

HALF MARATHON

by

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"Half Marathon"

FADE IN

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - MORNING

Vinyl, beige boxes line a full parking lot. All the cars are similar, American sedans, and the apartments are all the same, three stories, six porches, and twelve balconies.

MEREDITH DAVIDSON, a round face with short brown hair over a long coat, smokes while walking a little dog, BUGLES, a beagle.

Bugles dives for the biking BEN MASON, a thin man with thick glasses, a book bag, and a messenger bag. The beagle BARKS and pulls Meredith.

BEN
Hey, Meredith.

Bugles nips at Ben's knapsack. The biker slows down.

MEREDITH
Hey Ben, what's in the bag?

BEN
This, nothing, just books. Oh, and um, bacon.

MEREDITH
Bacon?

BEN
Bacon, breakfast. I was in a hurry.

With his wet noise, Bugles lifts under the backpack's top flap. He licks at the zipper.

MEREDITH
Save your bacon, I can't hold him much longer.

BEN
Thanks, have a good day.

MEREDITH

You, too.

Ben bikes; Bugles gives chase. They run through an identical parking lot, another, and then back. Bugles stops, but Meredith keeps running, now dragging her counterpart. He ambles past as a car backs up, just missing the pup.

Around the corner, into another lot, the woman and her dog speed past NEIGHBORS, some dressed for work, some for bed, and some undressed, going about their morning routines. Meredith jogs with tattered shoes, laces untied.

Bugles tightens his leash toward KIRBY, the beloved schnauzer of ALLISON CANTRELL, a tall, slouching woman in her late 30's.

Meredith struggles with her dog and the Illinois prairie wind. Arriving at the edge of the complex, almost to the open fields ahead, she trips from the curb to the sidewalk. She flips into winter shrubbery around the wooden apartment sign. Bugles follows his owner into the prickly brush.

MEREDITH

Okay, we'll walk from here.

INT. MEREDITH'S OFFICE - DAY

Phones RING, papers SHUFFLE, MEN and WOMEN, dressed for business, march about their tasks. At the end of a row of cubicles, Meredith leans into her computer.

ON SCREEN, a NIKE shoe spins. The mouse clicks a red button and the shoe turns red. With a BEEP, an instant message alerts, "CZAR_NICKOLAS_III: COFFEE?"

Without hesitation or reply, Meredith stands with her Beagle coffee mug and purse. Rounding her cubicle corner, she's blocked by the mousey Jenny Grace. At five-four, and just under 110 pounds in a thick coat, Jenny barely stands after their mild collision.

JENNY GRACE

Sorry, Meredith.

MEREDITH

That's okay Jenny, what's up?

JENNY GRACE
My computer's doing that thing?

MEREDITH
That thing?

JENNY GRACE
That thing where it doesn't work,
and it goes like BRR-RA-RA-RA-EOH.

MEREDITH
How'd it sound again?

JENNY GRACE
BRR-RA-RA-

MEREDITH
-Oh, RA-BLAH-HIYAH-GRRR-

JENNY GRACE
-GLAH-PHAH-SHOO-

Spikey hair emerges, followed by a stripe shirt man in his mid-thirties in middle management, ROBERT BERGESON.

ROBERT
-Excuse me, ladies. Am I
interrupting anything?

JENNY GRACE
Meredith was just helping me with a
computer problem.

MEREDITH
Oh no, I can't help you. When's the
new computer guy get here?

ROBERT
Next week-ish. Say, do you have a
cigarette?

From her massive purse, Meredith produces a pack and then a cigarette.

ROBERT
I'll see what I can do about your
computer, Jenny. Thanks, Mere.

Jenny Grace walks away smiling with unwarranted hope.

ROBERT

You're gonna have to figure out that computer thing. You gotta take charge sometimes 'round here.

MEREDITH

I don't know computers.

ROBERT

Call Chris. Say, you got a lighter?

Meredith flashes a false grin and hands over her loner lighter, a red Bic. Lighting up, Robert descends the stairs.

Meredith continues her forward progress, but a chair slides in her way. VALERIE GATCHELL, a stork of a woman with red hair and an orange Illini sweater, pilots a chair on wheels.

VALERIE

Mere, I need you.

MEREDITH

What?

VALERIE

I just sent it to you, in an email.

MEREDITH

Well, I'll get it later.

Valerie shuffles her feet and blocks the aisle.

VALERIE

Well, we need to look at it.
See, when you—

MEREDITH

—Come on.

Meredith turns around, and Valerie scoots behind her.

MEREDITH (continued)

Leave the chair.

Valerie pushes back her chair, which slides directly into NICK FLENNIKEN, an obese man with thinning hair and cool glasses. He nearly spills both coffees.

NICK
Fucking fuck!

At Meredith's desk, Valerie hovers. The two wait while the computer makes an awkward GRINDING sound not dissimilar to the previous noise/conversation.

MEREDITH
Great!

VALERIE
Ick.

Valerie pokes the screen as if it were a cat fallen asleep. Nick enters the cubicle carrying two mugs, half-full of coffee. He hands the cat mug to Meredith.

NICK
Figured you were detained.

VALERIE
(flirty)
Hey Nick, where's my coffee.

NICK
There's some on the floor, if you're thirsty. Hey, Meredith, you get my email?

MEREDITH
Computers are broken.

VALERIE
Did you call Chris?

Meredith feigns a smile, and Nick audibly smacks his head.

NICK
Who needs a stronger drink.

Meredith raises her hand first, then Valerie. Over the adjoining cubicles, hands raise.

INT. THE BLIND PIG - NIGHT

In the small, dim lit bar, Meredith, Valerie, and Nick crowd around two tables pushed together. They sit with JENN WRIGHT, a large woman, dwarfing the other Jenny Grace, and SAMANTHA, the receptionist trapped behind the table.

VALERIE

Show me again.

Jenny Grace waves a diamond ring in front of the ladies and Nick. He and Meredith break away.

NICK

Oh Christ, how was your Christmas?

JENN WRIGHT

Andrew's still shopping. He doesn't know rings.

MEREDITH

Holly jolly. Went to visit the parents in Oh-hi-oh. Chris was supposed to meet me there, since its half way, but he was busy.

JENNY GRACE

I picked mine out.

VALERIE

Really, I think that's terrible. Well, not terrible. Still...

The ring glints in the bar light. Meredith shields her eyes.

NICK

Forget him, it's a New Year. Make any resolutions?

JENNY GRACE

I said I liked this one. We weren't shopping for rings, we were getting gifts. It was, like, October outside. We shop early because Christmas is awful. I mean, not the season but the mall. We walked by the rings, and looked, I liked this one, but didn't think anything of it. Then...

MEREDITH

To quit smoking, lose weight, get married and run a marathon. You?

NICK

Didn't you hear, I'm getting married.

Jenn Wright breaks the conversation barrier.

JENN WRIGHT

No you're not. Is he?

NICK

Meredith is too.

Ringed hand to heart, Jenny Grace GASPS.

JENNY GRACE

Oh, how is Chris?

JENN WRIGHT

Jesus, Jenny he was joking.

JENNY GRACE

Sorry, Jenn. I didn't know. Nobody tells me anything. Anybody else?

Samantha, in the corner, raises her hand and ring.

VALERIE

Sam, why didn't you tell anybody?

NICK

This is ridiculous, you want to go outside, have a smoke?

SAMANTHA

I didn't want to steal Jenny's story.

MEREDITH

Is that a proposal?

Hand extended, Nick guides Meredith from the table.

NICK

Absolutely.

EXT. MEREDITH'S PORCH - NIGHT

Venetian blinds pull apart, and Meredith slides the glass door to the porch. Shivering, with her hands in her hoodie pocket, she removes a pack of camel lights and a lighter.

Cold air and a cigarette feed on each other in billows of breath and smoke. The mercury vapor lamps BUZZ and light the lot a haunting green. Meredith's porch is crowded with two sets of patio furniture.

Through the thick air, a lit cigarette lands in Meredith's hair. A floor above, Allison leans over the balcony.

ALLISON

I'm sorry, oh, sorry. I've been meaning to quit.

MEREDITH

Me too.

EXT. ALLISON'S BALCONY - NIGHT

A cloud of smoke billows around the Christmas lights still donning Allison's festive balcony.

ALLISON

I saw you running today.

MEREDITH

I just started. That's one of the reasons I need to stop smoking.

ALLISON

I might start running. How much does it cost?

MEREDITH

I spent 300 today, shoes and iPods and such. I needed new shoes.

Meredith's kicks up her leg revealing a tattered red Converse. Allison lifts her leg to show the same shoe, different color. The coincidence stops the conversation.

MEREDITH

I like how you did your living room.

ALLISON

How do you have your's?

Meredith turns around to survey the room.

MEREDITH

Mine's a bit more crowded. These apartments could be more spacious.

Allison exits and ashes her cigarette outside.

ALLISON

I wish it had a bigger kitchen.

MEREDITH

I don't cook much.

ALLISON

Me either, but I might if I had a bigger kitchen.

The women stare over the porch, where another cigarette falls from the sky like a lofting star.

INT. MEREDITH'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

A Stir Crazy popcorn popper stirs corn in oil. Above, butter drips. Meredith mixes half diet and half regular Dr. Pepper on the rocks. The popcorn pops and Bugles jumps.

INT. MEREDITH'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The apartment looks like a used furniture showroom. The living room has three full-sized couches and a loveseat. Two full bookshelves don't even hold all the books which are also strewn about the floor.

Under a blanket and a dog, Meredith eats popcorn, drinks soda, watches television, reads a book, and checks Myspace.

