine.

When suddenly Paige comes into the kitchen.

PAIGE
David, where's the dessert?
(sees Nina with the plate
in her hand)
You couldn't wait like everyone
else?

NINA
(points to David)
He made me eat it.

PAIGE
Well, why don't we bring them out
so everyone can enjoy some?

Irritated, Paige picks up two plates of pie and heads back
into the dining room. Nina smiles mischievously at David.

DAVID

Thanks. That'll be fun to deal with later.

As Nina slides off the counter and heads into dining room.

INT. DINING ROOM - LATER

Dinner is winding down. The pie has been eaten, there are lots of empty wine bottles around.

PAIGE

I still need Christmas lists from everyone by tonight. I'm heading out very early tomorrow morning.

VANESSA

(rolling her eyes)
Is it Black Friday already?

NINA

What's Black Friday?

TOBY

It's the biggest shopping day of the year. American retailers do roughly 7 percent of their entire annual sales total tomorrow - in one day. People line up at 4 in the morning.

PAIGE

Last year I got there at 3 AM and was number 210 on line.

NINA

Why would anyone want to shop on the day everyone else is shopping?

Paige glares at Nina.

TERRY

I hear there are fist-fights and people throwing their kids.

PAIGE

That's media hype. It's a very communal, Christmasy experience.

DAVID

I think we should all make each other presents like on Little House On The Prairie.

NINA

It'll probably be pretty crazy at
Ikea tomorrow, huh Van?

VANESSA

(pure attitude)

Yeah, I guess it will be -- Neen.

NINA

Okaaaay.

Terry fills everyone's glasses from one of the remaining bottles.

TERRY

I know it's late but I think we
should have a toast. Who needs
some?

VANESSA

Right over here.

TERRY

This is a 2003 Zinfandel from a
vineyard in Nova Scotia...

TOBY

(whispering over to Nina)

Man, if I only knew what wine
spectator gave it?

TERRY

...Wine spectator gave it a 93.

Nina laughs under her breath, a flirty vibe between her and Toby. Terry raises his glass.

TERRY (CONT'D)

On this Thanksgiving, I'm thankful
to have everyone home, healthy and
together for the holidays. Most
people have good friends, but we're
lucky enough to have friends who
have become our family. To the
Schiff and the Bass clans. I didn't
know two families could be this
close.

They clink glasses, some more enthusiastically than others.

CAROL

I don't know. I think we could
still be a little closer.

Carol stares straight at Nina and Toby. Nina can't believe her mother's audacity.

INT. DAVID AND PAIGE'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - LATE NIGHT

Toby and Nina are a bit stoned, and more than a bit drunk. They laugh as Toby stirs up a fresh batch of Vodka and Vitamin Water.

TOBY

Your mother is completely out of control, man. I thought she was going to applaud when she saw us leave together.

The stereo hums softly in the background. The red digital clock on the table reads 1:30.

NINA

The woman's a total lunatic. First three years I was away she sent me all these letters from our cat.

TOBY

What?!

NINA

"Dear Nina. Your parents are so worried about you. You should listen to them." Then, when Marius died she sent one more that said, "please re-read my old letters."

TOBY

(laughing)

That's great. I kind of like that.

NINA

Now you understand why I got the hell out of here.

Toby sits across from Nina.

TOBY

I hear ya', but, uh, I'm glad you're back.

NINA

Shut up.

Toby gulps down some more vodka. A lounge-y Zero 7 song starts to play on the stereo.

NINA (CONT'D)
Dance with me.

TOBY
Totally.

Nina stands and turns up the stereo. Toby tries to make it to his feet as well, but...

TOBY (CONT'D)
Oh shit.

Feeling queasy, he flops back onto the couch.

TOBY (CONT'D)
I need to get some water.

NINA
(teasing)
Sit down lightweight. I'll get it.

Nina stands and heads for the stairs.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

In half-light, Nina enters the kitchen. She finds David making himself a PEANUT BUTTER AND JELLY SANDWICH.

NINA
What are you doing up?

DAVID
Hey. Just watching a little TV in the man-cave.

NINA
"Man-cave?" Is that like your asshole?

David cracks up.

DAVID
Nice. No. It's the poolhouse. I got a worldwide satellite package your father recommended. There's a basketball league in Korea that gets completely crazy.

Nina smiles.

NINA
Toby needs some water. Where are the glasses?

DAVID
I'll get 'em.

David goes into one of the cabinets, pulls out two glasses, and fills them from the fridge.

NINA
It's not good to eat peanut butter late at night, you know? It'll make you fat.

DAVID
I'm not fat.

NINA
You will be if you eat this at 2 in the morning. It's physiological.

DAVID
Where'd you pick this factoid up?

NINA
I told you, I worked at a lot of restaurants.

DAVID
You worked at restaurants that served peanut butter?

NINA
(chuckling)
No. Do what you want, I'm just saying you wouldn't look good fat.

DAVID
I'll take that as a compliment.

He hands her the two glasses of water.

DAVID (CONT'D)
So, what's your story? You gonna stick around here?

NINA
No. I'm broke, so I don't know where I'll go. Supporting Ethan's photography career was expensive.

DAVID
How'd you afford the last minute airplane fare?

NINA
5814-6329-1763-3487. Androgenous
name on the card - Terry Bass.

David smiles. He really appreciates her. Nina looks at David intently. Then -

NINA (CONT'D)
I should get back downstairs.

She heads for the stairs to the basement.

DAVID
You're going to make your mother
very happy, you know that?

NINA
That's what I live for.

They share a look and a smile as she heads down the stairs...

INT. BASEMENT - SAME

Holding the waters, Nina arrives at the bottom of the stairs. Toby is sprawled out on the sofa, fast asleep.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Back upstairs, Nina puts the water glasses in the sink when through the window, she sees the TV flickering in the MAN-CAVE.

EXT. YARD - CONTINUOUS

Nina emerges and ambles through the back yard.

INT. MAN-CAVE - CONTINUOUS

David watches TV with his feet up on the table. There's a knock at the door. Nina pokes her head inside.

NINA
Hey.

DAVID
What happened to Toby?

NINA
I cut him up into pieces and put
him in the fridge for later.
(MORE)

NINA (CONT'D)
(smirking)
Your son's kind of a wuss.

David smiles.

DAVID
You wanna sit? The second half's
about to start.

She flops down next to him on the couch.

NINA
Who's playing?

DAVID
I have no idea.

They watch Korean basketball. It's nice. He looks over at her. She watches Basketball. She looks pretty and at ease in the blueish light. He turns back to the TV. She looks over at him. They both begin to feel self-conscious as sexual tension creeps into the room. The leather sofa squeaks as they shift their weight.

Suddenly, they HEAR the sound of a CAR ENGINE STARTING. It comes from the driveway.

NINA
What's that?

DAVID
My wife's going shopping. It's
Black Friday.....

David looks over at Nina. His forlorn expression says, "this is my life." Nina doesn't look away. The room is electrically charged. It almost seems that they could kiss...

And they do. It's sexy and intense... but very, very brief. David quickly pulls his head away.

DAVID (CONT'D)
Oh, fuck.

INT. CAROL AND TERRY'S KITCHEN - THE NEXT DAY

Still in her pajamas, a hungover Nina, sits at the table eating a bowl of cereal. Carol enters from the garage with a few bags of groceries.

CAROL
There she is. One PM, very
impressive.

NINA
(not looking up)
Go away.

Carol starts to unload her bags.

CAROL
So, did you have fun last night?

NINA
I'm sure you'd love a full report,
but just so you know - that's not
happening.

CAROL
You know there are mothers and
daughters who talk about these
things. Like friends.

Nina looks at her mother like she's insane. Carol rolls her eyes but perks up when she spots something outside the window.

CAROL (CONT'D)
Well, maybe Toby will be better
company than you.

Nina looks out the window, Toby is crossing the street with something in his hand. Carol waves to him. Toby waves back.

NINA
Try to control yourself.

Toby enters through the garage and emerges into the kitchen.

TOBY
Hey, Nina. Morning, Carol.

CAROL
Good Morning, Tobias.

Toby makes his way over to Nina.

TOBY
You forgot your sweater.

NINA
Oh, thanks.

CAROL
Do you want some breakfast, honey?

TOBY
No, thanks. I already ate.

CAROL

Well, I'll give you two some
privacy.

Carol exits the kitchen. A beat.

NINA

I can hear you hovering out there.

CAROL (O.S.)

Fine.

We hear Carol go up the stairs. Toby sits next to Nina.

NINA

You're looking a little crispy
today.

TOBY

My head's killing me. You can
really put em' away. Did I pass
out?

NINA

Pretty much.

TOBY

Sorry about that.

(smiling, embarrassed)

So look, I had a really great time
last night, before passing out, so
I was thinking... I'm supposed to
have dinner with my parents
tonight, and being that I'm leaving
in two days, I thought you might
want to join us... so we could hang
out... so I could see you more...

Nina smiles. He's being very cute.

NINA

Dinner with you and your parents?

(she thinks for a moment)

Sure. Sounds great.

INT. TARGET - DAY

Paige pushes her overflowing shopping cart as she continues
her full day Black Friday assault. People are everywhere.
It's like an 1800's land grab. Dock strikes are more
civilized.

EXT. DAVID AND PAIGE'S HOUSE - DAY

David stands on a ladder stringing CHRISTMAS LIGHTS to the front of the house.

Toby and Vanessa come from the garage carrying a large, heavy PLASTIC REINDEER.

VANESSA

Didn't we used to wait until December to put this stuff up?

DAVID

If your mother had her way, she'd start at Halloween.

Toby drops the reindeer in place next to the seven others.

TOBY

Man, these things are heavy. Hey Dad, I invited Nina to dinner tonight. I'm leaving soon, so I figured...

VANESSA

There is no way you can be interested in her. That's pathetic.

TOBY

You're still mad because she dumped you to hang out with Liz Gaines.

VANESSA

That among others.

TOBY

Let it go, Vanessa, people grow up. And so should you. Move out of the house already.

VANESSA

I'm saving money!

TOBY

You work at Ikea!

VANESSA

I'm interested in design! It's a great place to work!

TOBY

It's crap.

VANESSA

Than give back the Jelken lamp I
got you for your birthday.

TOBY

I would but it fell apart.

DAVID

Alright, enough!

TOBY

You're just jealous of her. You
always have been.

(turning to David)

Anyway, I invited her for dinner
tonight. I hope that's cool?

David's momentarily thrown. This is trouble.

DAVID

Yeah, yeah, sure. No problem.

INT. DAVID AND PAIGE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Post dinner. Paige, David, Toby and Nina play Rummy-Cube.
Each player with only a few tiles left on rack.

PAIGE

Let's go Toby.

TOBY

(concentrating)

Hold...

DAVID

It's called the fast moving tile
game.

TOBY

Hold.....

(he gives up)

Okay go.

Paige moves quickly.

PAIGE

The five and the thirteen, and I'm
out. Ha!

DAVID, NINA, TOBY

That's bullshit... I was going out
next... If you didn't rush me...

PAIGE

Sorry everyone. Who's helping me do
the dishes?

TOBY

(perhaps to impress Nina)
I will, Mom

Toby's cell phone rings.

TOBY (CONT'D)

Just give me a second. It's my
boss.

Toby takes the call. David looks at Nina. He doesn't exactly
want to be alone with her.

DAVID

Um, uh, I thought I'd run to the
video store, in case we want to
watch something after.

PAIGE

That sounds fun.

NINA

I'll go with you. Keep you company.
While Toby does the dishes...

David stares at her. Nina smiles....

INT. DAVID'S CAR - NIGHT

David and Nina drive in silence. It's tense.

NINA

So what are you thinking? Comedy?
Maybe something foreign?

David just stares at the road.

NINA (CONT'D)

Hello? Anybody in there?

DAVID

Just stop it.

NINA

Jeez, relax.
(cupping her hands like a
bullhorn)

NOTHING HAPPENED!! WE KISSED FOR
HALF A SECOND! IT'S NO BIG DEAL!

DAVID

Oh, it's a big deal! For me it's a
very big deal! You're 24. You're
my...

NINA AND DAVID

(she still bullhorns)
...BEST FRIEND'S DAUGHTER.

DAVID

Quit that! You're not being funny.

NINA

It was nothing, David. And you
stopped it. You're absolved. Okay?

David makes a left. More tense silence.

NINA (CONT'D)

Now what?

DAVID

What do you mean, now what?

NINA

I don't know. That was a weird
silence, I just thought I'd fill
it.

David parks in front of the VIDEO STORE, turns off the car,
and faces Nina.

DAVID

Look, I think you're great and
there's obviously a mutual...
something between us, but what
happened last night doesn't happen
again.

NINA

Fine.

DAVID

I know how you like to instigate
trouble --

NINA

I don't instigate trouble --

DAVID

Then why did you come to dinner?

NINA

Toby asked me. And I didn't instigate last night. If anything you leaned towards me.

DAVID

I did not.

NINA

Yes you did.

DAVID

He said, she said.

The mood immediately lightens. Nina cracks up.

NINA

"He said, she said"? Where did that come from?

DAVID

(laughing as well)

I don't know. It just came out. I'm losing my mind...

They stare at each. The connection is strong between them. Now it gets VERY TENSE.

NINA

I'm not instigating...

David looks at her. Then they lean and start kissing.

EXT. DAVID AND PAIGE'S HOUSE - NEXT AFTERNOON

The lawn christmas display is nearing completion. Near the REINDEER and SNOWMEN, Paige installs a row of electric CANDY CANES.

She looks up when David roughly drops a giant PLASTIC SANTA into his SLEIGH.

PAIGE

Careful.

(surveying the lawn)

What happened to the snowman's pipe?

Just then, David gets the feeling that someone's watching him. He turns and sees Nina smiling at him from her bedroom across the street.

He smiles quickly and sneaks a small wave to her.

INT. TERRY AND CAROL'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - THAT NIGHT

Carol sets the table. Through the window, Terry stares at David and Paige's lawn -- the Christmas spectacular in now LIT UP.

TERRY

(a bit jealous)

I'm thinking of getting one of those giant electric snow globes. You ever see those? The really big ones?

(lost in thought)

Fantastic...

Through the open door, they hear Nina coming down the stairs.

CAROL

(calling out)

We're in here.

No response. Carol steps into THE FOYER.

CAROL (CONT'D)

Honey, we're about to sit down.

NINA

I'm going out.

Nina's wearing a sexy skirt and has put on makeup.

CAROL

Well, well. Don't you look nice?

NINA

(putting on her coat)

Thanks.

CAROL

So, is Toby taking you to dinner?

NINA

Mom, please give me some room.

CAROL

Okay, okay, fine. Have fun.

Nina heads out the front door. Carol steps back to THE KITCHEN.

TERRY

Is she eating with us?

CAROL

She's having dinner with Toby! She
was all dressed up.

TERRY

Toby?

Terry looks up, confused.

CAROL

What?

TERRY

Toby left this afternoon for D.C.
Some Congressman needed to meet
with the delegation before they
left for China...

Carol is confused herself.

CAROL

This afternoon?

She heads to the window and pulls back the curtain.

CAROL'S POV: Nina sits in Terry's Prius. She's on her cell phone, engaged in what can only be described as a secretive, yet intense phone call. She backs out of the driveway with the phone cradled to her ear.

Between Nina being all dressed up, the Toby lie, this odd looking phone call, and her inherent neurosis and paranoia, Carol gets a strange feeling...

CAROL (CONT'D)

Terry, I'm going out.

EXT. STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Nina weaves the Prius through two lanes of holiday traffic.

Three cars back in the same lane we see Carol in her SAAB.

INT. CAROL'S CAR - SAME

Carol sits low in her driver's seat to avoid being spotted. This despite the fact that she's three cars back and there's no way she can be spotted.

Up ahead, Nina hits her blinker and makes a hard right. Carol follows.

EXT. ROUTE 116 - CONTINUOUS

Nina's car races toward town with Carol a hundred yards back. Nina turns left, Carol follows her around the bend only to discover...

INT. CAROL'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

CAROL IS SUDDENLY BEHIND NINA WITHOUT ANY CARS TO ACT AS A BUFFER. She slows down to keep a safe distance---when---Shit! A red light. Nina slows down and STOPS!

Carol's heart jumps! What to do?! She SLAMS ON THE BREAKS. RRRRRGGGGHHH! She's just sitting there in the middle of the road.

INT. NINA'S CAR - SAME

Nina HEARS the brakes squeal. She turns to look out the back window. Suddenly the HEADLIGHTS on Carol's car GO OUT.

INT. CAROL'S CAR - SAME

Carol is sunk low in her seat, sweating.

HOONNNNKKK!! Carol jumps and looks out the back. A HUGE SUV is inches behind her!

CAROL

Shit.

The SUV HONNNNKS again! Carol slowly inches forward when luckily, the light turns GREEN.

Nina's car accelerates. Carol exhales. She turns her lights back on and picks up speed.

INT. NINA'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Nina drives, oblivious to her mother's presence. Something BEEPS. She grabs her cellphone off the passenger seat and sees she's gotten a TEXT.

NINA

(quickly reading text)

Left this afternoon. Emergency.

Sorry couldn't say goodbye. Looking forward to Christmas! Toby.

(she's screwed)

Fuck!

INT. CAROL'S CAR - SAME

Carol has just started to breathe again, when -- HER CELLPHONE RINGS.

She checks the display. It reads: NINA CELL. Carol looks ahead to Nina's car and goes white. Unsure what to do, Carol panics and hits the green button.

CAROL
Hello...?

INTERCUT between the two cars.

NINA
Listen, I lied to you before.
I'm not going out with Toby. He
actually left for Washington this
afternoon.

CAROL
Oh?

NINA
Yeah, I'm meeting Meredith Lavitt.
Remember her? I didn't tell you
because I know you don't like her.

Carol lets out a sigh of incredible relief.

CAROL
Oh, okay. Thank you for telling me.
(softening, then...)
You don't have to lie to me, you
know?

NINA
I know...

A moment of ease between them.

CAROL
So, where are you going?

Nina's car approaches the PATTERSON GALLERIA MALL.

NINA
We're going to the mall. We'll
probably see a movie.

But she DRIVES RIGHT PAST IT. Now Carol passes the mall. Her heart sinks again.

NINA (CONT'D)

It starts late so I'll see you in
the morning.

(then, vulnerable...)

Mom, thanks for being cool, letting
me come back and stay and
everything. I've been feeling
really tossed around lately, so...
you know... thanks... for being
there.

Carol would normally love to hear these words, but right now
she looks very, very confused.

NINA (CONT'D)

Okay, well, I'll see you tomorrow.

Nina turns left into a MOTEL parking lot. Carol's eyes go
wide.

CAROL

Okay, bye.

Carol closes her phone as she pulls to the curb just outside
the motel...

EXT. STREET - SAME

Carol gets out of her car and ducks behind a low HEDGE.
Through the bushes, she watches Nina head into the MOTEL
OFFICE.

Carol heads into the parking lot, ducking from car to car
while keeping an eye on the office door.

She makes her way to a VAN and peers around the back of it.
In the distance, she sees Nina exit the office, key in hand.

Carol watches her walk along the hotel portico. As soon as
the coast is clear, she follows.

EXT. SIDE OF THE MOTEL - CONTINUOUS

Nina puts her key in ROOM 112 and enters.

Carol makes her way to the window. Peers in.

CAROL'S POV: Nina readies the room. She's alone.

A hundred scenarios race through Carol's head. She backs away
from the window. Turns around. And BUMPS SMACK INTO DAVID. He
has an ice bucket in his hand.

CAROL

Oh my God!

DAVID

Carol!

CAROL

What are you? What are you...?

DAVID

Nothing, just, Paige and I had a fight, I didn't want to sleep at home...

Nina comes out of the room "112."

NINA

Mom!!

CAROL

Oh my God!

DAVID

Carol, it's not what you think!

Carol notices the ice bucket has a "112" stenciled on it.

CAROL

Not what I think?!! I can read an

ice bucket, David!!

(she gags)

I'm gonna throw up.

Lost, David holds out the ice bucket towards her.

NINA

(freaking)

Mom!!

CAROL

I'm serious. I'm gonna vomit.

Carol stumbles into some nearby bushes...

INT. DAVID AND PAIGE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Paige is furious. David has his head in his hands.

PAIGE

Just tell me how long it's been going on?!!

DAVID

She's been away for five years!

PAIGE

HOW LONG?!!!!

DAVID

We kissed. That's it. It was a
mistake.

PAIGE

Then what the hell were you doing
in a God damn motel room!!!

AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS: Vanessa listens in.

PAIGE (CONT'D)

She's a child, David!

DAVID

She's not a child. She's 24. It's
not like she's 17.

PAIGE

Congratulations! You didn't
statutory rape her! I'm gonna throw
up.

DAVID

Paige--

PAIGE

On you!

DAVID

Look, I'm sorry. I am. The whole
thing was wrong. But let's be
honest. Things haven't been good
with us for a long time.

PAIGE

Don't do that. Don't apologize and
then blame me in the same sentence.
Your pathetic mid-life crisis isn't
my fault!

DAVID

Admit it, you're not happy either.

PAIGE

It's not about being happy, David!
The measuring stick of every
successful fucking relationship
doesn't have to be whether you're
happy or not!

DAVID

Then what is it?!!

PAIGE

How about trust?! And commitment!

DAVID

We'll, I'm not exactly sure that's
enough.

David hangs his head. This is a mess.

INT. TERRY AND CAROL'S LIVING ROOM - SAME

Completely livid, Carol paces back and forth. Nina and Terry
sit on either side of the sofa. They watch Carol pace. Nobody
talks.

NINA

Jesus Christ! Say something
already!!

CAROL

I'll say something when I want! You
don't get to decide when I say
something! I decide!

NINA

Then decide already.

TERRY

I'll decide! You have caused some
serious trouble in the past young
lady, but this time--

Nina rolls her eyes.

TERRY (CONT'D)

Don't roll your eyes at me!

NINA

I'm sorry, but it doesn't work when
you try to be the stern father, it
looks like you're pretending...

CAROL

You're father is not pretending! We are furious! Do you have any idea how serious this is?

NINA

Yes! I do! But it happened! David and I like each other, it's not like we planned this. It just happened!!

CAROL

You LIKE each other?

NINA

Yes. I like him. We've always been close.

TERRY

Oh my God!

CAROL`

I know what this is. It's some sick revenge because you think we weren't supportive enough of you and Ethan, so now you're going to teach us a lesson--

NINA

Believe it or not this isn't about you, Mom! But now that you mention it, you're the one who told me I should find myself a man and not a boy!

From across the street, they hear the sound of a car starting. Carol crosses to the window.

CAROL

Oh, God. Paige is leaving.
(turning to Nina)
I bet you didn't think about her for a second??

NINA

I wasn't thinking about any of you.
As I said - IT JUST HAPPENED!!

Nina stands and heads for the door.

CAROL

Where are you going?

NINA
Across the street.

CAROL
No, you're not! Nina. Nina get back
here! Terry do something!

But it's too late. Nina opens the front door and exits.

EXT. ORANGE DRIVE - CONTINUOUS

Looking confused but determined, Nina marches across the street. The door to David's house is still open from Paige's fiery exit.

INT. DAVID AND PAIGE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Nina quietly steps inside. She closes the door behind her and finds David sitting on the sofa, his head in his hands.

NINA
(quiet; unsure)
Hi.

DAVID
(looking up)
Hey.

They stare at each other. The enormity of what's just happened beginning to sink in.

NINA
I'm sorry.

DAVID
Don't be.

Nina crosses to the sofa and sits next to David. Neither one moves.

DAVID (CONT'D)
What did you tell your mother?

NINA
I told her I liked you.

VANESSA (O.S.)
Now, I'm gonna barf!!

Nina and David turn. Vanessa's up on the landing. David stands.

DAVID
Vanessa...

VANESSA
Don't. Don't even try to explain
this.
(to Nina)
And I thought the Peter Fortunato
hand job was bad.

NINA
Oh, would you fuck off!

VANESSA
I'll fuck off when you blow me,
slut.

Just then - a KNOCK at the door.

DAVID
Great. What's next?

David crosses and opens the door. Terry stands on the porch.

David stops cold when he sees his best friend. Terry's
obviously extremely upset. David's heart sinks...

DAVID (CONT'D)
Oh man, Terry, I am so sorry --

But Terry isn't there to talk. He rears back and throws a
HAYMAKER at David's chin.

But being that Terry hasn't thrown a punch in thirty five
years, he loses his balance as he and David tumble to the
floor in a heap.

TERRY
I think I sprained my ankle.

CUT TO:

INT/EXT. VANESSA'S CAR - DAY

Vanessa drives with intensity as THE CLASH blares from her
stereo.