She clicks the first friend on her list, CHRIS, an attractive man with a big grin and an Illini cap. At Chris' page, DMB plays. Meredith stops it with a frown. She scrolls through his top 16, she's number 14. Bugles is number 8.

The channel changes to a RON POPEIL infomercial. Meredith puts down her book, MARATHON RUNNING FOR DUMMIES, and pours vodka into half a glass of half and half soda.

INT. MEREDITH'S LIVING ROOM - MORNING

The kinks in the blinds light the room. The TV's chatters, as Bugles paws at his owner's pillow buried face.

Meredith shakes her head awake. With the TV remote, she sees the time, 6:30 AM. She frowns at her happy dog.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - MORNING

Dog in tow, Meredith jogs. She picks up pace, rounding a row of Ford Tauri. Bugles slows down. Turning to pull, Meredith sees Ben biking toward them.

BEN

Morning, Meredith.

MEREDITH

Hey, Ben.

BEN

So what are you, like, running now?

MEREDITH

I was trying to, Bugles is a wuss.

At the sound of his name, Bugles perks his ears and tail.

BEN

Well, I can watch him.

MEREDITH

What?

BEN

While you run, we can walk, me and him. He is a he, right? Bugles is a boy's name.

MEREDITH

Don't you have to get to work?

While Ben answers the question, Meredith checks her watch, her hair, and mostly the sky. Ben flips through his bag.

BEN

School, no, I was going to the library, return some books. Actually, I might keep one, I should, yeah.

Looking around, Meredith fidgets with the leash and eventually recognizes silence.

MEREDITH

So, it's not a trouble?

Ben drops his bike in the middle of the lane. He opens his backpack and removes a library book and a bag of bacon.

BEN

Nope. Great.

The chain exchange commences and Ben, already reading, walks away. Meredith runs away.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - MINUTES LATER

ECU: A Swatch marks 00:10:00

Ben flips a page and hands another strip to Bugles, who barks and runs toward Meredith, covered in sweat and dying.

MEREDITH

Hey, little guy. How was he?

Ben's arm jerks and he drops the book. The dog leaps over a wrecked bike, Ben trips over it.

MEREDITH

Is that your bike?

BEN

What, this old thing? Yes. It was a bike, it was my bike. Ewww, um—

MEREDITH

Do you need a ride?

INT. CHEVY CAVALIER - MORNING

A MORNING DJ screams over forced laughter. Meredith's wet hair covers her eyes as she looks out the window. Ben offers her a strip of bacon, she declines. Meredith stares out the window as they pass a small brick house for sale by owner.

EXT. UNIVERSITY - DAY

The car slides around PEDESTRIANS and parks in the road. Ben crunches into his seat belt.

BEN

This is fine, thanks. Um...

MEREDITH

Do you need a ride home?

BEN

Could you? What time?

MEREDITH

5ish.

Ben contorts his face and checks his non-existent watch. He then nods his head and exits. They both wave.

INT. MEREDITH'S OFFICE - BREAK ROOM - DAY

Long Johns, snails, maple squares, glazed, and cake donuts fill boxes. The hands of typists dive for favorites. Nick, Valerie, and the Jennys talk in the back.

Meredith looks over the dozen choices. The new guy, CRAIG, a cleancut college grad with a big grin, walks beside her. She grabs the half-sprinkled, iced glazed.

CRAIG

Why do they do that?

Meredith crooks her head in response.

CRAIG (cont.)

The sprinkles. Just half, like it's moderation. Like it's half the fat, half the sprinkles.

MEREDITH

I imagine it as a couple. He likes sprinkles. She hates 'em. But they love each other, and they're watching their carbs, cause it's 2002, I forgot to mention that, it's in the past. They order a half sprinkle donut and split it.

Craig reaches out his donut free hand.

CRAIG

I'm Craig, I'm new.

MEREDITH

I'm Meredith. I'm old.

CRAIG

Well Mere, do you want to split it?

MEREDITH

No.

CRAIG

Cool.

Craig grabs a Long John. Valerie moves between them, she lifts a snail.

VALERIE

I skipped breakfast.

Meredith and Craig nod in response. Allison returns to Nick and repeats her conversation.

CRAIG

So how is this place?

MEREDITH

Not too bad. Sometimes its alright.
I'd call it half-sprinkled.

CRAIG

Mmmm.

INT. MEREDITH'S OFFICE - BREAK ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The FULL STAFF, mostly overweight, holding coffee, stand at attention. Robert holds a donut like a microphone.

ROBERT

Everbody, Craig. He's, like, a computer whiz, so that's cool. We need that. He'll be the new Chris 2.0. Craig, you don't know Chris. But he was you before you. He quit. This is Craig though, he's just starting-here. Craig you wanna' tell us anything about yourself?

CRAIG

Um, I'm Craig. I just, I just graduated, from ISU-

VALERIE

-Woo!

Everyone waits for Valerie's head to explode.

CRAIG

Ah, I have a degree in computer science, and I'll be doing some of your web programming, tech work-

ROBERT

-Any hobbies, anything?

CRAIG

I like, ah, computers, and sports.
I run; I'm a runner.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NOON

In sweats, Craig runs to the road. Feet moving, body stopped, he looks both ways then crosses the street.

INT. MEREDITH'S OFFICE - NOON

Nick and Meredith peer out the window.

NICK

What the fuck is that about? He,
like, brought workout clothes to
work. We don't have a shower.
There's no locker room. Did we get
a locker room? Who does he think he
is um, ah, name me a runner.

MEREDITH

Jackie Joyner-Kersey.

NICK

Jackie Joyner-Kersey?

MEREDITH

Give him a break, he just got out
of college.

Nick turns from the window to focus his rage on Meredith.

NICK

Oh, and in college people just go
running. Like, all the time.

MEREDITH

Yeah. Don't you ever drive through
campus?

NICK

No, it's gross. Do kids still run?
Don't they have computers.

MEREDITH

I ran track. Sort of, Freshmen year. I just ran a relay.

Nick's expression changes from anger to inquisition.

NICK

What was your time?

MEREDITH

Our time was, like, 1:50. It was the 200 M relay.

NICK

Oh so you ran like a, wait my phone has a calculator.

Nick flips open his Krazor phone.

MEREDITH

I ran alright, I wasn't the anchor, and it was just junior college but—

NICK

—Terribly interesting, did you get that email I sent you?

MEREDITH

The song.

NICK

Yes.

Meredith pulls back her mouth like a reeled in fish.

MEREDITH

About that. It's kinda, annoying.

NICK

Annoying is good. Annoying is memorable. People remember things that are annoying. Like—

They both lean toward the window.

NICK (continuing)

—What the fuck?

EXT. PARKING LOT - NOON

Holding a Subway bag, Craig runs in place as he looks both ways. A car passes before he crosses the street.

NICK (O.S.)

Now what's the point, really. And he's got, is that Subway? What a fucking asshole.

INT. MEREDITH'S OFFICE - NOON

Nick shakes his head and avoids the window. Meredith continues staring.

MEREDITH

I think he seems alright, sort of. This is weird though.

NICK

I'm done with the new guy. You want to go out for drinks and talk about him. Valerie and the Jennys are in.

MEREDITH

Yeah, no, I got to pick up a friend, sort of. It's weird though.

INT. GREGORY HALL - DAY

A power point presentation ends, and the screen goes blank. Doctor Cain, a large bald man with a compensating beard, stands before a full lecture hall.

DOCTOR CAIN

If you have any initial questions, please see my TA, Mr. Mason. I'll be available during my office hours as listed on your syllabus. Mr. M here will be available Tuesday, Thursday, and most Friday nights.

THE CLASS, mostly Freshmen, disperses. Several YOUNG WOMEN surround Ben. He does his best to field a myriad of questions and statements that sound like questions.

EXT. GREGORY HALL - DAY

COLLEGE STUDENTS, attractive, young and wearing iPods, cross the street without looking. Meredith cranes her neck out the window. She stops every couple feet to avoid another suicidal street crosser.

Reaching the curb, Meredith finds PATRICIA, a mid-twenties hipster with thick glasses and a thicker haircut.

MEREDITH

Have you seen Ben around?

PATRICIA

Ben?

MEREDITH

He's um, a, he's a guy I'm picking up. He's tall-er than that guy, kind of a, ah dork-

PATRICIA

Wait, Ben? Ben Mason? Is he kinda'-

Like a monkey doing the robot, Patricia impersonates Ben.

PATRICIA (continued)

Kinda' really bad hair.

Ben exits the building and walks, like a penguin, to the circle drive.

MEREDITH

Absolutely, he walks weird too.

PATRICIA

Like a penguin. Like he's holding an egg all winter. He always smells like Hot Pockets. I don't see what people see in him. Wait, you guys aren't dating right?

Ben pats Patricia on the back as he opens the car door.

BEN

No.

MEREDITH

Absolutely not.

Ben waves to Patricia as he gets in the car.

BEN
Hey Patty. Where's Steve?

PATTY
Picking me up in the new car.

BEN
You got a new car?

PATTY
Sort of.

As Meredith drives away, a yellow school bus parks.

INT. CAVALIER - AFTERNOON

Ben hugs his bag and looks out the passenger side window.
Meredith drives and looks out the driver side window.

MEREDITH
You don't really smell like Hot
Pockets.

BEN
No, I, I, ah just ate a Hot Pocket.

MEREDITH
Mmm. What kind.

Meredith sniffs toward Ben.

BEN
Turkey, broccoli, cheese.

MEREDITH
Sounds more like a Lean Pocket
situation to me.

BEN
It might have been a Lean Pocket
situation.