She swings a wide right turn into the IKEA PARKING LOT. She
drives a piece of shit.

VANESSA (V.O.)

When I told my Ikea co-workers what had gone down, my friend Maya, who actually got me the job here, said...

INT. IKEA - SHOWROOM - DAY

Very CLOSE on co-worker MAYA (23). Purple streak in her hair.

MAYA

(kind of excited)

No way!! That's frackin crazy!!

VANESSA (V.O.)

While Henry Chart, who works in kitchenware, and is from Thailand, said this...

Very CLOSE on co-worker, HENRY CHART (34). He has a cherubic face.

HENRY CHART

"Old cow eating young grass."

Pull back - Vanessa, Maya and Henry Chart un-box plates in kitchenware.

HENRY CHART (CONT'D)

That's what we call it in Thailand when an older man goes with a much younger woman.

MAYA

Man, you Asian people have the best expressions.

HENRY CHART

Don't worry, Vanessa. It usually doesn't last.

Vanessa takes this in.

VANESSA (V.O.)

I guess Henry might be right because in our case the "old cow" seemed to instantly regret eating the "young grass". Riddled with guilt, he puttered around the house...

INT. DAVID AND CAROL'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

David's in his bathrobe, making a tuna sandwich.

VANESSA (V.O.)
Melted down at work ...

INT. DAVID'S OFFICE - DAY

A very stressed David screams into the phone.

DAVID
They ordered those specs three
weeks ago, Barry! I promised
delivery!!

On his wall, David sees a FRAMED PRINT AD he once created of
a HOT YOUNG GIRL CARESSING A BOTTLE of BICARDI.

VANESSA (V.O.)
And refused to take her calls.

INT. DAVID BEDROOM - NIGHT

David lies in bed alone. His cellphone rings. The display
reads: "NINA." He closes the phone.

VANESSA (V.O.)
Meanwhile, the "young grass" was
staying at her friend Meredith
Lavitt's apartment - who annoyed
her.

INT. MEREDITH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Nina and Meredith sit on the sofa. They watch *THE GRADUATE* on
TV.

MEREDITH
This is totally you guys! What
freakin' movie is this?

Nina glares at Meredith.

VANESSA (V.O.)
My Mom checked into the only Bed
and Breakfast in town...

INT. THE ORANGE GROVE INN - DAY

Paige is being shown one of the rooms by the elderly OWNER.

OLD MAN

There's no other guests at the moment, so pick any one of the ten rooms you want...

VANESSA (V.O.)

...But being that she was paying with my father's credit card, she decided to live large.

PAIGE

I'll take all of them.

INT. CAROL'S CAR - DAY

Carol drives.

VANESSA (V.O.)

Being a good friend, Carol visited her every day...

EXT. BED AND BREAKFAST - DAY

Carol has parked. She reaches into the backseat of her car.

VANESSA (V.O.)

And in an attempt to relieve her own guilt over the trouble her daughter was causing, brought my Mom some pretty useless presents.

She removes a GIANT TIN FILLED WITH THREE KINDS OF GOURMET POPCORN.

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

As for Terry, my father kept trying to call him, but he wasn't quite ready to talk yet....

INT. TERRY AND CAROL'S HOUSE - DEN - DAY

Terry reads with his ANKLE wrapped in ice and elevated on pillows. The PHONE RINGS. Terry whips out a pair of HI-TECH BINOCULARS and looks across the street to see David making the phone call. Terry does not pick up.

VANESSA (V.O.)
Of course, my poor brother had no
idea what was going on...

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - CHINA - DAY

Toby sits in a hotel writing a POSTCARD. The first words are,
Dear Nina...

VANESSA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
And me, I was stuck between
watching my mother unleash 20 years
of pent up frustration...

INT. BOWLING ALLEY - DAY

Paige whips a ball down the lane with shocking ferocity.
Vanessa watches.

VANESSA
...And listening to the "old cow"
babble on about love, marriage,
regret...

INT. DAVID'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - EVENING

An ALMOST IN TEARS David bares his soul to a bored Vanessa.

VANESSA (V.O.)
...and how family and friends are
the most important thing in life...

INT. VANESSA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Vanessa takes a huge hit off her BONG!

VANESSA (O.S.)
Luckily, I had some very sweet new
grass.

INT. IKEA - DAY

Vanessa is being harassed by her co-workers Maya and Henry
Chart as she sets up a Heimdle bedroom display.

MAYA
You need to get out of that house
immediately. Come crash on my
couch. We'll have fun.

HENRY CHART

She's right. You're 22 years old. I had a full medical practice by the time I was your age. It's unhealthy to live at home.

VANESSA

I know, but I have my plan.

MAYA

Your live at home - save money - corrode your soul - plan.

VANESSA

I'm going to move to the city and do interior design work. I've already made some serious contacts.

HENRY CHART

Where? Here?

Henry opens his arms to indicate "we're in fucking Ikea."

VANESSA

I laid out most of these display rooms and you both know that they're good.

(then...)

My father says the whole thing is over and hopefully she'll just move back to San Francisco - or die. I'm good with either one.

MAYA

You have got a serious stagnation problem my friend. How much money have you even saved?

VANESSA

I don't know. Like --- fifteen hundred dollars.

HENRY CHART

Fifteen hundred? You've been working here 2 years.

VANESSA

I know what I'm doing. Just leave me alone.

INT. STARBUCKS - DAY

David and Nina sit at a back corner table. David drinks a regular coffee and Nina a mocha-latte frappuccino.

NINA

Does this mean you're done avoiding me?

DAVID

I wasn't avoiding you, I just needed time to think. I wanted to meet so we could clear the air. I'm sure we'll see each other around, so, I wanted to make sure everything is okay between us.

NINA

You sound like you're breaking up with me except we only kissed once -

DAVID

I'm not -

NINA

I guess technically twice but the first one was nothing.

DAVID

This isn't about kissing, this is... whatever was going on between us. Whatever we were feeling.

NINA

Okay. Look, I get that it was wrong so if this is what you want to do, then fine.

DAVID

Okay. We're good then?

NINA

Old friends.

They sit there. David drinks his coffee. Nina her frappuccino concoction.

David looks at the other customers suddenly self-conscious about being seen with her.

NINA (CONT'D)

So what do ya want to do? Do you want to go or do you want to sit here and be tense?

DAVID

We can do whatever you want? We can go or I'm fine to sit here.

NINA

Can we just stop this! Nothing happened! It's like I'm sitting across from you but I don't even recognize you!

DAVID

Stop saying nothing happened!! My wife left me! I betrayed everyone I care about.

David's mini-outburst causes a couple of customers look over at their table. David sweats.

NINA

Look, I'll go along with whatever you want here David. Seriously.

DAVID

Thank you.

NINA

Let me ask you one question though, Are you happy in your marriage?

DAVID

That's none of your business.

NINA

Then let me ask it differently. Is your marriage to Paige making you happy in your life?

DAVID

Don't be so smart, okay. It's not always about being happy. Paige and I are complicated. You can't understand looking at it from the outside. Only the people inside can understand.

NINA

So that's a no?

DAVID

Did your relationship with Ethan make you happy in your life?

NINA

Ethan was an idiot.

DAVID

But you were ready to marry him?

NINA

Fine. Last question. If you were able to lean across this table and kiss me and there would be no repercussions, and no one would say it was wrong, and there were no rules, would you do it?

DAVID

I'm not answering that, it's a stupid question!

NINA

Would you do it?!

DAVID

If there were no rules?! Sure!

NINA

Fine. There are no rules.

Nina just stares at David. There's an intense stillness between them. And for a split second - David is overcome with a very free feeling that there are no rules. That her saying it somehow made it real - and then it's gone.

DAVID

That's good. No rules. That would be...great, I wish we could all just act on our feelings, but... the truth is, they pass. Attraction passes. Passion passes. It doesn't last.

NINA

Is that what happened with you and Paige?

David's stares at her intensely.

NINA (CONT'D)

I know us being together is wrong, David. I just don't get how choosing to be unhappy is right.
(then...) Or we can just sit here and wait for the passion to pass.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL - LATER

David and Nina throw each other about the room, lips locked tight, unable to contain themselves as we HEAR an extremely professional version of "*TIS THE SEASON TO BE JOLLY*" in eight-part harmony.

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - SAME

Our yuletide soundtrack is provided by PAIGE and her CHRISTMAS CAROLING GROUP.

CAROLERS

*Don we now our gay apparel, Fa, la,
la, la, la, la, la, la, la,..*

We CUT BACK AND FORTH between Nina and David intensifying, as clothes start to come off, and the CAROLERS singing their hearts out under Paige's direction.

We end on the Carolers as the song flourishes to an ebullient conclusion. They look at each extremely pleased. And they should be. They're excellent.

PAIGE

Very good, everyone. Let's remember to watch the pace.

Paige hands out a SCHEDULE she's typed up.

PAIGE (CONT'D)

A few things. There's three weeks to Christmas...

Everyone applauds.

PAIGE (CONT'D)

I know there's been requests to start the Christmas Eve walk and sing earlier...

CHRISTMAS CAROLER DIANE

If we get going by 5, we'll have time to finish cooking Christmas dinner.

CHRISTMAS CAROLER STANLEY

My parents are coming. I need to start at 4.

PAIGE

That's great Stanley but it's not dark out at 4, and if it's not dark out the candles are useless, right?

(getting upset)

We always sing at 6, people! Every year! We can't just change things because we feel like it! Some things need to stay the same!

The group looks at Paige with "what's up your ass' glowers.

PAIGE (CONT'D)

Now if this little bitch session is over, let's move on to the jingle bells medley.

EXT. DAVID'S HOUSE - VERY EARLY IN THE MORNING

With the sun just coming up, David throws an overnight bag into the backseat of his car. He keeps looking at both houses to make sure no one is watching him. The early hour of this departure is no accident.

INT. DAVID'S HOUSE - 10 AM

A yawning Vanessa comes into the kitchen in her pajamas. She goes to refrigerator for some juice, but sees a NOTE magnetized to the door.

INT. IKEA - CAFETERIA - DAY

Maya and Henry Chart and Vanessa sit in a booth eating meatballs. Henry reads David's note.

HENRY CHART

So? He's saying he needs to go away for a day or two to think. That actually seems healthy.

VANESSA

He's just never done anything like that before.

MAYA

He's never fucked up his entire existence before.

VANESSA

I don't know, something's wrong, I can feel it.

INT. DAVID'S CAR - DAY

David drives as he and Nina drink morning coffees. The mood is light and playful.

NINA

Come on. Tell me where we're going?

DAVID

I'm serious. I have no idea. I'm just driving. We have... 37 hours until I have to be back at work. We can go anywhere we want.

Nina thinks, then comes up with a great idea.

INT. TROPICANA CASINO - ATLANTIC CITY - LATER

Nina and David stand at the entrance to the CASINO. The lights, the noise, the bells, the people -- all in its seedy glow of fabulous fun glory...

NINA

Atlantic City. Where New Jersey comes to hide.

David smiles, appreciating her sentiment. They're both happy, feeling far, far away from home...

INT. TROPICANA - NIGHT

Nina and David at the end of a CRAPS TABLE. David makes bets like a pro.

DAVID

Pushing ten on the 4 and then 9, five dollars hard eight and give me a dollar yo.

DEALER

Dollar yo. Roller out.

NINA

How do you know all this?

DAVID

Used to come here all the time.

INT/EXT. ATLANTIC CITY - MONTAGE

On the boardwalk, in the casino, around the hotel, on the beach -- Nina and David are having a great time.

It's all so free and easy. And we get the feeling that no matter where they were they'd find a way to have fun. That despite the age difference, they just work. And none of it is forced or phoney.

INT. FANCY CASINO STEAK HOUSE - NIGHT

David and Nina have a candlelit dinner. It's actually a romantic setting. Tuxedoed waiters. Live piano music. A few tables over, Nina sees a HEAVY SET WOMAN clad in a garish skin tight purple getup.

NINA

Don't be obvious, look to your right and check out that woman's outfit.

David sneaks a peak to his right.

DAVID

Oh my God.

NINA

It's like a skin tight purple scuba suit.

DAVID

It's like those compression socks that keep your blood flowing, she just went for the full body version.

They're laughing, when they hear...

MAN'S VOICE

David!

David co-worker, GIDEON ALLEN and his wife, ANNE, approach their table.

GIDEON

Hey, how's it going, buddy? You remember Anne.

DAVID

Sure, sure. Hi.

ANNE

Hi, David.

David, somewhat shell shocked, get his wits, and introduces Nina...

DAVID

And this is Nina. Nina this is
Gideon Allen, who works with me,
and... Anne. Nina and I are old
friends.

Gideon and Anne look at Nina with a "what the hell is going on" glower. She could be a hooker for all they know.

GIDEON

Nice to meet you, Nina.

David quickly tries to change the subject.

DAVID

So you guys come here a lot?

GIDEON

Few of times a year. Anne's
actually a fantastic poker player.

Plastic smiles. It's all very awkward.

DAVID

Okay...

GIDEON

Yeah, well, great running into you.
Nice meeting you, Nina.

NINA

Yeah, you too, Gideon. Anne.

Gideon and Anne bid a hasty retreat.

NINA (CONT'D)

Well, that was horrible.

DAVID

Yeah, pretty much.
(then...)

But you know something? I don't
really care.

He smiles. Then, so does she.

NINA

Good. Cause I don't really care
either.

INT. DAVID'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - TWO MORNINGS LATER

Back at home. A buoyant David shaves while humming a Dylan song. Vanessa walks past in her pajamas. She stops and watches him. What's he so cheery about? Something's not right.

INT. DAVID'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MINUTES LATER

David comes down dressed for work. Vanessa eats a bowl of cereal. David tries to hide his happiness.

DAVID

Hey. There she is.

VANESSA

Back from your "need to think" vision quest?

DAVID

Yeah. I took a ride out to the beach. Really cleared my head.

David's awkward. Vanessa senses something's up.

VANESSA

Where did you stay?

DAVID

At a bed and breakfast. It's nice out there in the winter. The air...

What's up is that David's a terrible liar.

DAVID (CONT'D)

I'm gonna make some coffee, you want some?

VANESSA

I don't drink coffee.

He gets the coffee grinds. He feels like she's seeing right through him.

DAVID

So how's work going?

VANESSA

Fine.

(pressing the issue,
testing if he's lying)

I spoke to Mom.

(MORE)

VANESSA (CONT'D)

I told her how sorry you were and that everything was over. I don't think she's gonna forgive you, but if you want to try to call her...

DAVID

Okay. Maybe I will...

Off David's guilty expression.

INT. HOTEL - NIGHT

David paces as Nina sits in a chair with her feet over the side.

DAVID

It was horrible. I know she knew I was lying. I can't lie to her.

NINA

Are you sure she knew? I never really thought of Vanessa as perceptive.

DAVID

What is with you two?! Why do you hate each other?!

NINA

Relax. I'm kidding. And I don't hate her, she hates me.

David paces and sweats.

DAVID

We can't just sneak around. This is bad enough. I can't live my life as a lie. What about your parents?

NINA

I obviously don't have issues lying to them.

David lowers his forehead and just looks at her.

NINA (CONT'D)

What do you want to do? It's not like we can have them over for dinner and just tell them.

Off David, lost in it all...

INT. DAVID'S HOUSE - EVENING

David and Nina sit across from a very irate Carol, Terry and Vanessa.

CAROL

WHAT???

DAVID

We didn't want to lie to you!

CAROL

Oh, thank you. Thank you both for showing such good judgement.

VANESSA

I'm going upstairs.

DAVID

No you're not. Sit down.

NINA

Let her go, she's never going to understand.

VANESSA

Understand that you need to go from man to man to validate your pathetic existence?

NINA

What would you know about it? You've never even had a boyfriend.

VANESSA

At least I don't go around hooking up with other people's fathers! Hey Terry, wanna make out?

DAVID

Stop it! Both of you!

TERRY

You said it was over, David? You promised!

DAVID

I know. And it was. Look, we get that this is wrong --

CAROL

Ya think?

DAVID

But we're happy. I'm happy. You guys know things with Paige and I have been bad for a really long time. And this feels... it feels great. And yes, it's selfish and yes it's unacceptable, but if it makes me happy do I have to stop? I don't want to stop. I don't want to.

He looks at Nina. He's emotional. A strong moment between them. Everyone catches it. Their almost surprised by how genuine it seems.

CAROL

I see.

(a pause, then, to Nina,
still terse)

And what do you plan on doing?
Staying in New Jersey?

NINA

I'll get a job in a restaurant.

DAVID

I'm going to introduce her to Shelly. I'm sure he could use the help.

TERRY

Shelly's restaurant is pretty serious.

NINA

I've worked at serious restaurants.

The mood is very tense. No one sure how this is going to play out.

CAROL

Well, if you want us to take you seriously, let me ask you a few questions. As the concerned mother I believe I'm allowed to grill the young couple.

Carol shows a moment of lightness. Where is she going with this??

DAVID

(hesitant)

Okay.....

CAROL

Would you say that the connection
you're feeling is genuine? That
what you have is real?

DAVID

Yes.

NINA

Absolutely.

CAROL

Now, we're all aware that there's a
significant age difference here?

NINA

Yes, but if what we're feeling is
genuine, then age doesn't matter.

CAROL

I guess what I'm asking is...
Nina... honey.... are you okay with
sucking David's old balls?

Vanessa cracks up, Terry practically does a spit take.

DAVID

Carol!

CAROL

It's a legitimate question. Your
balls are much older than her.

Nina jumps up.

NINA

You are such an asshole! Why don't
you get out of here!

As the confrontation escalates, something catches Vanessa's
eye OUT THE WINDOW. There's a CAR idling OUTSIDE.

Vanessa sees her MOTHER in the front seat looking in. They
make eye contact and Paige quickly SPEEDS OFF.

Back inside, the ARGUMENT continues. Vanessa turns back
around to see Nina storming out of the room followed by David
- as Carol yells after them.

We stay on Vanessa...

VANESSA (V.O.)
And it was right about then, that
shit started to really get
weird....

EXT. DAVID'S HOUSE - DAY

Through BINOCULARS: we peer through the BAY WINDOW into David's LIVING ROOM. He and Nina are laughing as they play an old game of OPERATION on the floor.

VANESSA (V.O.)
My father started calling in sick
to work a lot, which could have
been great, but actually resulted
in me spending even more time in my
room...

INT. UPSTAIRS BEDROOM - SAME

Vanessa stands blowing pot smoke out her window when she suddenly gets a disturbed look on her face.

HER POV: Terry stands at his living room window with the BINOCULARS pressed against his face, watching David and Nina.

VANESSA (V.O.)
Gadgets Mcgee was unnerved to see
Nina with my Dad...

Terry lowers the binoculars.

VANESSA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
...but was also struck by how
alive his friend seemed.

EXT. EISENHOWER PARK - ULTIMATE FRISBEE FIELD - DAY

Terry approaches a dozen or so TWENTY-YEAR-OLDS throwing frisbees.

VANESSA (V.O.)
Inspired to re-capture his own lost
youth or something, he went on-line
and found a pick-up ultimate
frisbee game in Paramus.

These guys are good. Forehands, backhands, and air-bounces.

TERRY
You guys got room for one more?

EXT. ULTIMATE FRISBEE FIELD - 1/2 HOUR LATER

Terry aggressively guards a much younger player.

VANESSA (V.O.)
His intense play both impressed and
scared the other players...

TERRY
No daylight! No daylight!

VANESSA (V.O.)
And after the game, he regaled them
with the story of how he was one of
the inventors of the game.

EXT. ULTIMATE FRISBEE FIELD - 2 HOURS LATER

The other players stand around Terry as he holds court.

TERRY
It was me, Jared Kass, and Joel
Silver...

ULTIMATE PLAYER
Joel Silver the movie producer?

VANESSA (V.O.)
Meanwhile, across town, Carol kept
trying to visit my mother, but was
mysteriously unable to get in touch
with her...

INT. BED AND BREAKFAST - DAY

Carol argues with the OLD PROPRIETOR through the closed door.

OLD MAN
I'll tell her you stopped by again
if you like.

PAN OVER to reveal Paige sitting at a table away from the
window.

VANESSA (V.O.)
This was mainly by design, but also
because my mother was spending a
lot of time at the post office...

INT. POST OFFICE - DAY

Paige mails some boxes.

VANESSA (V.O.)
Where, in a move I radically
applauded, she sent Christmas gifts
to Nina and my father...

INT. DAVID'S HOUSE - NIGHT

David opens his box...

VANESSA (V.O.)
Hair dye and Viagra for him...

Nina opens hers...

VANESSA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Hannah Montana tickets and clothing
from Forever 21 for her...

They do not look amused.

VANESSA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
She also photo-shopped a Christmas
card and sent it to all their
friends....

EXT. ANOTHER MCMANSION - DAY

A random SUBURBAN FRIEND opens her mail.

CLOSE ON THE CARD: Madonna and child. David's face pasted
over the Madonna. Nina's over the child.

VANESSA (V.O.)
And even though Carol was being
rebuffed by Paige...

INT. TERRY AND CAROL'S HOUSE - FOYER - DAY

Carol enters through the front door and heads for the
kitchen.

CAROL
Terry?

VANESSA (V.O.)
...She was getting the exact
opposite reaction at home.

IN THE KITCHEN - she finds Terry with his shirt off, feeling sweaty and muscular after a game of frisbee. He takes a hearty slug from his drinking glass and holds it out to Carol.

TERRY
(sexually suggestive)
Smoothie?

CAROL
Oh good God.

VANESSA (V.O.)
And as for me, I turned to my
friends for support, but was met
with a surprising amount of
resistance.

INT. IKEA - DAY

Vanessa argues in a home office display with Maya and Henry Chart.

HENRY CHART
Maybe they are really in love?

VANESSA
You said it doesn't last. You said
the grasses only want the cows for
their money.

HENRY CHART
Usually, that is the case. But not
always.

MAYA
I can see why she might like him,
your Dad's really cute.

VANESSA
Don't be gross. Just because you
haven't been laid in six months...

HENRY CHART
Perhaps your problem lies more with
Nina than your father.

VANESSA
Oh really Henry, why's that?

HENRY CHART
Because your brother was right when
he said you were jealous.
(MORE)

HENRY CHART (CONT'D)
Because she has lived and travelled
many places and you still live at
home.

This hits a nerve.

VANESSA
Ha. You my friend have breathed in
way too much cheap pine wax. She's
a selfish skank, And he's just
whatever -- he's selfish too.

MAYA
Yeah, but if he's happy with her,
and you make him stop, then you're
the one who's being selfish.

Henry looks at Maya.

HENRY CHART
That is maybe the most intelligent
thing you've ever said.

An annoyed MALE CUSTOMER appears.

ANNOYED MALE CUSTOMER
Scuse me? Does anyone actually work
here? I can use some help?

VANESSA
I got it. Anything to get away from
you two.
(heading off with guy)
How can I help you, sir?

Vanessa leaves with the customer. Maya looks at Henry.

MAYA
She really needs to get out of that
house.

INT. WHOLE FOODS SUPERMARKET - THAT NIGHT

Vanessa, hot salad bar dinner in hand, heads towards the
register, when she sees....

Her FATHER perusing the myriad of FRESH FLOWERS. Vanessa
quickly ducks behind a tall display of Flax Seed Chips.

She watches as an employee approaches David and he
enthusiastically points to the ROSES, TULIPS AND IRISES. The
employee smiles picking up on David's ebullience.

Vanessa slits her eyes, conflicted, as Henry Chart's words echo in her ears. She never seen her father this happy.

INT. MALL - DAY

Paige carries two heavy bags full of Christmas presents. She's tired. She puts one bag down and stretches out her cramping hand.

Against the wall, she notices a makeshift booth with a sign that reads "THE TRUE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS."

Beneath that is a poster for BARNYARD INTERNATIONAL adorned with photos of HUNGRY CHILDREN around the world.

Curiosity peaked, she approaches the late 40's, bearded man who works the booth. We'll call him ROGER.

PAIGE
What's Barnyard International?

Roger sees that one the bags she holds is from BABY GAP.

ROGER
Well, you see those presents you got from Baby Gap? Instead of giving them to a baby who I bet already has a lot of clothes, why not help feed a baby that has no food?

PAIGE
These aren't for a baby. They're for my husband's new girlfriend.

Roger looks confused. Paige's eyes lock on a PHOTO of smiling AFRICAN CHILD hugging a goat.

ROGER
Here are some pamphlets. Did you know one sheep can provide an entire family with enough milk for a year? Plus the wool can be woven into clothing to wear or sell at market.

PAIGE
It's like the Christmas gift that gives year round.

Roger looks at her.

ROGER

Yes. It is. That's very good. Can I use that?

Paige smiles as if she's just gotten her gift from the Magi.