MEREDITH
Blah.

BEN

Blah-AH.

MEREDITH

BL-BL-AH-BLAH.

BEN

Blah.

Meredith smiles and drives away.

INT. MEREDITH'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

JINGLE, CLICK, CLUNK, the door knob turns. Bugles jumps from the couch and meets his owner.

MEREDITH

Hi, baby! Hi! Hi! Watch your step,
there's a dog.

BEN

Hi! Hi, there.

Meredith turns with a gaped mouth and arched eyebrow.

MEREDITH

You eat already?

BEN

A Lean Pocket.

MEREDITH

'K, I'm going to order something.
You smoke?

Meredith opens her phone and paces the kitchen, Ben watches her while examining various items of kitchen kitch.

BEN

Only when I drink.

EXT. PORCH - TWILIGHT

A half a pizza, half pepperoni, half sausage, sits on porch next to half a bottle of wine. Meredith and Ben smoke.

BEN

So, wait, you're telling me you've
never even been to Chicago.

MEREDITH

No, I've been there, I just don't go there.

BEN

Ever? What if you needed something, like, I don't know, culture?

MEREDITH

I'd go somewhere else, New York or something.

BEN

Have you ever been to New York?

MEREDITH

No.

Ben ashes his cigarette then drags before continuing.

BEN

I'd go to Tokyo.

MEREDITH

No you wouldn't.

BEN

What? I'd go.

Leaning toward Ben, Meredith steals back the wine.

MEREDITH

No you wouldn't, why would you?

BEN

Different culture, it's big, lights, I don't know, Asians? Is that enough?

MEREDITH

It's fine but you're not going there. You can't even get to Chicago.

BEN

I could take the train.

MEREDITH

To Tokyo?

BEN

You're right, I'm never going to Tokyo. I'll go to Chicago, though.

MEREDITH

You'll need a ride.

BEN

Can I get ride?

MEREDITH

I'm not going to Chicago. I'm going to New York.

Ben snubs his cigarette. He gulps wine and swashes it in his mouth. Shaking his head first, he leans in the direction of Meredith. She smokes her cigarette and he turns.

When Ben looks back, Meredith kisses him.

EXT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Bugles paces in front of the door. He BARKS then lies down.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Two middle-weight bodies merge in low light. The sex is gentle, but motivated, they roll between dominance. Each position change is met with soundless GASPS.

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP, Meredith smacks her alarm. She rubs her temples while looking at Ben, asleep. Frowning, she resolves to roll from bed, knocking off books and clothes.

On the nightstand sits another bottle of wine. The top drawer sits open, revealing condoms and underwear. She grabs underwear and closes the unmentionable clothes drawer. Socks follow, then shorts and shoes. She pulls a large U of I sweater over her sports bra.

Meredith exits the room on tip toe, she opens her door and steps gingerly over the sleeping dog.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - MORNING

Small fingers click the swatch "SET" button. Meredith jogs. She passes Allison, power walking her dog. The women exchange waves.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - MINUTES LATER

Meredith breathes heavily while rounding the third parking lot. She checks her watch.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - MINUTES LATER

Meredith grabs her side and wheezes. She shakes her head, and walks, hands at her waist. She resets her watch.

ECU: Swatch marks 00:22:36

INT. MEREDITH'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Bugles BARKS as Meredith enters sweating. She immediately removes her sweater and shoes. Other clothes drop as she approaches the bathroom. She pulls back the shower curtain.

BEN (O.S.)

Hey.

Meredith SCREAMS. She curtain covers herself against the door and Ben.

BEN

What, oh, oh, sorry.

Hands over eyes, Ben continues.

BEN (cont.)

I didn't know where you, um. You're going to take a shower.

Meredith, still covering, carefully steps into the bathtub and pulls the curtain around her body.

MEREDITH

Yes.

BEN

Cool.

MEREDITH

Ben?

BEN

Yes.

MEREDITH

Can you take Bugles for a walk, or something?

BEN

Of course, yes, of course. I'll just, um. Bugles! Let's roll.

The hot water turns and Meredith raises her head to greet it. She closes her eyes and opens them as the water rushes against her neck and chest. She leans forward to rest her hands against the tile wall.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Steam and Meredith exit the bathroom. She wears a towel over her head and hair. A second towel wraps her body.

MEREDITH

I thought you went for a walk.

BEN

We're back.

MEREDITH

You need a ride again?

BEN

No. I'll get there later.

MEREDITH

Fine.

She enter her room, removing the towel. Ben cranes his neck as she shuts the door.

INT. MEREDITH'S OFFICE - DAY

A package lands on Meredith's keyboard. It advertises a Swoosh(tm) and a foreign shipping address.

NICK

Package.

MEREDITH

You get demoted?

NICK

The receptionist quit.

VALERIE

The new one?

NICK AND MEREDITH

What?

Valerie ascends over her cubicle. Craig lifts his head over the other side.

NICK

Jinx!

CRAIG

Who?

VALERIE

Samantha quit.

NICK AND MEREDITH

Crystal quit.

NICK

Double jinx!

VALERIE

Her name was Crystal?

NICK AND MEREDITH

Whatever.

NICK

Triple jinx. You're in trouble now.

VALERIE

Her name was Crystal, she said hi to me when I came in.

NICK

Well, that's her job.

Valerie descends to her cubicle.

VALERIE

She quit.

CRAIG

What you got there? A package.

Nick stares down Craig and then walks away.

MEREDITH

Shoes.

CRAIG

What is it with women and shoes?

NICK (O.S.)

What?

Meredith grimaces.

MEREDITH

They're Nike iPod shoes.

Craig leans forward with an AWE. MEREDITH pulls the box away from him.

CRAIG

What color?

EXT. MEREDITH'S OFFICE - NOON

Over the trunk of her car, Meredith laces her new red shoes. She stretches awkwardly.

She works desperately at her iPod. Eventually giving up and running to an NPR podcast.

EXT. NEIL STREET - DAY

Through traffic, Meredith runs while her iPod plays "This American Life" and a gives split times.

EXT. BONEYARD CREEK - DAY

The creek looks like sewage, but the path is pretty with fresh snow. Meredith runs with her eyes to the ground, trying to step into other prints. Looking up, she sees a crowd of COLLEGE RUNNERS, gaining on her. Meredith cuts through an alley and down the Engineering Quad.

EXT. UNIVERSITY AVENUE - DAY

Passing the television station, Meredith slows to a walk, just in front of the Taco Bell. She looks both way, Taco Bell and Dairy Queen.

INT. DAIRY QUEEN - NOON THIRTY

The Dairy Queen menu has four sections, specials, hot eats, cool treats, and Blizzards. The list of Blizzards is lengthy and majestic. Using her finger to read through the menu, Meredith leaves the Blizzards behind.

MEREDITH

I'll just take a sugar, ah, sugar
free, no, a Dilly Bar.

EXT. MEREDITH'S OFFICE PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

Meredith run/walks past cars while eating the remainder of her dripping Dilly Bar.

Craig races by, with Subway. They exchange waves, she flips the Dilly Bar behind her back and accidently slips the remainder to the ground.

Meredith stares down the lost ice cream, and then looks back toward Craig, jogging in place as he looks for his keys. She lights a cigarette, and check her iPod.

ECU: An iPod shows 00:26:35.

INT. MEREDITH'S APARTMENT - DAY

The apartment is a bit of a mess. Books line the floor and the numerous couches look sat upon. The television is fully turned around, A "Gilmore Girls" rerun plays ON SCREEN.

Keys JINGLE and the lock TUMBLES. Bugles and Ben turn toward the door. Bugles BARKS.

BEN

Hey, Meredith. I turned the TV a
little bit. This couch is more
comfortable than that couch. Why do
you have five couches?.

Meredith tosses one pair of shoes on the counter and flips another pair at the wall. Even before both shoes hit the ground, Meredith rubs her feet.

MEREDITH

What are you still doing here?

BEN

Hanging out with Bugles.

MEREDITH

Get out of here.

BEN

What?

MEREDITH

Listen, I'm sorry, but you have to leave. My feet hurt, my head hurts, it's been a bad day.

Meredith opens the door long enough for Ben to exit. Moments later, he KNOCKS.

MEREDITH

What?

BEN(O.S.)

I forgot my book.

MEREDITH

Where's it at?

BEN (O.S.)

I think I left it on the, on the toilet.

Meredith locks the door.

BEN (O.S.)

That's fair.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - DAY

Ben's apartment door, number 103, is closed. Meredith, holding a library book, KNOCKS.

Ben opens the door immediately and kisses Meredith, who pulls back and then moves forward through the door.

INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - DAY

Naked, Ben and Meredith embrace on a mattress, on the floor. Ben rests with his eyes closed. Meredith surveys the room.

Beer bottles, plates, and books lie in no particular order. Ben has maps, large survey maps, marked all over. His place looks like an archeological dig of a dorm room.

MEREDITH

So, where are your sheets?

BEN

Huh?

MEREDITH

Nothing.

In the corner of the room are four aquariums all filled with dirt and ants.

BEN

Let's just sleep.

MEREDITH

Oh, I'm not sleeping here.

INT. MEREDITH'S BEDROOM - DAY

Meredith sits on her own bed and gingerly puts on her shoes.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

The untilled fields look like leveled cities. Meredith hobbles past the mailboxes and sparse trees of farm country.

VALERIE (O.S.)

No sheets.

INT. OFFICE BREAK ROOM - DAY

A sign on the fridge reads, "PLEASE, SWEET JESUS, PLEASE REMOVE THE CHICKEN(?) OR WHATEVER THAT IS FROM THE FRIDGE, OR PLEASE DON'T OPEN THE FRIDGE. -MGT (NICK)"

MEREDITH

None.

Valerie eats an amalgamation between a donut and a scone. The pastry-like product CRUNCHES between her teeth. Meredith drinks from a thermos.

VALERIE

Not even a comforter or a duvet?

MEREDITH

Not even a pillowcase.

VALERIE

Get outta' there. This guys no good. He sounds like a serial killer or a fine artist.

MEREDITH

No, he's sweet.

Rob parts the two women. He pours a large mug of coffee into a "#1 DAD" mug.

ROBERT

What are you eating?

VALERIE

A donut.

MEREDITH

A shake, for lunch.

ROBERT

That's gross. Those have been there for, like, over a week.

Meredith mouths "TWO WEEKS," and gives a peace sign.

VALERIE

I brought a lunch but you can't open the fridge.

Rob opens the fridge.

VALERIE AND MEREDITH

Don't open the—

The fridge opens with near visible odor. The two women duck into their elbows. Rob falls back, almost to the ground.

NICK (O.S.)

Who opened the door? Who opened the
fucking door?

Shirt over his mouth and nose, a bandit, Nick hits the
fridge door like Refrigerator Perry. The door shuts but the
effects linger. Valerie hits Nick with a stiff arm and exits
the room like Walter Payton.

ROBERT

(coughing)

Sorry. Sorry. What's in there?

NICK

Chicken! Raw chickens! Where were
you gonna cook the chicken, Craig.
I know it was you. Fucking health
nut, fucking chicken. Christ, I'm
going for a smoke.

MEREDITH

I'm coming with you.

Rob, using his tie like a respirator, places a managerial
hand on Meredith's shoulder.

ROBERT

Wait, Meredith.

MEREDITH

What, Rob?

ROBERT

I need you to take care of this
fridge thing. You should take
charge around here a little more.

With a second pat on his employee's shoulder, Rob exits.
Meredith drops her hands long enough to fully frown, then
she recalls the smell and exits at a run.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Under an Illini rain poncho shrouded in toilet paper,
Meredith opens the fridge. GAGS proclaim from O.S.

Like tokens and prizes from a carnival game, the fridges contents fall into the trash as Meredith pulls them forward. She does this with abandon, but catches a Dr. Pepper in midair. Shotgunning the soda, she throws away the can with the remainder of the chilled food products.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Visible breath rushes out of Meredith as she breaths deep on the winter air. The snow CRUNCHES below. The fields are perfectly flat, leveled by a light snow which still falls. Meredith winces as she slows to a walk and checks her time.

ECU: iPod shows 31:10.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

The cars look even more alike, covered in snow. Meredith saunters toward Ben, walking Bugles and eating a bagel.

ALLSON

My dogs are barking.

BEN

Actually, he's been real good.

MEREDITH

My feet hurt, jerk-store.

BEN

Need me to rub them? It grosses me out, but I'll do it if coerced.

Meredith leaps the leash and belts her arms around Ben's expanding waist.

MEREDITH

My feet gross you out?

BEN

Feet gross me out, yours are, um, beautiful.

INT. MEREDITH'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Like a velvet stage curtain, Meredith's stained white sock slides back to reveal her distressed feet.

BEN

Oh, those are the ugliest, ugh,
what are those, toes? How'd they
get like, like, that?

Meredith's toes line up like knocked down bowling pins. The
soles of her feet have the hilly terrain of a golf course.

MEREDITH

My toes are crooked, that's normal,
for me at least. At least they're
not webbed.

BEN

Webbed toes are cool, at least then
you can swim better. Like a fish.
Like a fish man. Like Aquaman.
Crooked toes just look broken. Are
your toes broken?

MEREDITH

No. Just blistered, I'm training
for a marathon.

BEN

On these feet?

MEREDITH

I might get new feet. Shoes at
least.

BEN

New shoes'd be a rug to cover a
hole in the floor.

MEREDITH

So I need new feet first? Robot
feet.

BEN

At least.

Ben massages her feet despite promises against it.

BEN

I wish I had a robot arm.

MEREDITH

What would you do with it?

BEN

Open stuff. Massage ugly feet.

MEREDITH

I'll get you a robot arm.

BEN

I'll buy you robot feet.

MEREDITH

I'll get new shoes. I bought those online. I wear an eight, so that's what I got. Thinkin' maybe it was a bit of an eight and a half type situation.

BEN

Think? I'll get you new shoes.

MEREDITH

You don't have to get me new shoes.

Ben ceases the message.

BEN

If it'll save me from ever having to rub your feet again.

MEREDITH

Here we'll trade. I'll rub yours.

BEN

No you won't you're not getting your hand on my feet.

MEREDITH

Why not?

BEN

I have webbed toes.

MEREDITH

Gross.

BEN
I know, right?

They laugh together and Meredith lays her head down as Ben, watching TV, continues the foot massage.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

ON SCREEN, an add boasts "BUY ANY PAIR OF SHOES AND GET A SECOND OF EQUAL OR LESSER VALUE AT 1/2 PRICE!" Meredith leans over the screen, reading carefully, she pushes back her hair, longer now.

Valerie yells in Meredith's earphoned ear.

VALERIE
Hey Mere, How's the art look?

MEREDITH
Good, I like the colors, the copies
a bit stilted though.

VALERIE
Yeah, Nick's distracted with the
grocery store campaign.

Meredith removes her headphones revealing MUSIC (O.S.).

MEREDITH
Oh, the jingle.

Standing, Meredith pushes Valerie aside and marches to Nick's cubicle where Craig stands with an acoustic guitar.

NICK
Hometown Proud, Hometown Proud,
IGA! IGA!

MEREDITH
Alright, cut it out!

CRAIG
IGA! IGA!

CRAIG
We're adding guitar to the song.

MEREDITH
It's not a song.

NICK
I don't think it really
needs the guitar. Hey!

MEREDITH

You've practiced enough. I can't
bill these hours. What do I write,
jam session? Sing-a-long? Grab-ass?
Monster truck rally? Soccer?

ROBERT (O.S.)

-Hey Mere, did you hear back from
the grocery store?

Everyone turns to see Rob standing directly behind Meredith

MEREDITH

No.

ROBERT

They love it. Love it. Great job.

Rob ferociously pats Meredith on the back. His hand lingers
longer with each pat.

MEREDITH

Oh, it was all Nick's idea.

Rob and Nick shake hands like political opponents after an
election.

ROBERT

Great job. Whatdaya' working on
now.

NICK

Oh, we're just practicing.

ROBERT

Well, keep it up.

NICK

Ok, key of, um, B!
Hometown Proud!

Rob and Craig join. Rob drums the cubicle wall.

NICK

Here's the part where the carts
roll past the produce. Then, good,
less guitar more clapping.

Before the chorus can even get going, Meredith has her headphones on.

MEREDITH

I'm gonna go for a run!

Rob gives her a thumbs up.

EXT. UNIVERSITY AVE. - CHAMPAIGN - DAY

Strong winds whip up limbs and leaves like a cheering crowd. Meredith, in a long sleeve tee and leggings, struggles through the wind. She leaps puddles and breaths deep on the still chilled air.

Her hair stretches behind her now, past her shoulders. Her baggy shirt fits with even more abandon, beaten back against the gail.

She turns a corner at the Northeastern edge of campus. She crosses the street at a small brick house for sale by owner.

EXT. MORROW PLOTS - DAY

Hoe in hand and twig in his mouth, Ben stands over a small patch of farmland in the middle of campus.

Meredith, running, sees him and waves. Ben waves, sees who it is, then races to catch up.

BEN

Wait! Meredith! Wait.

Meredith SIGHS, reluctantly slowing down. She runs along with Ben as he wheezes to her side. Ben is bigger now, with the rough beard of a man letting himself go.

MEREDITH

What, Ben?

BEN

Nothing, just wanted to say "Hey."

MEREDITH

(laughs)

Hey.

BEN

You running?

MEREDITH

Yeah.

BEN

Good, keep it up. Hey, I'll be working tonight, I can't make it over. You can stop by later though.

Ben pats her on the back and then comes to a complete stop, hands on his knees.

MEREDITH

That's okay I might go out with some friends from work.

Ben, obviously in pain, waves her off. He coughs what appears to be straight dirt. Meredith hides a giggle and speeds on her way.

EXT. OFFICE - DAY

Sprinting down Chester street, and under the overpass, Meredith clicks her iPod.

ECU - 00:37:45

She slows down and looks ahead. Outside the office, Nick, Craig, and Rob have formed a band. A guitar case sits on the ground with change inside.

Nick, the singer, waves to Meredith, who drops a dollar in the case.

EXT. BLIND PIG - TWILIGHT

Under heat lamps, bar patrons smoke. Clothing has switched to early spring, there are new leaves on the trees. Meredith smokes with Nick, JENN WRIGHT, and Craig.

JENN WRIGHT

No sheets?

MEREDITH

Nope.

NICK

Not even a comforter, or a duvet?

Meredith shakes her head.

CRAIG

So, is this like serious?

MEREDITH

I don't know, he stays at my place a lot. I don't know. He's good with Bugles.

CRAIG

Ok. But not, are you dating?

MEREDITH

We've never really gone on a date.

JENN WRIGHT

You haven't gone on a date?

MEREDITH

No, what's a date?

CRAIG

Well, still the same. Dinner, a movie, bowling, the opera—

NICK

—The opera? Why are you out here? You don't even smoke.

CRAIG

Do I have to smoke to be outside?

NICK

As long as I have to smoke outside.

CRAIG

Can I get a smoke then?