INT. MALL - LATER

Still holding her bags, Paige strides through throngs of Christmas shoppers.

She sees a WOMAN IN A SALVATION ARMY UNIFORM clanging her bell. She marches over and drops her two shopping bags full of presents on top of her bucket...

PAIGE

There's gift receipts inside if anyone want to return them.

And walks off with a grin of freedom...

INT. TRATTORIA - LATE MORNING

SHELLY COLTER, the restaurant owner we heard of earlier, leads Nina through his upscale Italian eatery. Well, upscale for New Jersey. The lunch staff is just beginning to trickle in.

SHELLY

It was great to hear from David. Jane and I have been meaning to call him and Paige, but you know, things get crazy.

NINA

Yeah... they do.

They enter the OPEN KITCHEN.

SHELLY

Okay, Chef's the boss back here, so do what she says. You'll probably start on the salad station but if all goes well, you'll quickly move up to sauces.

NINA

I really appreciate this opportunity, Mr. Colter.

Nina's CELL PHONE goes off. She quickly grabs it from her pocket to silence it. The display reads, "Ethan".

NINA (CONT'D)

Ucch, sorry about that. Don't worry. I always keep my phone off when I'm working.

SHELLY

(warmly, enjoying her)

Okay. Just do a good job. Don't make me regret this.

EXT. FRISBEE FIELD - DAY

Terry makes an outstanding diving layout grab in the endzone as the other players CHEER.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Carol comes from the bathroom, still brushing her teeth...

CAROL

I think that for Christmas Eve we should demand that Paige come over -

She's stopped cold by Terry, who lies on his side on the bed.

CAROL (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

Terry pulls back the sheet to reveal that's he NAKED. And from Carol's reaction, probably erect.

TERRY

Come here.

CAROL

I have toothpaste in my mouth.

TERRY

I don't care. Now come here.

He puts out his hand out to her. And this time she takes it.

INT. DAVID'S HOUSE - SAME

Vanessa in her room with her laptop. She's on CRAIGSLIST. We see the cursor click on the "HOUSING WANTED" tab.

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - DAY

The Christmas Carolers are UP IN ARMS!!

CHRISTMAS CAROLER STANLEY
You're our leader, you can't quit!

CHRISTMAS CAROLER DIANE
Christmas Eve is in six days.

CHRISTMAS CAROLER MARCUS
They're counting on us!

PAIGE
Calm down. Calm down. ORDER!

The Carolers settle.

PAIGE (CONT'D)
I understand that you're upset but
don't worry. You're all dedicated
and talented singers. Marcus will
take over as leader.

The Carolers freak - "Marcus?!" "Marcus is an idiot?"

CHRISTMAS CAROLER ELLEN
Why are you doing this, Paige?

PAIGE
Because Christmas is wasteful,
Ellen. And I'm done wasting my
life.

CHRISTMAS CAROL STANLEY
Well this isn't a waste, not to us,
and I think you are being extremely
inconsiderate pulling something
like this so close to Christmas
Eve!!

PAIGE
You're right Stanley, I guess all I
can say is -- try not have a cow.

Paige tries to keep a straight face, but then, she starts to giggle.

The Carolers protest - "What is going on? "I don't see what
so funny?"

PAIGE (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, I'm sorry, everyone... I
didn't mean to get your goats.

Paige snorts, putting her hand over her mouth as the group
starts in again - "What are you doing?" "Stop laughing." "Why
is she talking about goats?!"

As we go off Paige who's practically doubled over laughing.

INT. DAVID'S CAR - EVENING

David and Nina pull up in front of SHELLY'S RESTAURANT.

NINA

Thanks for dropping me off.

DAVID

Of course. Good luck.

They kiss. It gets heavy.

NINA

You're gonna make me late.

She gets out of the car and closes the door. David sits, a smile on his face - then, there's a KNOCK on the passenger window. It's Nina.

DAVID

(rolling down the window)

That was fast.

NINA

(sticking her head in)

I need to tell you something...

Suddenly, the mood turns serious. Nina has something important to say...

NINA (CONT'D)

I...

DAVID

I love you, Nina.

NINA

You shit! You suck! I wanted to say it first.

(quick change)

Wait. Were you serious or were you just screwing with me?

DAVID

I was serious.

Nina smiles.

NINA

Well, now I'm not saying it. You blew it, buddy. Gotta go to work.

(MORE)

NINA (CONT'D)
(she turns for the door,
then turns back)
I'm only kidding. I love you! I
love you!! I love you!!!

EXT. FRISBEE FIELD - DAY

Terry leaves his feet and goes completely horizontal for a killer lay-out defensive block. This time, CAROL cheers on the sidelines. Covered in dirt, Terry pops to his feet, and playfully flexes both biceps ala Popeye.

INT. TERRY AND CAROL'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - DAY

Through the shower door, obscured by steam, Terry and Carol soapily go at it as Terry gets off more than game dirt.

INT. LOFT LIKE SPACE - JERSEY CITY - DAY

Vanessa and Maya are being given the tour of a fairly killer loft space by MIKHALAY, a cool looking, artist type with a make-you-wilt smile.

MIKHALAY
There's six bedrooms total so
there's always someone to hang
with. We try to keep a communal
feel.

Maya stares at Mikhalay. He's a hottie.

MIKHALAY (CONT'D)
I don't mean to be a ball-buster,
but if you can get a reference from
the last place you rented...

VANESSA
Oh. Well, I wasn't really--

MAYA
Totally. No problem. We'll fax it
right over.

MIKHALAY
Cool. So here's the bedroom.

Mikhalay opens the door to the EMPTY BEDROOM. The huge windows let in amazing light. There's exposed brick and wide-plank hardwood floors.

EXT. STREET - DAY

They exit the building.

MAYA

You are taking that place. You are!
It's not even that expensive!

VANESSA

I don't know, it's not that bad at
home.

MAYA

Oh my God, what is your problem!

VANESSA

You only want me to take that place
so you can fuck Mikhalay.

MAYA

Of course. But, I also want you to
become a normal human being. What
are you so scared of?

VANESSA

I'm not scared.

Maya just stares at her.

VANESSA (CONT'D)

Fine. I'll call Mikhalay tonight.
You satisfied?

Dubious, Maya whips out her cell phone.

VANESSA (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

MAYA

Calling Henry. He wants to see a
copy of the lease.

INT. SHELLY'S RESTAURANT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Nina works hard at the SAUCE STATION as white tickets slam
the line. The Chef barks out orders.

CHEF

I need two more soups on 27. Nina
plate 24...

It's fast paced but she's keeping up.

INT. SHELLY'S RESTAURANT - DINING ROOM - SAME

David's come to support Nina. A carpaccio appetizer on the table before him. Shelly has joined him for a moment.

SHELLY

Thanks for sending her to me. She's a good worker. Chef likes her.

DAVID

That's great.

SHELLY

(not sure what's going on)
So is Paige coming down or...?

Before David can answer, THE MANAGER comes over.

MANAGER

Shelly. Zeiss is on line 2.

SHELLY

(to David)

Excuse me. I gotta take this.

Shelly goes. David catches Nina's eye through the open kitchen window. He gives a thumbs up and rubs his belly making a "yummy" gesture. Nina giggles.

Just then, David's jaw drops. On the other side of the dining room, PAIGE is being seated by the hostess.

David panics. He thinks about making a run for it when -- SHIT! Paige looks over and they make eye contact.

Paige misses a breath as a busboy comes over and pours her water.

FROM DAVID'S POV: we see Shelly come out of the back office. He's sees Paige, goes to her table, and gives her a welcoming kiss on the cheek. He gestures towards David's table - "you're supposed to sit over there." Paige smiles politely and declines.

Shelly looks confused, he shoots David a look - "What the hell is going on?" His eyes then wander over to Nina in the kitchen - he's beginning to put the pieces together.

BACK ON DAVID as his waiter approaches.

WAITER

Done with your appetizer sir or are you still working on that?

DAVID

What? Oh, you can take it. Thanks.

The waiter removes the plate.

David fidgets. It's too awkward. He knows he has to go over and say something.

Paige watches him get up and come towards her.

PAIGE

Hello.

DAVID

Hi, Paige. Nice move on the Christmas card.

PAIGE

Thank you. Dining alone?

DAVID

(glancing at the kitchen)

Um, yeah, I guess.

(beat)

So, how are you doing? Is everything.....

PAIGE

(calmly, easy)

Sit down, David. We don't need to make this uncomfortable and you know how I hate pleasantries.

David hesitates a moment, then sits.

PAIGE (CONT'D)

Thank you. Now, in answer to your question, I'm fine.

(then)

What about you? You look happy.

DAVID

Uh, yeah, things are okay, I'm...

PAIGE

If you're happy you can say so. You don't need to spare my feelings. Just be genuine, David. Please.

DAVID

Yes. I'm happy.

PAIGE

Thank you.

A beat as they look at each other. David sees that something oddly serene has come over Paige.

PAIGE (CONT'D)

(playful)

You realize this is the first time
we've been out to dinner in
years...

David smiles.

PAIGE (CONT'D)

Have you heard from Toby?

DAVID

No. Have you?

PAIGE

I got an e-mail a few days ago.

DAVID

Did you tell him --

PAIGE

I didn't want to worry him on his
trip. He seems to be doing very
well.

DAVID

That's great.

PAIGE

He's met some important people --
oh, he did accidentally eat
something called "night soil" at a
banquet in Shanghai. He didn't
leave the bathroom for two days.

DAVID

Oh no. Poor guy.

PAIGE

It wasn't all bad. He did learn the
Mandarin words for "stomach" and
"toast..."

Between the story and the tension, David can't help but
laugh. Paige's mouth curls into a smile which evolves into an
easy laugh as well.

IN THE KITCHEN

Nina works quickly as she puts a perfectly sauced plate up on the line. She glances into the dining room. David's seat is empty. She scans the room and sees -- David with Paige laughing and talking with great ease. A wave of conflicting emotions overcomes Nina.

EXT. SHELLY'S RESTAURANT - LATER THAT NIGHT

Nina bounds out the front door in tears. She moves through the waiters and line cooks who hang out smoking cigarettes. David is waiting by the curb to pick her up.

NINA
Unbelievable!

Nina storms passed him, throwing her balled up apron as she passes.

DAVID
Hold up...
(catching up)
Wait a second!

David catches up and grabs Nina's arm. When she turns, David sees that she's crying.

DAVID (CONT'D)
What happened?

NINA
Shelly just fired me!

DAVID
Wha -- Why?

NINA
Because he's not an idiot. He saw you and Paige and saw me and figured out what's going on. He said he couldn't get in the middle of it. I was good at that job!

DAVID
I'm sorry.

David goes to comfort her, but she pulls back.

NINA
Why the hell were you talking to her?!

DAVID

I couldn't just ignore her. What did you want me to do?

NINA

I don't know. Just.... I saw you sitting with her, and, I thought...

DAVID

Thought what?

NINA

I don't know. You looked normal together. I don't know... Can we please just get out of here?

EXT. ORANGE DRIVE - DAY

With only three days until Christmas, Paige's Christmas Spectacular is now matched by her neighbors' equally impressive displays. Yards are filled with plastic snowmen. The houses are covered in lights.

IN FRONT OF TERRY AND CAROL'S HOUSE - a TAXI pulls up to the curb.

INT. TAXI - CONTINUOUS

The TAXI DRIVER looks over his shoulder.

TAXI DRIVER

This is it. 1729 Orange. Good luck, buddy. I hope it works out for you.

We REVERSE to REVEAL that the taxi driver is talking to ETHAN in the backseat.

ETHAN

Thanks, Frank. I really appreciate the advice.

(emotional)

Do you mind if I sit here for a little bit? I kind of need to gather myself.

EXT. TERRY AND CAROL'S HOUSE - PORCH - SAME

BUZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ... Ethan nervously fingers the bell.

After a moment, Carol opens the door...

CAROL

Hello?

VOICE

Hi, Mrs. Bass? We've never met,
but, I'm Ethan.

Carol's brow furrows. She's about to unleash a wave of fury,
when instead, slowly, a gleam enters her eyes.

INT. TERRY AND CAROL'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Ethan eats some soup and sits across from Carol.

ETHAN

It's like that song, "you don't
really know what you've got til
it's gone." I love your daughter,
Mrs. Bass. I made mistakes, but
they were stupid.

CAROL

Uh-huh.

Carol pastes an understanding look on her face, but we can
see her wheels turning.