NICK

Nobody give him one. Ridiculous.

Meredith slides a cigarette to Craig. Nick notices, and pops his neck when Jenn hands Craig a lighter.

NICK

I saw that. Ridiculous.

JENN WRIGHT

He should come out.

MEREDITH

Would that be a date?

NICK AND CRAIG

No.

Nick gives an angry eye to Craig who coughs on his cigarette.

MEREDITH

I'd have to pick him up.

JENN WRIGHT

Definitely not then.

Unable to properly smoke it, Craig stares at the lit end of his smoke.

CRAIG

I thought you were quitting.

MEREDITH

It's nice out. I cut
down, some.

NICK

Who said anything about
quitting?

NICK

If one more person quits smoking,
I'm, I'm going to kill them,
slowly, with cancer.

JENN WRIGHT

I was thinking about quitting, but
now it's nice out.

MEREDITH

Exactly.

CRAIG

Why's that matter.

NICK

I want him out of the outside.

Meredith stomps out her cigarette and leads Craig inside.

NICK

Fucking health nut.

INT. BLIND PIG - MOMENTS LATER

Craig walks past their table as Meredith trails on his arm. Valerie grabs at Meredith's other arm.

Valerie makes hand signals that roughly translate as "You, him, what's going on there, anything, anything, you know, sexual?" Meredith responds with a one handed "Nah, well maybe, who knows, not me."

Valerie turns to the Jenny Grace. JENNY'S FIANCEE, an attractive, over-dressed man, leans in. They all mouth words with elaborate hand gestures.

Craig watches this, and motions "THIS WAY, THEN." They arrive at a new table, within earshot of the old table. Valerie and the other Jenny lean like flowers to a lamp.

CRAIG

So, I was wondering, if maybe you'd like to go on a date.

MEREDITH

Like bowling or the opera?

CRAIG

Like dinner.

Meredith shoots a look at Jenny Grace and Valerie. Jenny pretends to look away.

MEREDITH

Well, I'm kinda' seeing somebody.

CRAIG

But you said you weren't dating.

MEREDITH

We're seeing each other.

CRAIG

Will you think about it?

MEREDITH

Uh, just a second.

Meredith turns to Valerie, who gestures wild questions. Meredith's hands and mouths say, "HE ASKED ME OUT."

Valerie replies "WHAT'D YOU SAY?"

MEREDITH

Maybe.

Nick and Jenn return from the sidewalk. Valerie waves them both over. Meredith weighs their reactions like a "PRICE IS RIGHT" contestant.

NICK (O.S.)

Fuck!.

MEREDITH

Maybe.

VALERIE (O.S.)

She just said maybe.

CRAIG

Ok

Nick wipes his brow and gives a desperate look to Meredith.

NICK

Ok.

INT. MEREDITH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A pen marks over month two of marathon training. She turns to the section on diet. She looks over at Ben, eating popcorn. He's put on ten pounds, mostly around his neck.

MEREDITH

You want to go out?

BEN

Where? We went out last night.

MEREDITH

I drove you to a lecture. I want to go out, to dinner a movie or something.

BEN

There's nothing out.

MEREDITH

Fine, we could do something else.

Ben nods his head and eats popcorn directly from his belly.

MEREDITH

Why don't you get a car?

BEN

Why? I don't need one, I can take the train, or bus, or bike.

MEREDITH

But you don't take the train or bus. You don't have a bike. I drive you everywhere.

No longer eating, Ben turns to Meredith.

BEN

Well, I could take the bus.

MEREDITH

Yeah.

BEN

I'll take the bus.

MEREDITH

You don't have to.

BEN

No, I will. And tomorrow, or whenever, we'll out. The bus goes places.

MEREDITH

We don't have to take the bus, I can drive.

BEN

Ok.

Ben throws pocorn past his teeth, and Meredith turns away.

EXT. PARK - MORNING

Flowers open for the morning sun. The trees and their new leaves drip with a fresh rain.

Meredith rounds a park path and returns to a street soon suffering with the morning's traffic.

She follows the road past parked cars and moving cars and dogs and people.

INT. MEREDITH'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Meredith, out of breath, opens the door and removes her sweater. She leans on the kitchen counter.

MEREDITH

Ben?

She wanders the living room, peaking into the bathroom and bedroom.

MEREDITH (continued)

Ben?

Bugles, wearing a collar and a note, sniffs to Meredith's feet. She lifts her dog and his note.

EXT. BUS STOP - DAY

Meredith drives slowly by the bus stop where Ben waits along with a mixed bag of STUDENTS, a few PROFESSIONALS, and a smaller number of the ELDERLY.

Ben waves and she waves back, blowing him a kiss. An ELDERLY MAN, with a sweater and cap, blows a kiss back.

INT. MEREDITH'S OFFICE - DAY

In a chair on wheels, Craig sits in the aisle facing Meredith. She stares at a spreadsheet.

CRAIG

Well, you don't have shin-splints
but maybe there's something off
with your training are you-

Meredith swivles in her chair.

MEREDITH

-Ok, I'll go out with you.

Craig leans forward.

CRAIG

Ok, when.

MEREDITH

Whenever.

CRAIG

How about tonight.

MEREDITH

Tonight's fine.

CRAIG

Ok, I'll pick you up at eight,
how's eight?

MEREDITH

Fine.

CRAIG

Ok.

With an initial SCRAPE, Craig pushes his chair back across the floor. He keeps kicking back as he rounds the corner. The RATTLING of the wheels persists past the point of sight, then a BUMP and a light CRASH.

CRAIG (O.S.)

Sorry, Nick.

INT. OLIVE GARDEN - NIGHT

The whole place pretty much looks like an Olive Garden. Fake Italian sayings line the walls which support shelves of fake olive oil and tomatoes. There's an endless supply of breadsticks and salad on every table.

Craig sits upright with a napkin in his lap. He grabs a breadstick and uses it as a visual aid.

MEREDITH

Well, yes, of course I was watching my carbs. Everyone was watching their carbs. Now, you know, I run.

CRAIG

Me too.

MEREDITH

Yes, I know, so, I need the energy.

CRAIG

Same here. Have you ever tried energy bars?

MEREDITH

Yes, they're awful.

CRAIG

I guess, I'm just used to them.

MEREDITH

They look like zombie tongues. I mean, I understand getting used to light ranch dressing, or diet soda, but powerbars?

CRAIG

Oh, I don't drink soda.

Meredith sips at the straw in her soda.

MEREDITH

No. Why would you, empty calories, cavities.

CRAIG

Absolutely.

Meredith looks from her plate, an alfredo pasto, to Craig's endless salad.

INT. FORD TAURUS - NIGHT

Craig cranes his neck, looking out the front window. He clicks his turn signal and takes a right in the parking lot.

CRAIG

Should I have turned there?

MEREDITH

No, you can just loop around. Or really, just let me out anywhere.

CRAIG

I got it now, building E, right?

MEREDITH

Here.

With a SCREECH, the car stops. Meredith jerks forward then settles back, grabbing her purse and looks out the window.

CRAIG

Well. This was nice.

EXT. MEREDITH'S APARTMENT COMPLEX - NIGHT

With the bug light and a work light, Ben digs in front of his porch. He's dressed like an Egyptian archeologist circa 1930. His shovel is also an antique. With the helmet flashlight glaring, he looks toward Craig's car.

MEREDITH (O.S.)

Yes.

CRAIG (O.S.)

You wanna' running tomorrow?

INT. FORD TAURUS - NIGHT

Meredith keeps her eyes out the window.

MEREDITH

At work?

CRAIG

Yes.

MEREDITH

Ok, yeah, well, I have to go.

CRAIG

Ok.

The door opens, and Meredith slips away. She jogs toward the excavation site.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - NIGHT

From overhead, Ben looks like a caught grave robber.

MEREDITH
You burying bodies?

BEN
No, research.

MEREDITH
Digging up bodies?

BEN
Nope, just dirt. I've got to finish
this research before graduation.
I'm a little behind.

MEREDITH
How far behind?

Ben checks his watch. Lighting the ancient indiglo.

BEN
'Bout two years.

MEREDITH
Good luck, good night.

BEN
Good night.

INT. MEREDITH'S APARTMENT HALLWAY - NIGHT

Ben KNOCKS, Bugles BARKS, and Meredith opens the door. With an inviting gesture, she moves aside as Ben enters. She shuts the door behind him.

BEN (O.S.)
Who was that?

MEREDITH (O.S.)
A friend from work.

INT. MEREDITH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Ben kicks his shoes at a shoe pile. Bugles jumps for them but settles down.

BEN

You smell like Olive Garden.

MEREDITH

We went to Olive Garden, you smell like hot pockets.

Ben smells himself.

BEN

No I don't. What was it like, a-

Meredith holds the door and swings it with her body's sway.

MEREDITH

Listen, Ben. I'm tired. I think, I'm just going to bed.

BEN

Ok, wait.

The door shuts on Ben's sentence. KNOCK, KNOCK.

MEREDITH

What, Ben?

BEN (O.S.)

My, ah, shoes.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - DAY

Shoeless Ben Mason waits at the door, which opens to reveal Meredith holding the right Chuck. Bugles holds the left.

INT. MEREDITH'S OFFICE - DAY

On a camera phone screen, Craig runs and punches in place. Past the camera, he runs in place in front of Meredith's cubicle. Nick hits record.

NICK

What an asshole.

Jenn Wright, coffee in hand, sips while looking over Nick's shoulder. Nick continues videoing.

Meredith emerges from her cubicle as Craig takes off. He runs to the water cooler, still jogging in place, gets water, pours a second water and tosses it, spilling to Meredith, before running down the stairs. Meredith slowly walks behind.

EXT. ELM STREET - DAY

The street parts, making two one lanes with a small park between them. The runners navigate the park path.

CRAIG

So, you're training then, for like a marathon.

MEREDITH

Yes. I wanna' run the New York Marathon, but that's a ways away.

CRAIG

So, this is probably really easy for you?

MEREDITH

Actually, this is a little faster than my pace.

CRAIG

You want me to slow down?

Craig slows to a near walk pace.

MEREDITH

We can go faster than that.

CRAIG

Like this?

Craig speeds up to his previous pace. Meredith now lags behind.

CRAIG (continued)

So, what are you doing after work. I was going to cook dinner.

MEREDITH

What?

CRAIG

Do you want me to cook you dinner?

MEREDITH

Can you cook?

CRAIG

Sure, the directions are on the box. You coming?

Meredith speeds up, but her legs fall back a bit. She grunts and flops her feet like cinder blocks.

MEREDITH

Yeah, I'm coming.

INT. CRAIG'S STUDIO APARTMENT - EVENING

The apartment decoration is sparse, but semi-sophisticated. The room is very Ikea, with white walls and furniture. The couch, actually a daybed, faces the wall and wall mount television.

In the kitchen-like area, Craig spins from the fridge to the table to the sink, each time bringing out one item.

KNOCK KNOCK. Standing at the sink, Craig opens the door.

CRAIG

Oh, good, you found the place.

MEREDITH

Yes, it's just three blocks from work. Nice place, modern.

Meredith hobbles through the door, she walks with a limp.

CRAIG

Thanks, um, have a seat. Dinners almost ready. Did you bring the, ah, wine?

MEREDITH

Yes, do you have a corkscrew?

CRAIG

What no, I don't drink. Um, wait, I have a swiss army knife, here.

Still wearing oven mits, Craig crosses into the "bedroom" and removes a swiss army knife from his plastic nightstand. He tosses it to Meredith, who ducks as it rebounds off the wall and sticks into the mashed potatoes. Meredith removes the knife, careful to avoid dripping cheese or potatoes.

Craig returns and puts his mitts in the second drawer. He spins to the table with a large spoon. Meredith starts to open the wine.

MEREDITH

So, what are we having?

CRAIG

Oh well, this is it.

He dips into the potatoes and comes back with a spoon full of ground beef, cheese, and vegetables.

CRAIG (continued)

It's shepherd's pie. It's got everything.

MEREDITH

Oh, do you want some wine?

CRAIG

No, that's okay, I don't drink.

Meredith smiles and drinks straight from the bottle.

INT. CRAIG'S APARTMENT - LATER

On the bed/couch, Meredith and Craig sit as comfortably as possible. The empty wine bottle rests on the floor. On television, THE STARS dance.

Meredith slumps and thereby moves closer to Craig's arm which is stretched to the remote. Removing his hand from the remote, Craig places it on her leg. Meredith frowns, looking at her leg. Turning to confront him, she's kissed.

The encounter continues as Meredith pulls away but is against the bed rail and wall. She braces with her left arm, but the right wraps around Craig, who moves forward like an athletic slug. They stay in this position and Meredith slowly brings both arms around him.

Craig takes off his own shirt, revealing a toned body. Meredith grabs against his side, and they pull around with her on top. He removes her shirt and struggles with her bra.

Meredith stops to remove her bra, and as she does this, he sits up to again take the lead, unzipping her pants and then his own. With clinched teeth, she winces at her cramped leg.

Meredith lies down, as Craig removes her jeans, they're a size too big and slide off. His pants are actually tighter, and it takes the two of them to roll them back down to his knees, which is where they stop. The couple continues, as he runs strong hands down her side. She grabs at his square cut boxer briefs. They slide to meet the jeans. Their legs kick like swimmers, removing the remaining clothes.

MEREDITH

Condom.

Ben removes a condom from the clear drawer nearby. Both fretting over the packaging, they move together, him between her muscular legs. Their bodies collide, Meredith's shaking smoothly under his firm stomach. She lets out small moans as he grunts.

Craig kisses her neck, as Meredith, face contorted between smiles and a blank stare to the ceiling, turns to see the stars dance.

INT. CRAIG'S APARTMENT LATER - LATER

On television, the show cuts to promotion. A TELEVISION ANNOUNCER speaks over a split screen of credits and clips.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Next on ABC, the Bachelor...

CRAIG

Do you want to watch this?

MEREDITH

No.

The two rest under the covers in separate, seated positions. Craig takes the remote and flips through the channels.

CRAIG

You want to go running in the morning?

Meredith checks her watch, revealing a bare wrist.

MEREDITH

You mean, from here? I don't have my workout clothes.

CRAIG

You have them at work, it's just down the road.

MEREDITH

No, that's okay, I think I'm, I think I'm gonna go.

Meredith leans over to get her shirt and pants from the floor. She puts her shirt on first.

CRAIG

Right now? Are you sure? Are you sure you're... okay to drive.

Standing up and balancing, poorly, to put her pants on, Meredith moves toward the kitchen. She opens the fridge, revealing fitness water, lunch meat, and ketchup.

MEREDITH

I'll be fine. I'm going to take one of your waters, if that's okay?

Meredith shakes the water.

CRAIG

Fine. Sure you're okay?

MEREDITH

Yes, no, I'm fine. I'll get coffee.

CRAIG

I can make coffee here, well,
there's a coffee shop downstairs,
is it open, surely it is, I've
never been there.

Meredith opens the door and exits as Craig talks.

MEREDITH

I'm gonna go.

Craig stares at the closed door and then back toward the television. He flips channels back to The Bachelor. Lying down, he closes his eyes.

INT. MEREDITH'S CAR - NIGHT

Meredith drinks from a to-go coffee cup. She sips at the lid and it spill down her shirt. She rest the cup on the dashboard, as she lights a cigarette.

Turning the key, she starts the car, and it lurches forward spilling the coffee. Meredith dives for the coffee.

MEREDITH

Damn it, damn it!

The cigarette falls from her mouth. She holds the coffee in one hand with the other hand fishing the cigarette from her lap. Slapping the seat and burning her hand, she lifts the crushed cigarette and tosses it out of the car.

Regaining some composure, Meredith throws out the remainder of her cigarette pack.

INT. MEREDITH'S OFFICE - DAY

Elbows on her keyboard, Meredith sleeps on her desk.

ON SCREEN: In the google search bar, text appears: "Half Marathon." Links descend in order of relevance.

ROBERT (O.S.)

Mere, Meredith wake up.

Falling into her monitor Meredith wakes up with a shudder. She immediately starts typing.

MEREDITH

What is it?

Robert leans in. He puts his leg up on the cabinet.

ROBERT

Do you have a lighter?

MEREDITH

Yes, um, here.

She reaches into pockets and removes a red Bic.

ROBERT

Great, awesome, do you have a
cigarette?

MEREDITH

Actually, I don't. I, um, smoked
them all.

Robert turns his head and walks around the corner.

ROBERT (O.S.)

Hey, Nick.

NICK (O.S.)

Hey, Robert.

ROBERT (O.S.)

Hey, can I borrow a cigarette? You
know what, make it two.

NICK (O.S.)

Uh, sure. You need a lighter?

ROBERT (O.S.)

No, I've already got a lighter.

Robert returns to Meredith's desk and holds out a cigarette.

ROBERT (continued)

Do you want to have a smoke?

MEREDITH

Okay.

Meredith stands up to see Valerie and Nick both staring from their cubicles. As they exit, Craig slides his chair back.

EXT. MEREDITH'S OFFICE - DAY

Robert smokes like a teenager, he looks very intentionally cool. Meredith drags calmly and efficiently.

ROBERT

So you're running, you're a runner.

MEREDITH

I've been running.

ROBERT

Yeah, I used to run. It's good for you.

Meredith drags from her cigarette and nods.

ROBERT (continued)

You running with Craig, he does that. He's a runner.

With quick half-inhales, Robert works at his cigarette.

MEREDITH

We ran the other day, we don't really keep the same pace.

ROBERT

Yep, what I thought. So, um, what are you doing Friday?

MEREDITH

I'll be here, working.

ROBERT

After that, do you want to get dinner?

MEREDITH

Um, as a date?

Robert nods his head then shakes his head.

ROBERT

No, work, but after work.

MEREDITH (continued)

Okay, um, after work.

ROBERT

Yeah, I'm going to take off work early Friday, got to pick up my son from school and take him to his Mother's. She lives over in Tolono. So, I'll just come back here to pick you up from work, at like six. Can you work till six?

MEREDITH

Uh, Friday, yeah.

ROBERT

Great, six.

Robert takes another cigarette and hands her back the pack. Meredith stares at him, smoking the filter of his cigarette. Robert walks away with a quick wave.

Meredith is left, standing, face full of worry.

EXT. MEREDITH'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Standing in the same place, only Meredith's dress has changed.

HONK. HONK. HONK. Robert SQUEELS up in his Cabrio.

INT. SUSHI RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Dim lights hang from the ceiling and illuminate the red interior of an intolerably hip, midwest sushi shop.

Robert leans over his plate and maneuvers his chop sticks with the skill of a toddler's first coloring experiment. Meredith uses a fork.

MEREDITH

Your job?

ROBERT

(mouth-full)

Yes, sort of. I'm taking over the company, and, er, um, expanding, and I'd like you to take over some of my current responsibilities.

MEREDITH

I don't think I want that.

ROBERT

Well, there's a raise involved. You'll get a raise.

MEREDITH

Um, frankly Robert, I'm not totally happy right now, with my job.