ETHAN

I just had a successful exhibition
of my photographs in San Fran and
this gallery in New York is gonna
move the show to their space. It's
awesome, but doing all that without
Nina - I don't know, it feels
pointless. Please, Mrs. Bass, tell
me what I can do to get her back?

INT. DAVID'S HOUSE - DEN - SAME

A large CHRISTMAS TREE sits in the corner. Nina sits on the
floor sifting through shoe boxes full of ORNAMENTS. David
speaks on the phone.

DAVID

(on phone)

...no, Shelly, I know it's
complicated -- okay, okay, I
understand. Thanks for calling me
back.

David hangs up.

NINA
I told you.

DAVID
He said he'd write you a reference,
but... yeah, he doesn't want to get
involved.

NINA
We need to move. This doesn't work
us being here, it's never gonna
work.

David's caught somewhat off guard.

DAVID
No.. I know...

NINA
So let's go somewhere.

DAVID
Yeah, but, it's not that simple for
me. I have a job... this house...

NINA
We're never going to figure out
what we are living across the
street from my parents. I love you
but...

ETHAN'S VOICE
WHAT THE FUCK?!

They both look over to see ETHAN inside the house.

NINA
Ethan?!

ETHAN
What the hell is going on?

NINA
What are you doing here?

ETHAN
Did you just say you love this
guy?!

DAVID
Hold on, Ethan? Like Ethan Ethan?

NINA
How did you get in here?

He holds up a key-chain.

ETHAN

Your mother gave me the key. She said to just come in, that you might not hear the bell.

DAVID

(calmly)

Look, Ethan, I'm gonna have to ask you to leave.

ETHAN

You can ask, but I'm not going to.

(to Nina)

Who is this?

NINA

Ethan, this is David. David and Paige -- my parents best friends from across the street...

ETHAN

Why are you telling your parents' friend that you love him?

Vanessa appears.

VANESSA

What's going on, the front door was open?

ETHAN

Nina, I need to talk to you. Can we go somewhere? For five minutes...

NINA

Ethan, I think you should leave.

VANESSA

(shocked... and intrigued)

Ethan Ethan?

ETHAN

Just give me five minutes!

DAVID

She said no, Ethan. Now, I'm gonna ask you one more time to get out of here.

ETHAN

And if I don't, Pops, what are you gonna do about it?

WHAP!!! David suddenly LUNGES FORWARD and grabs Ethan.

VANESSA

Dad!

NINA

David!!

A MESSY SCUFFLE breaks out. David grabs Ethan by the back of the jacket, tangling up his arms, and pushes him towards the door.

ETHAN

Hey man, get off!

David clumsily shoves Ethan through the front door and out onto the lawn.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

(on the ground)

Why don't you go fu--

David slams the door behind him. He looks at Vanessa and Nina, panting.

DAVID

What?

They both looks at David like he's a bit insane. That was quite the male violent outburst.

NINA

Just let me go talk to him...

Nina heads out the door.

Vanessa looks at David who's still huffing and puffing.

VANESSA

I found an apartment. But we should probably discuss it later.

As Vanessa heads upstairs.

INT. DINER - DAY

Ethan pleads his case to Nina.

ETHAN

Yes, I cheated on you, and I am deeply sorry, but I'm a sabotager.

(MORE)

ETHAN (CONT'D)

I've been seeing a therapist -- and any time anything good happens to me I ruin it, because I get scared. Things between us were real, Nina, but I didn't think I deserved you, so I became a sabotager and destroyed it.

NINA

That's great Ethan, but we can't just pretend everything's fine because you learned a new term about yourself. Is sabotager even a word?

ETHAN

Let me finish. See, I think you're a sabotager also. Because you pushed really hard for us to get married, but that was just to show your parents you weren't this lost pathetic screw up, but we weren't ready to get married. Relationships need to evolve.

NINA

Like you evolved into that girl's pants? I've moved on Ethan, David and I --

ETHAN

David and you?!! HE'S YOUR PARENT'S BEST FRIEND FOR CHRIST'S SAKE!!

Ethan said that much too loud. The other patrons look over. Now, Nina sweats. The reverse of David in the Starbucks scene.

NINA

We're done here. You need to go home, Ethan.

Nina grabs her bag and gets up from the table. Ethan yells after her.

ETHAN

I can't go home! I only bought a one way ticket!

(then)

I'M NOT GIVING UP ON US, NINA. I LOVE YOU TOO MUCH FOR THAT...!!!

As Nina heads out the front door.

EXT. ORANGE DRIVE - DAY

Terry throws his frisbee cleats and sports bag into his Prius. David pulls up across the street in his Audi. He gets out. They're both unsure how to play this...

DAVID

Hey.

TERRY

Hey.

It's been awhile since they spoke. Their proximity making this awkward. David, crosses most of the street, but still keeps a distance.

DAVID

Where ya going?

TERRY

To play some ultimate. I've been playing a lot.

DAVID

That's great.

(pause)

So what do you and Carol have planned for Christmas?

TERRY

I don't know. She actually mentioned something about seeing Paige.

They nod their heads and make pursed smiles. Then...

DAVID

It's good to see you, Terry.

TERRY

Yeah.

DAVID

I miss you.

TERRY

(softly)

What the fuck are you doing, David?

DAVID

I don't know. But I'm pretty sure I'm in love with her.

Terry looks at David. Despite all this, he does miss his friend as well.

TERRY
(avoiding the issue)
Okay, well, I'll see you around.

As Terry gets into his car and starts the engine.

INT. CALL CENTER - DAY

Paige sits at a cubicle wearing a telephone headset. Against the far wall hangs a banner for BARNYARD INTERNATIONAL.

PAIGE
(on the phone)
Well, thank you very much Mr. Ingber, and the people of Komanesk, Ukraine who will be receiving the chickens thank you as well. Merry Christmas.

Paige clicks off the call as ROGER, the Barnyard representative we met at the mall, passes by.

ROGER
Great job, Paige. You're a natural.

Roger gives Paige's shoulder a quick squeeze. He beams her a flirtatious smile and heads for the office.

Paige smiles after him, but her thoughts begin to drift and her expression changes.

She looks at her phone, thinks for a moment, then dials a number from memory...

INT. DAVID'S HOUSE - SAME

Nina has found a box of OLD PHOTOGRAPHS amongst the shoe boxes of ornaments. She holds up a photo of BOTH FAMILIES TOGETHER FROM 10 YEARS AGO. Everyone is in front of the Christmas Tree looking happy. Nina has her arm around Vanessa.

The phone rings. Still looking at the photo, Nina absentmindedly answers it.

NINA
(on phone)
Hello?

BACK AT THE CALL CENTER - Paige is frozen. She was calling David but hadn't considered that Nina could answer.

INTERCUT: Nina/Paige

PAIGE
(caught off guard)
Um.... hello ma'am, I'm calling
from Barnyard International.

Then a mischievous look comes into her eye.

PAIGE (CONT'D)
Is this the lady of the house?

NINA
(whatever...)
Um, yeah.

PAIGE
Well Mrs. Schiff, let me say how
young you sound. Are you sure this
isn't the Schiff's daughter? Oh,
how I flatter.

NINA
I'm sorry. What organization are
you from?

PAIGE
Home Wreckers International. We
support women who've been driven
from their homes due to war,
natural disaster, or sluts.
Jennifer Aniston is our
spokesperson.

NINA
Paige?

PAIGE
Doris?

NINA
What?

PAIGE
I'm sorry. I thought you wanted to
say random names out loud. Pamela.
(then)
Gotta run. I'll call back when your
mommy's home. Wave bye-bye to the
phone, cutie. Bye-bye!!

Paige hangs up and beams a self-satisfied smile.

We STAY ON NINA. She clicks off the phone and takes a breath.

Just then, Vanessa comes down the stairs with a duffle bag slung over her shoulder. She and Nina eye each other.

VANESSA

Tell my father I'll call him later to explain.

NINA

Explain what?

VANESSA

I have this large bag. I think you can figure it out.

NINA

Look, if I'm... driving you out, I'm sorry --

VANESSA

You're not driving me anywhere. I've been planning on leaving for a long time and now that I found the right place I'm going there. It's all part of my plan.

NINA

Okay.

VANESSA

Great.

Vanessa turns for the door.

NINA

Vanessa...

Vanessa turns back.

NINA (CONT'D)

I know you think I'm this whore walking nightmare who just... gives handjobs and steals other people's boyfriends -- even though that was eons ago -- but.... I actually care about him. A lot. I think I make him happy. I just wanted you to know that it's for real.

VANESSA
(genuine)
I know.

And she does. A strong, if fleeting moment of mutual acceptance passes between them.

VANESSA (CONT'D)
But you still manage to leave a
wake of disaster wherever you go.
For a further example, just look
outside.

Nina goes to the window to see - ETHAN STANDING ON THE SIDEWALK. He holds a large cardboard sign that reads, "NINA, PLEASE."

NINA
Oh, man.

VANESSA
He's been out there for about an
hour.

Nina blows past Vanessa and heads out the front door.

EXT. DAVID'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Nina marches up to Ethan.

NINA
Are you out of your mind?

ETHAN
I'm not on his lawn. The sidewalk
is public property.

NINA
I told you to go home.

ETHAN
Yes. And I actually bought a return
ticket. But I'm not leaving 'til
you give me another chance, Nina.
I'm not. That's why I ripped up the
ticket. In my mind. Cause it was an
e-ticket.

NINA
I'm with someone else, Ethan. I've
moved on. Face it. You need to get
over me.

She turns and starts back to the house. He yells after her.

ETHAN
BUT THAT'S JUST THE THING! I DON'T
WANT TO GET OVER YOU!

INT. DAVID'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - LATER

David and Nina peer out of the bedroom window down at Ethan. He stands in the same position holding his sign.

DAVID
I feel like a prisoner in my own
house.

Then they see Carol coming across the street with a wool blanket.

DAVID (CONT'D)
Oh, come on...

Carol tries to offer the blanket to Ethan who tries to refuse...

INT. HALLWAY - LATER THAT NIGHT

Dressed in her pajamas, Nina makes her way towards the bathroom. When she passes the window, she stops and looks down at a cold Ethan, who's draped in Carol's blanket.

NINA
(slightly forlorn)
What are you doing, Ethan?

We hold on Nina as the neighborhood Christmas lights flash across her face. "Perhaps she does leave a wake of destruction wherever she goes."

We move out the window and into the nighttime of Orange Drive. The block is illuminated with ornamental cheer. Far in the distance, the display of one house suddenly goes dark. Asleep for the night. Christmas Eve is hours away, as we....

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ORANGE DRIVE - MORNING - 8 A.M

Early winter light bathes the street. We go CLOSE ON: a plastic RUDOLPH with frost on his nose. Then an ELF, covered in icy dew. Then SANTA. FROSTY. In the cranky morning light their faces almost look alive.

We find DAVID in front of his house.

He stands next to his car. Feet away, Ethan sleeps curled up next to a tree using his cardboard sign as a pillow.

David smiles mischievously, puts his key in the driver's side door and sends his CAR ALARM BLARING TO LIFE!!!! Ethan shoots up.

DAVID
Morning, Eth. Merry Christmas Eve.

Ethan scrambles to his feet as David gets into his car and drives away.

INT. TERRY AND CAROL'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - 11 A.M.

Terry looks out the window at Ethan. Carol paces while talking on the phone.

CAROL
(leaving a message)
Paige, I want you to stop avoiding me. Terry and I are spending Christmas Eve with you - this tradition is continuing - so get your ass over here tonight or I'll get really mad! Okay, I love you.
Bye.

She hangs up and turns to Terry.

CAROL (CONT'D)
How was that? Too forceful?

INT. DAVID'S HOUSE - UPSTAIRS BEDROOM - 2:30 P.M.

Nina sits on the bed wrapping several identically shaped PRESENTS, when she hears a car pull up outside. She goes to the window and sees...

TOBY, back from his trip to China, stepping out of a cab.

NINA
Oh shit.
(calling out)
David! David!

EXT. ORANGE DRIVE - SAME

TOBY grabs his luggage from the trunk of the TAXI and pays the driver.

TOBY
Thanks a lot. Merry Christmas.

As the taxi pulls away, Toby's eyes wander over to Ethan.

ETHAN
Hey. Merry Christmas.

TOBY
Uh, yeah... Same to you.

Toby looks confused. Ethan's clever sign now reads:
"CHRISTMAS IS FOR-GIVING."

INT. DAVID'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Nina hurries down the stairs...

NINA
David!

As Toby walks through the front door.