ROBERT

Well, Mere, would a raise help?

MEREDITH

No.

ROBERT

Oh.

The two sit, and Robert, after using his fingers, sticks a whole piece of yellowtail into his mouth.

SIX WAITERS AND WAITRESSES, one carrying a dainty sushi dessert, converge on their table. Meredith, goes from a blank, avoident look to one of intense displeasure.

ROBERT

I told them it was your birthday.

MEREDITH

It's not—

The waiters interrupt with a thunderous birthday song.

EXT. CAMPUS BUS STOP - EVENING

Ben stands with STEVE, an obese man with a light beard and thick curly hair.

STEVE

I thought you always got a ride.

BEN

Not lately, I thought you and Patty
always drove.

STEVE

Patty's got the car. She's picking
me up.

BEN

At the bus stop?

STEVE

We bought a bus. She also thinks
it's funny. It's the same reason
she packs me a lunch box.

Steve lifts up his tin, Tintin Lunch Box. The MTD bus, blue
and red, stops in front of their conversation.

BEN

You're not getting on the bus then?

STEVE

No, you need a ride?

BEN

No, I'm getting on the bus.

STEVE

Lame.

BEN

Nice lunch box, Steve.

The door shuts behind as Ben enters the bus. Steve stands
alone, a grown man, with a back pack and a lunch box.

Patricia pulls up in a yellow school bus with canoes on top.

INT. MTD BUS - NIGHT

Alone in the middle of the bus, Ben stares at the PASSENGERS
in front of him. The bus slows to a stop and Ben looks out
the window.

INT. CABRIO - NIGHT

Playing with his radio, Robert drives past an MTD bus. Meredith looks out the window. She turns to Robert, who sets down the iPod as the stereo plays Nick's IGA commercial.

INT. ROBERT'S HOME - NIGHT

KEYS jingle as Robert opens his kitchen door. He flips on the light to reveal a kitchen in distress, cereal on the floor, spaghetti on the wall, and the fridge is open.

<p>ROBERT Mind the mess, I took care of Jake this week because his mother was in Vegas. Did I tell you this already?</p>	<p>MEREDITH You told me this already.</p> <p>MEREDITH (continued) Yes.</p>
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INT. ROBERT'S SUNROOM - NIGHT

The glass room has a jacuzzi and a tanning bed. Robert flips a light switch, which start a mist machine.

ROBERT
You ever been out to my sunroom.
Here's the sunroom. Got a tanning
bed there. You tan? It was my
wife's I don't hardly have a use
for the thing except in the winter.
Do you tan?

Lifting the lid of the tanning bed, Robert illuminates the room with blinding UV radiation.

MEREDITH
No.

ROBERT
You should, it's good for you.

MEREDITH
Really?

ROBERT
Well it looks good.

Robert flips his arms in front of the tanning bed before shutting it. He points to his jacuzzi.

Robert turns on the jacuzzi and unbuttons his shirt.

ROBERT (continued)

Don't suppose you brought your swimsuit, doesn't matter, but if you want. I still have some of my ex-wife's swimsuits. They're under the sink in there with the rags.

MEREDITH

What?

ROBERT

Under the sink, with the towels, swimsuit, bout your size. Eh, maybe a little smaller.

MEREDITH

I don't want to get in the hottub.

ROBERT

Cool. So, what then?

MEREDITH

Can you just take me back to the office?

ROBERT

Hey, you don't have to work it's Friday night.

Robert uses his unbuttoned appearance as a visual aid. He then buttons up, while headed toward the door.

MEREDITH

I just, I-

Meredith spins to the door and looks for the light. She flips one of seven dimmer switches.

The lights come on. The sunroof is lined with tiny lamps. At every corner of the room is a tiki-torch.

ROBERT

Nice, huh, LEDs, fucking amazing.

MEREDITH

Where's your bathroom?

INT. ROBERT'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Fully clothed, Meredith sits on the toilet with the lid down. She stares forward at a urinal above the urinal is a glass case containing last Sunday's sports front page.

INT. ROBERT'S LIVING - ROOM

Staggered on terraced floor, four reclining leather seats face a plasma television. Robert holds a very large, very complicated remote control.

ROBERT

You watch movies?

The stereo and screen turn on with the click of a button. The noise is deafening.

ROBERT (continued)

Mere, where'd you go?

Robert punches a couple of buttons and turns down the sound.

ROBERT (continued)

Mere!

EXT. RACE STREET - NIGHT

One side of the road is a corn field, the other is a suburb. Meredith hobbles down the road in high heels. She removes the shoes while still struggling forward.

Holding her shoes and hiking up her dress, Meredith races down race street.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - NIGHT

A party rages over two floors of Meredith's complex. The downstairs porch has a line outside the door. Meredith approaches at a jog.

Meredith puts her shoes back on as crosses the lot. Her face shows pain, but she grins it away.

MEREDITH
How much for a cup?

JOSH, a large man with a backwards cap and a bar crawl T-shirt, holds the cups.

JOSH
Girls drink free.

Meredith grabs a cup, then another one. She rubs her belly.

MEREDITH
I'm drinking for two. It's a girl.

Josh, pausing only to count, hands her two cups. Meredith walks inside.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - MOMENTS LATER

The line outside now stretches to the parked cars. Holding two full beers, Meredith exits the porch and crosses to her place.

She stops to shout upstairs.

MEREDITH
Hey, I stole two cups. Need a beer?

EXT. ALLISON'S BALCONY - NIGHT

Cigarette smoke covers the balcony, it wafts toward the outdoors and the parking lot. Across the way, the party raves.

ALLISON
You think that balcony will fall down.

MEREDITH
No.

ALLISON
Think somebody will fall off?

MEREDITH

God willing.

Fingers cross. A young man doing a keg stand slips with his legs of the edge but his friends catch him.

MEREDITH

That's what I like about living alone, it's all this peace and quiet. Smoking cigarettes and watching Captain Kangaroo.

ALLISON

I don't really like living alone.

MEREDITH

So, you haven't always lived alone?

ALLISON

No, you?

MEREDITH

Yes, well, I've never moved in with anyone. Almost, but... you?

Allison rubs behind Kirby's ears and then covers them.

ALLISON

Oh, you know the story D-I-V-O-R-C-E. I have to spell it out, Kirby was his dog.

MEREDITH

Kirby? You—

ALLISON

—Don't tell him.

MEREDITH

Kirby's tough, though. Growl.

ALLISON

He's stronger. We've been running, some.

MEREDITH

I saw.

ALLISON
You still running a marathon?

MEREDITH
Half.

ALLISON
I'm thinkin' bout it. I bought a
book.

MEREDITH
You wanna run it with me?

ALLISON
I don't run the whole way, I do the
whole, walk run thing.

MEREDITH
That's good though. I'm running in
Columbus.

ALLISON
Ohio?

MEREDITH
Si.

ALLISON
When.

Across the lot, the party riles as Ben, walks past.

MEREDITH
It's... Oh, great.

COLLEGE GIRLS
Mr. M!

Ben holding a red cup, walks to Meredith's porch and looks
up.

BEN
Hey, can I come up? I'll buy you a
drink!

MEREDITH
Already got one.

BEN
Can I come up?

MEREDITH
I'll come down.

Ben drops his drink and holds out his arms to catch.

MEREDITH
Well, I'm not gonna jump.

INT. OFFICE BREAKROOM - DAY

Nick eats a bagel, and talks with Jenny and Valerie.

NICK
Both of them.

VALERIE
Both of them?

NICK
Both.

Pointer fingers extended, Nick brings his hands together and switches one hand to a peace sign.

JENNY GRACE
Was it a double date?

NICK
No, just two dates.

VALERIE
Well are you going to ask her out?

NICK
Exactly. Should I? I mean, do I
have to?

Meredith walks in and straight for the coffee.

VALERIE
Meredith, we were just talking
about you.

MOCK LAUGHING, Meredith pours a coffee.

NICK
So, how was Robert's place?

MEREDITH
He has a tanning bed.

Nick spits coffee.

VALERIE
Really? Think he'd let me use it?

Nick LAUGHS as Robert walks into the lobby. Meredith slides to out the door and over to the stairs, climbing.

ROBERT
You guys seen Meredith?
What's so funny?

VALERIE
Oh, Jenny just told a joke.

ROBERT
What's the joke?

Looking to both her friends for help, Jenny Grace gives up.

JENNY GRACE
You have a tanning bed?

INT. MEREDITH'S OFFICE - UPSTAIRS - DAY

Holding her leg, Meredith climbs the side stairs, and turns down the main hallway. Nearing Craig's desk, she turns around and then makes four more turns before passing her desk and coming back to it from the East.

Sitting down, she tenses as a ROLLING NOISE approaches. Craig appears, kicking his chair.

CRAIG
Hey, I didn't think you were here today.

MEREDITH
I'm taking a half-day.

INT. MEREDITH'S APARTMENT - DAY

A bowl of popcorn sits next to two bags of microwave popcorn. An empty bottle of Dr. Pepper sits next to a half empty bottle of regular Dr. Pepper. Meredith's laptop lies open to Myspace. Meredith lies on the couch, an ice pack on her leg. She pets Bugles who is obviously restless.

Under a styrofoam chinese box, Meredith finds her Marathon Runner's Handbook and fills in X's for the last four days. She flips back in her book to a section titled "HALF MARATHON TRAINING"

Curled up with her dog, Meredith flips the pages. The training calendar is shorter and less intense. With a pen, Meredith transposes her previous efforts to a new challenge.