TOBY
Hello! Anybody home?

Nina freezes. Unsure what her next move should be, she forces a big smile.

NINA
Hey, Toby!

TOBY
(big smile)
Hey, Nina, what's going on?

He gives her a warm hug.

TOBY (CONT'D)
I really missed you. Did you get my postcards?

NINA
Ah... no.

TOBY

Really? I sent them to your Mom's house. Is everyone already over here?

David enters from the kitchen.

DAVID

Did you call--
(seeing his son)
Hey, Toby! You made it back. Merry Christmas.

TOBY

Merry Christmas, Dad.

They hug. David steps back and looks at Toby. Then he looks at Nina. Nina looks at David. Toby looks at his father and Nina. He has no idea what's going on, but something's not right. The room fills with a fog of awkwardness. Confused, Toby manages to squeeze out...

TOBY (CONT'D)

What's with that guy out by the sidewalk?

INT. MAYA'S APARTMENT - 4:00 P.M.

Maya and Henry Chart are upset at Vanessa.

MAYA

You have to take Mikhaley's apartment!!

VANESSA

I don't want to live with six other people. Let me just crash on your couch for a while.

MAYA

Henry would you talk some sense into her!!

Vanessa cell phone rings. She looks at the display.

VANESSA

Oh shit, it's my brother.

INT. HALLWAY - MAYA'S APARTMENT BUILDING - A MINUTE LATER

Vanessa argues with her brother.

VANESSA
(on phone)
Would you chill out.

INT. DAVID HOUSE - SAME

Toby paces near the front bay windows.

TOBY
How the hell did you not tell me
Mom and Dad split up?!? How could
no one tell me?!

INTERCUT: Vanessa/Toby

VANESSA
You were in China!
(softer)
How was that by the way?

TOBY
Really great. I brought you
something.
(intense again)
Just get your ass over here!

VANESSA
I can't. I'm with my friends from
work. It's Henry's first Christmas.

TOBY
Get here! You're not leaving me
alone with them!!

He looks out the window to see Ethan, still standing tall.

TOBY (CONT'D)
And where the hell is Mom?!?

EXT. DOWN THE STREET - SAME

PAIGE sits halfway down the block in her car. Barnyard
International pamphlets are strewn on the passenger seat.

FROM HER DISTANT ANGLE - Paige stares at her old house and
the strange man who stands on her lawn.

Despite her new found calling, the emptiness of a lonely
Christmas Eve without her family and friends has gotten to
her.

INT. DAVID'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - 4:30 P.M.

Toby freaks on David and Nina.

TOBY

Putting aside the enormous and perhaps nauseating age difference between you two, you do realize that I've kissed her - twice.

NINA

We kissed once. We never kissed on Thanksgiving. You passed out.

TOBY

Oh, well then, everything's fine!

DAVID

Toby, I know you're upset, but try to understand--

TOBY

Understand what? That I'm the first son in history to be cock-blocked by his father?!

Vanessa appears.

VANESSA

Oh good, I haven't missed anything.

EXT. ORANGE DRIVE - SAME

THE CHRISTMAS CAROL GROUP stands on the lawn of the first house, defiant to the elements, doing what they do best.

CAROLERS

Ding Dong Merrily On High, In Heaven the Bells are Ringing...

Though tonally lessened by the loss of Paige, they are nonetheless - excellent.

INT. PAIGE'S CAR - 5:00 P.M.

It's now dark. Paige puts the car into drive and begins creeping towards her old house. There's a strangeness in her eyes.

She glides up to her old house, stopping by Ethan on the sidewalk. She rolls down the passenger window.

PAIGE

Excuse me. Merry Christmas. What are you doing?

Ethan breaks his stoic pose and turns to Paige in her car.

ETHAN

My ex-girlfriend is in that house and I'm trying to win her back.

He shows Paige his sign.

PAIGE

What's her name?

ETHAN

Nina.

PAIGE

You must love her very much to be standing out here like this.

ETHAN

I do. She's got this new boyfriend who lives here, but she should be with me.

PAIGE

You're Ethan, right?

ETHAN

Yeah?

PAIGE

My husband is the new boyfriend of your ex-girlfriend.

They look at each other. A mutual understanding of hurt between them.

They both HEAR and then see the Christmas Carolers far down the block.

CHRISTMAS CAROLERS

(distant)

Joy to the world, the Lord is come...

Paige and Ethan look at one another again. Then, Paige looks back at her house...

Through the large BAY WINDOW she sees David and Nina standing near the Christmas tree.

47 emotions flash across her face, but her heart sinks when her children, Toby and Vanessa, come into view. From her POV it appears that her WHOLE FAMILY is celebrating the holiday without her.

She turns back to Ethan.

PAIGE

Ethan, would you mind stepping aside for a moment?

INT. TERRY AND CAROL'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - SAME

Terry is cooking dinner. Out the window, he catches a glimpse of Paige's car.

TERRY

(calling out)

Hey Carol, I think Paige is here.

CAROL

Thank God. I knew she'd come.

Carol approaches the window and sees Paige REVERSING AT AN ODD ANGLE.

CAROL (CONT'D)

What is she doing?

INT. DAVID'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - SAME

David is still trying to calm Toby down.

DAVID

Look, this obviously isn't an ideal situation for any of us, but it's still Christmas Eve...

They hear the intense revving of a CAR ENGINE.

VANESSA

What's that?

David goes to the window...

EXT. ORANGE DRIVE - SAME

Through the open passenger window, Ethan yells to Paige.

ETHAN

Merry Christmas, Paige.

PAIGE
It's about to be.

She guns the engine, steps on the gas and the car SHOOTS FORWARD!!!

INT. TERRY AND CAROL'S HOUSE - SAME

Carol is watching...

CAROL
Oh no!

INT. DAVID'S HOUSE - SAME

David is watching...

DAVID
What the hell is she---!!!

AS...

EXT. PAIGE'S CAR - SAME

THE CAR JUMPS THE CURB ONTO DAVID'S LAWN, BUCKS LIKE A BRONCO, AND RAMS THE TEAM OF PLASTIC REINDEER HEAD ON. RUDOLPH, DONNER, BLITZEN... ROW AFTER ROW OF REINDEER ARE MOWED UNDER AND THEN -- WHAM!! SANTA'S SLEIGH IS PULVERIZED IN A COLLISION OF AUTOMOTIVE METAL AND CHEAP INDUSTRIAL PLASTIC.

INT. PAIGE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Paige braces herself as she slams on the breaks and turns the wheel. The car skids on the lawn, kicking up grass and mud!

Paige scans the lawn, punches the gas and races forward, obliterating FROSTY THE SNOWMAN.

PAIGE
Never liked that one.

EXT. TERRY AND CAROL'S HOUSE - SAME

Terry and Carol come running into the street.

EXT. DAVID'S HOUSE - SAME

David runs onto the lawn. Nina, Vanessa and Toby come to the doorway.

DAVID
PAIGE!!!

He runs towards the car.

INT. PAIGE'S CAR - SAME

Paige backs up over Frosty and makes a fascinating discovery - DAVID is standing 10 feet in front of her, illuminated by the headlights.

PAIGE
Hello, David.

David freezes -- then realizes what's going on. Paige steps on the gas. David takes off, swerving as he runs.

PAIGE (CONT'D)
Stay still you...

WHAM! Paige takes out a giant ILLUMINATED CANDY CANE.

David runs onto THE NEXT DOOR NEIGHBOR'S LAWN.

Paige follows. The car slams through a GIANT SNOWFLAKE and crushes a few plastic ELVES.

INT. THE NEIGHBORS HOUSE - SAME

The NEIGHBORS are in the middle of dinner when they hear the crunch of polyurethane elves being torn asunder.

EXT. BACK OUTSIDE - CONTINUOUS

David darts left into the street. Paige steps on the break and skids out, leaving a huge mud GASH on her neighbors lawn.

IN FRONT OF DAVID'S HOUSE - Nina, Vanessa and Toby stare in disbelief.

TOBY
Mom, stop!

Vanessa is snapping pictures with her cell phone.

VANESSA
This is unbelievable.

DAVID runs across the street towards TERRY AND CAROL'S HOUSE. Paige barrels after him, clipping the back fender of a parked car.

TERRY
Paige! No!! NO!!!

BAM! She takes out Terry's ELECTRONIC SNOW GLOBE.

David sidesteps the car and pounds on Carol's window!

DAVID
PAIGE!! ENOUGH!!

But she's still coming!!

She spins the wheel hard left and hits the gas. Mud and grass kick up as she CLIPS David in the thigh with her left front bumper.

DAVID (CONT'D)
Ow!!!

David's pants are torn, but he's in one piece. He turns and runs back towards his house.

Paige makes a wide turn, sideswiping MARY, JOSEPH, BABY JESUS and the ENTIRE MANGER in the corner of the neighbors' yard.

David yells to Nina, Vanessa and Toby as he sprints towards the doorway.

DAVID (CONT'D)
Get inside! Get inside!

He fumbles onto the porch, pushes everyone inside, and SLAMS THE DOOR.

Paige skids to a halt on her lawn. Everything is quiet as the neighbors filter into the street and inspect the plastic yuletide carnage. Carol and Terry run across the street.

Paige looks up. She's facing headlong towards DAVID'S AUDI parked in the driveway.

She smirks, lowers her head, punches the gas, and SMASHES INTO THE SIDE OF DAVID'S CAR. Metal crackles as smoke pours from Paige's engine.

Looking oddly calm, Paige undoes her seat-belt and steps out of the car. It has begun to SNOW.

Paige looks down. She's standing on the mangled torso of a plastic REINDEER. It's quite heavy, but she picks it up and moves towards the house.

TERRY
Paige, don't --

She swings it back and with all her might HURLS it towards the large GLASS BAY WINDOW.

PLAP! It bounces off the window.

PAIGE
Shit.

And then behind her she hears...

Ethan runs forward with SANTA'S HEAVY PLASTIC HEAD held high in the air. He stops short and PROPELS IT TOWARDS THE WINDOW. This time, THE GLASS SHATTERS.

Santa's head rolls into the LIVING ROOM surrounded by shards of window pane.

PAIGE
Thank you, Ethan.

Ethan smiles as Paige heads towards THE FRONT DOOR, passing the neighbors as she goes...

PAIGE (CONT'D)
(walking)
Sorry about the lawn, Robert. Merry
Christmas, Marion.

Terry and Carol run up alongside Paige.

CAROL
Paige, honey, don't go in there.

TERRY
Come on back to our house and
relax.

PAIGE
Thank you for the invitation, but
it's Christmas Eve and I'd like to
spend it with my children.

Paige continues up the walk. She reaches the door. It's LOCKED. She's momentarily stymied, but then remembers - SHE HAS THE KEYS.

INT. DAVID AND PAIGE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Paige enters the living room followed by Terry and Carol. David lunges at Paige, Toby restrains him.

TOBY

Dad!

DAVID

Are you out of your mind?! You've got some serious problems!!

PAIGE

(calmly)

I do. And you're number one.

(turning to Vanessa)

Hi, sweetie. It's good to see you. I'm sorry I haven't been in touch.

VANESSA

It's okay.

PAIGE

Hello, Toby. Welcome home. How was China?

Paige steps forward for a hug. Toby carefully releases David, who is still furious, but doesn't attack.

TOBY

(hugging)

Ummm.... really great.

(not knowing what else to say)

I brought you a present.

PAIGE

Oh, thank you. May I have it?

Toby debates whether David is calm enough to go get his bag.

TOBY

Sure.

There's a deathly silent tension as Toby goes for the present.

TERRY

Merry Christmas everyone.

Everybody stares at Terry for his inappropriate timing. Toby comes back with his bag.

TOBY

I, um, actually got everyone
presents since... because, well...

(suddenly angry)

NOBODY BOTHERED TO TELL ME WHAT WAS
GOING ON!

PAIGE

Well, give them out.

TOBY

Uh, okay, they're nothing special.

Toby hands out small wrapped presents to everyone.

TOBY (CONT'D)

I couldn't carry that much stuff,
so, they're just little things.

They all begin to awkwardly unwrap their presents. Paige finishes first. It's a souvenir from THE GREAT WALL.

PAIGE

Well this is very nice. A bit
useless, but nonetheless, very
thoughtful. Thank you, honey.

She gives Toby a peck on the cheek, then turns to the group.

PAIGE (CONT'D)

I've donated cows and goats for all
of you in your names. They'll go to
families in third world countries
and will provide milk and nutrition
for many years.

(to David)

David, I donated a gigantic ass in
your name. It'll be good for
farming.

(to Nina)

Nina, I donated a baby pig in
yours. That made me laugh.

Nina smiles, almost appreciating the joke.

NINA

I actually got you a Christmas
present, Paige.

(then...)

I got all of you Christmas
presents.

(MORE)

NINA (CONT'D)
I didn't think we'd be doing this
this year, but I got them anyway...

Nina gets the presents from under the tree and hands them out.

NINA (CONT'D)
I thought they were too beautiful
not to.

Everyone is confused. They just stare at their wrapped presents.

NINA (CONT'D)
Well, go ahead. Open them.

Everyone unwraps their present:

They are the OLD PHOTOGRAPHS Nina found earlier. Each of them enlarged, matted and beautifully framed.

Carol's is of herself, from 20 years ago, looking carefree and beautiful.

Toby's is from 13 years ago. He's riding a skateboard against a pink sky.

Nina hands each person, except David, a photograph of their younger selves. Vanessa as a twelve-year-old making a face at the camera; Terry posing with a young Joel Silver; Paige on a trampoline in mid-bounce, her long hair flying everywhere.

THROUGH THE BROKEN WINDOW we HEAR the CHRISTMAS CAROLERS.

CHRISTMAS CAROLERS
*Silent Night. Holy Night. All is
calm, all is bright...*

Their beautiful five-part harmony and a lot of SNOW drift into the living room.

A sense of calm comes over the room as everyone looks at their gifts.

TERRY
Wow, Nina...

NINA
I found them in a box of photos
that was mixed in with the
ornaments.
(mostly to Paige)
It's not like I snooped or
anything.

CAROL
They're beautiful.

VANESSA
(looking at her photo)
When was this? I don't even
remember this?

PAIGE
Why did you make these?

NINA
Because you all look really happy
in them. This is the way I remember
all of us growing up.

Nina looks at everyone as they stare at their photos.

NINA (CONT'D)
I know that David and I being in a
relationship seems crazy... and it
is... but we never meant to hurt
anyone.

Then she looks at Paige.

NINA (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, Paige. I know that to
you, I was always this reckless
immature brat who deserved a smack
across the face--

Paige SLAPS NINA ACROSS THE FACE. It's sudden.

NINA (CONT'D)
But, I was going to say, that I've
changed...
(then, to everyone)
I guess around here that's
impossible.

We see Nina trying to stay strong, but her emotions are
getting the best of her.

NINA (CONT'D)
(rubbing her cheek)
I should get some ice. Symbolism
aside, you kinda nailed me with
your wedding ring...

She begins to tear up, turns, and heads out of the room.

INT. BEDROOM - MINUTES LATER

Nina sits teary eyed on the bed. David enters.

He looks at what a mess she is and lets out a disarmingly warm smile and small laugh. It captures the absurdity of what just happened. Nina can't help but laugh as well.

NINA

(touching her cheek)

Well don't laugh. It really hurts.

DAVID

I know.

NINA

I bet she's wanted to do that for twenty years

DAVID

You know, when you stopped being friends with Vanessa we were both incredibly relieved because we thought you were a corrupting influence on her.

They smile at each other, enjoying the irony. David sits next to her on the bed.

DAVID (CONT'D)

You're right. We need to get out of here. They're never going to accept us, so let's just go. I'm serious.

NINA

I know.

DAVID

My company has offices is Chicago, Boston... What's wrong?

NINA

What's gonna happen? We move to Chicago and get married? Does that seem real? What about Vanessa and Toby. Do they come visit us for Thanksgiving?

DAVID

What, suddenly we're being pragmatic?

NINA

No, but I don't know if moving anywhere is going to make a difference.

DAVID

What does that mean?

Nina hesitates -- but then reaches into a drawer of the side table and pulls out another FRAMED PHOTOGRAPH.

NINA

I was wrapping it, but then I -- here, just take it.

She hands the photograph to David.

CLOSE ON THE PHOTO: IT'S A SIMPLE PICTURE OF A MUCH YOUNGER DAVID RECLINING ON A PICNIC BLANKET. HE'S SMILING AS HE STARES RIGHT AT THE CAMERA. IT'S A GENTLE MEMORABLE IMAGE.

DAVID

I love this. This is great. I don't understand.

NINA

Look in the background.

David regards the photo carefully. On the grass, in the distance, is the blurry form of a 14-MONTH-OLD GIRL in a little yellow dress.

NINA (CONT'D)

I didn't notice it until I saw it blown up.

DAVID

That's Vanessa.

NINA

No it's not. Look at the hair.
(this is hard for her)
It doesn't matter where we go
David, we'll still always be this.

David has many emotions but no words. The image puts the entire history of their relationship into perspective.

NINA (CONT'D)

We can move someplace, yes. Or, we can stop now and this will just be remembered as something that happened one incredibly fucked up Christmas.

Just then, Vanessa appears in the doorway. She vibes that something very intense is going on.

VANESSA

Hey. Sorry. Can I talk to you for a second?

DAVID

Uh, yeah. What's up?

VANESSA

Um... the cops are next door. They want to talk to Mom... about the lawns... but she took off. What should I tell them?

DAVID

Um... yeah... can you just give us a second, sweetheart?

VANESSA

Sure.

Vanessa leaves. David turns to Nina, the enormity of the situation beginning to land.

NINA

Wow. Cops. This Christmas just went from bizarre to legendary.

David smiles. She's sees that he's very emotional. David hasn't cried in twenty years.

NINA (CONT'D)

C'mon, what was I gonna be, Vanessa's stepmother? It would have been ridiculous.

David laughs. He's a mess. He really doesn't want to lose her.

DAVID

I love you.

NINA

I know.

They smile at each other. They know it's over. It has to be.

DAVID

So now what happens?

Just then, from outside, they hear.....

SINGING VOICES
*Ni-i-na, Ni-i-na, please just give
 me a cha-ance...*

It's sung to the tune of "NOEL." Nina and David go to the window. They see ETHAN BACKED UP BY PAIGE'S CAROLING GROUP.

ETHAN
 (singing, the Carolers
 ahhhhing....)
*Cause I love you, yes I love you,
 cause you are my star. Ni-i-na, Ni-
 i-na....*

NINA
 Come on...

DAVID
 He's persistent...

Nina turns back to David.

NINA
 I'm sorry, David.

DAVID
 Go back to San Francisco. You
 shouldn't be here.

Ethan and the Carolers continue the serenade.

NINA
 What happens the next time we see
 each other?

DAVID
 I don't know. I think we'll be
 happy to see each other.

Nina smiles, her eyes well up.

David looks at the PHOTO again. He cocks his head.

DAVID (CONT'D)
 You know, I forgot that you were
 her...

They look at each other. A lot of love still between them. Then, Nina looks out the window at Ethan. She turns back to David and thinks of hugging him, but it doesn't feel right somehow. Instead, she just looks warmly into his eyes and then heads out the door.

David looks out the window waiting for Nina to appear. He's silent and very emotional.

After a moment, Vanessa steps into the doorway again.

VANESSA
You okay?

David half looks back at her.

DAVID
Yeah. Much better.
(then...)
Did you move out?

VANESSA
Sort of.

DAVID
Good. It's about time.

He smiles at his daughter, then looks back out the window. He watches Nina walk across the front lawn. Her steps are measured.

Vanessa watches her father as he stares out the window.

VANESSA (V.O.)
When this whole thing started,
Henry Chart said, "If an old cow
eats the neighbor's young grass,
everyone goes hungry." But I'm not
sure I agree with that.

EXT. DAVID'S HOUSE - SUNSET

David and Vanessa sit in what remains of Santa's sleigh.

VANESSA (V.O.)
My Dad was pretty mopey for a
while, but he was also really fun
in his misery and kept calling me
to come over and hang out...

They both take snowball target practice, trying to hit
Santa's head which is propped on an elf body.

VANESSA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
He even went through a short phase
where we both enjoyed my young
grass...

JUMP CUT: Both still in the sleigh, David now takes a hit off Vanessa's bong. He smiles and gives a thumbs up, then coughs profusely. Vanessa cracks up.

EXT. MAIN STREET OF TOWN - DAY

David and Vanessa drive in David's half-smashed Audi.

VANESSA (V.O.)

A couple of months later he met Julie who was only seven years younger than him and annoying only in that she was very smart, very nice, and for anyone's age, pretty friggin hot...

EXT. RECEPTION HALL - NIGHT

David dances closely with JULIE, 43, at the wedding reception of his cousin Jeffrey.

EXT. ORANGE DRIVE - CHRISTMAS EVE

We go back to see Nina walk across the lawn to Ethan. He stops singing. The Carolers continue.

VANESSA (V.O.)

Nina told Ethan that she and my Dad were splitting up...

Ethan turns to the Carolers and signals them to "quit it."

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

...but that she wasn't ever going to be with him either. It took some convincing, but she finally got him to unrip the e-ticket in his mind and go home.

Ethan's expression slowly turns to one of devastation.

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

Terry and Carol were thrilled that things were over with my Dad and Nina, but not nearly as thrilled as they were with their new vacation house in the Poconos.

EXT. SKI HOUSE - EVENING

On a snow covered deck, Carol and Terry make out in a HEART SHAPED HOT-TUB.

VANESSA (V.O.)

Terry also started a seniors ultimate frisbee league and once again got to play alongside his fellow co-founder Joel Silver. Yup, that Joel Silver.

EXT. FRISBEE FIELD - DAY

Terry plays hard against a bunch of 50-year-old diehards. Carol cheers from the sidelines.

VANESSA (V.O.)

My mother expanded her humanitarian efforts...

EXT. AFRICAN VILLAGE - DAY

Wearing polo shirts that read, "Barnyard International" Paige and Roger hold hands as they deliver a goat to a family in need.

VANESSA (V.O.)

And made amends with all our neighbors by replacing what she destroyed with lawn ornaments from around the world.

EXT. ORANGE DRIVE - DAY

The NEIGHBORS we saw earlier open their front door. A large AFRICAN FOLK-ART GIRAFFE sits on the porch.

VANESSA (V.O.)

My brother ended up meeting a nice girl named Samantha, who was much more his type than Nina. He even introduced her to my Dad at our cousin Jeffrey's wedding.

EXT. RECEPTION HALL - EVENING

Toby walks through a crowded party with cute, corporate looking SAMANTHA. They see David.

DAVID

Hey, there you are.

TOBY

Hey Dad, I'd like you to meet
Samantha.

DAVID

Hey, Samantha, it's really nice to
meet you.

Toby suddenly looks nervous as David shakes Samantha's hand.

TOBY

Okay, we gotta go.

Toby whisks Samantha towards the dance floor as David cracks up. Toby turns back and smiles at his Dad as Julie approaches David with two drinks.

VANESSA (V.O.)

And, as for me, well... I finally
got out of Ikea and started working
for this Italian furniture designer
who paid me just enough to afford
my own place in the city...

INT. VANESSA'S EAST VILLAGE FLAT - EVENING

Vanessa washes dishes in an extremely small apartment.

VANESSA (V.O.)

And let me stress. Just enough.

EXT. SOHO STREET - DAY

Vanessa walks down a crowded city street. She passes a fancy
ORGANIC RESTAURANT.

VOICE

Vanessa!

She turns and sees Nina dressed in chef's whites.

VANESSA

Oh, hey. Do you work here?

NINA

Yeah, we just finished the lunch
shift. The food is great, it's all
local.

(then)

(MORE)

NINA (CONT'D)
Hey, my Mom told me you're working
at this awesome furniture place.

VANESSA
Yeah, it's good. The stuff's crazy
expensive.

Just then, the door to the restaurant opens and a VERY
HANDSOME ENGLISH MAN in his EARLY 50'S emerges.

NINA
That's my boss.
(calling out)
Good bye, Mr. Daniels.

Daniels pulls out a cigarette and heads over.

DANIELS
Good work today, Nina. Would either
of you have a match?

VANESSA
Oh, I might.

Vanessa looks through her bag.

NINA
Mr. Daniels, this is my friend
Vanessa. We grew up across the
street from each other.

VANESSA
(finding a matchbook)
Here you go.

DANIELS
Thank you, Vanessa.

Mr. Daniels takes the matchbook and smiles at Vanessa. A
spark jumps between them. Nina's eyes dart back and forth, as
Daniels extends his hand to Vanessa.

DANIELS (CONT'D)
It's truly a pleasure to meet you.

Off Vanessa's expression both mortified and intrigued we...

CUT TO BLACK.