EXT. APARTMENT - MORNING

Bugles bounds out the door and Meredith lumbers behind him. They walk around the apartment. Bugles stops at Ben's place and sniffs the mounds of dirt around his patio. He has several aquariums set up. An old Schwinn bike, newly remodeled, rests against a large container of earth.

Bugles pees on one of the piles. Meredith frowns as bugles scrapes back the dirt over his business.

INT. MEREDITH'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Meredith stretches against the wall as Bugles lies back on the messy couch. He SNIFFLES then dog SNEEZES. Meredith gives him an adoring AWE. With a double tie of her shoes, Meredith exits at a jog.

EXT. OPEN FIELD - MORNING

Newly planted corn pokes through plowed soil behind an empty road. Meredith runs at a quick pace. She smiles; her hair, long now, flips behind and fights the wind. She leans into the wind and picks up pace.

She checks her time.

ECU: 01:08:55

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - MORNING

Cars pull out and PEOPLE walk their dogs. Meredith maneuver through the morning rush. Avoiding but waving to Allison, now in better shape, Meredith nearly runs into Ben, on bike.

BEN

Hey, watch out now.

MEREDITH

You watch it, biker.

BEN

Got a new bike! It's kinda old.

MEREDITH

I like it. It's green, pretty.

BEN

Thanks, have a good day, tell Bugles "hi."

MEREDITH

Oh, he already said "hi."

With a raised eyebrow, Ben pedals away. Meredith watches him all the way to the corner and out the lot.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - EVENING

With a glass of red wine, Meredith sits on her porch. She half smokes a cigarette and looks toward the road.

Ben pedals around the corner. Bugles and Meredith sit up.

With great speed, Ben rolls past her porch.

MEREDITH

Hey, Ben!

SCREECH, Ben topples from his bike but lands on his feet then trips, then recovers.

BEN

What? Hey, Meredith. Hey Bugles.

MEREDITH

How was school?

BEN

Good, almost done now. Well, all but dissertation.

MEREDITH

Good. What are you doing tonight?

BEN

Um.

INT. BEN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

String runs between coordinates on Ben's topographical maps. Note cards tack up the room like license plates at a roadside diner. On ground is literal dirt, separated by wooden planks and tarp.

BEN

So, this is my home office. I'm compiling about three years of research on soil types and consistences.

MEREDITH

Shouldn't you be doing this stuff in a lab?

BEN

I have a lab. Well, I share a lab. Patty and Steve have it now.

MEREDITH

Do you need any help?

BEN

You good with spreadsheets?

MEREDITH

It's all I do.

BEN

Good then, I hate them. I need the data on those note cards organized into a table.

MEREDITH
Which note cards?

BEN
All of them.

Meredith gives the room a full survey, something she had avoided. There are more note cards than ants, and Ben has four ant farms.

INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Computer on her lap, Meredith wakes on a folding chair. Standing, she knocks over a two foot stack of notecards.

On the uncovered bed, Ben sleeps, in a stained shirt which barely fits.

MEREDITH
I'm going to go check on Bugles. I think he might be sick.

BEN
Sick?

MEREDITH
Yes, a sick dog, it's the saddest thing in the world. I got through about half the notecards.

Ben rolls over, opening his eyes, and stretching.

BEN
Good start. Need any help with Bugles?

MEREDITH
No. Need a ride this morning?

BEN
No, I'm going to bike in. I'm trying to bike more, get in shape. Go ahead, punch it.

Ben's chest rises as his stomach sucks in. He motions to his stomach, which Meredith mock punches.

MEREDITH

Good, oh, I'm not running a marathon. I'm running a half marathon did I tell you that?

BEN

No, that's great, great start. What is that, like 12 miles?

MEREDITH

13.

BEN

Good luck, need a running partner who just bikes?

Leaning to his cheek, Meredith kisses Ben's three day beard.

MEREDITH

I already got a running partner.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

What serves as the apartment yard is green now: the leaves and flowers in full bloom. The parking lot is nearly empty and Allison runs in the middle of the lane. Meredith jogs past and Allison increases her pace.

ALLISON

Hey again.

MEREDITH

Hey, how's it going?

ALLISON

Good, I'm surprised you could run today.

MEREDITH

Eh, I had some time off coming. I have to use it.

ALLISON

Before when?

MEREDITH

Before I quit.

ALLISON

I just quit, well, I'm going to.
What is it you do exactly?

MEREDITH

I'm a project manager, but I'm
quitting. You?

ALLISON

Well, I'm... well, I'm going to be
a real estate agent.

MEREDITH

You need a house to sell?

ALLISON

Sure.

MEREDITH

Okay, we'll talk about it later.

Allison slows to a fast walk and Meredith jogs ahead.

INT. MEREDITH'S OFFICE - COPY ROOM - DAY

The printer spits out page after page of running material.
Craig reads each page as it flips down.

CRAIG

You print these?

MEREDITH

Yes. I'm going to run a half
marathon.

CRAIG

I thought you were running a
marathon.

Meredith shakes her head.

CRAIG (continued)

How's your training coming, are you
mixing it up, getting in a lot of
sprints and improving your times?

Disgusted, Nick looks in from the door.

MEREDITH

Oh, absolutely, yeah. Sprinting,
um, running, hurdling—

CRAIG

You do hurdles?

MEREDITH

What, don't you?

Craig tightens his eyes and throat.

CRAIG

Yeah, I do hurdles.

EXT. COLLEGE TRACK - AFTERNOON

Overhead, clouds move quick and dark. Hurdles line the track and Meredith diligently runs around them at a sprint pace. She reaches the finish and slows to walk around the curve.

At the next straightaway, she runs. Along with a RUMBLING in the clouds, FOOTSTEPS compound her own.

Walking again, the FOOTSTEPS grow louder and faster behind her. She turns to see a FEMALE RUNNER approaching, dressed like Meredith. As the runner comes closer, it's Meredith with a baton. She holds it out to herself.

Meredith grabs the baton and sprints around the track. Ahead, she sees herself again, running in place. With a GRUNT she passes the baton and now continues running another 200 meters to the next dopleganger.

Meredith 4 races through the rain now. Lighting strikes in the distance as she reaches the finish line. Wet and returned to normal, she rests, then jogs out off the track.

EXT. RACE STREET - DAY

In the now pouring rain, Meredith runs under the cover of trees down a long sidewalk.

Ben, on bike, rides past.

BEN

Meredith?

MEREDITH

Ben?

BEN

Need a ride?

Ben slows and Meredith speeds up to move together.

MEREDITH

What? How?

BEN

On the handlebars. Didn't you ever do that?

MEREDITH

When I was 12.

BEN

Well how old are you now? Too old to ride a bike?

MEREDITH

Too old to ride on a bike.

BEN

Well then let me ride with you.
It's raining.

Meredith leaves the sidewalk and runs on the road with Ben.

MEREDITH

We'll get out of the rain, I know a shortcut. Turn here.

Meredith leaps a puddle and Ben splashes his bike straight through it.

EXT. WASHINGTON STREET - DAY

A "FOR SALE BY OWNER" sign, soaked in rain, advertises a small brick home with a long porch and porch swing.

MEREDITH

Alright, we're here.

BEN

What, are you buying this place?

MEREDITH

I own this place.

Bounding the cracked cement stairs, Meredith gets her keys.

BEN

Well then why—

Meredith opens the door.

INT. EMPTY HOUSE - DAY

The rain drenched travelers enter a bare home. Only a welcome mat greets those seeking shelter.

MEREDITH

—Wipe your feet.

Ben wipes his feet.

BEN

So, is this where you grew up?

MEREDITH

Yes. This is my parent's house.
They moved out last fall when Dad
took the job at Ohio State.

BEN

How is Mr. Davidson?

MEREDITH

(laughing)

Dad's good. How's Mr. Mason?

BEN

Oh, I'm fine. Where's your room?

MEREDITH

I don't live here, but it used to
be up stairs.

BEN

This way?

MEREDITH

Ben, get down.

Ben, half way up the stairs, slides down the banister. He slips all the way into Meredith's arms. They kiss.

BEN

Well, then where's your door?

MEREDITH

My door?

BEN

The one with your height on it.
Meredith age 4, 7, 8, 10, 20.

From a catcher's squat, Ben rises to meet height requirements of each age, eventually using his hand to reach 8-foot-tall.

MEREDITH

My doors in the kitchen.

Sliding on still wet feet, Ben sloshes into the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - EMPTY HOUSE - DAY

Ben braces on the door frame. Meredith ambles after him. With his index finger, Ben traces the pencil marks from years ago. There are two lines at each age, a higher line says "MICHAEL."

BEN

Michael?

MEREDITH

My older brother. We're not close,
Michael and I, in age or, well, he
lives in New York.

At the 12 year line, Meredith's marks stop, Ben stops here as well. Michael's lines continue.

BEN

What about 13?

MEREDITH
I stopped growing at 12.

BEN
What about now?

Meredith SIGHS, but Ben presses her against the wall with a kiss. With his hand over her head, he steps back and moves her to do the same.

BEN (continued)
You've grown.

MEREDITH
No, I haven't.

BEN
Half an inch, at least.

MEREDITH
You moved your hand.

BEN
No I didn't, go back.

Meredith slides back below his palm.

BEN (continued)
See! We have to mark it!

MEREDITH
Well, I don't have a pencil.

Ben removes a pencil from his ear. He carefully marks the top of Meredith's head. She moves to view the line. Arms to the side, head straight, Meredith stands at her door.

BEN
Meredith, age, how old are you?

MEREDITH
28.

BEN
God, you're so old.

In block letters, Ben marks "MEREDITH AGE 28."

MEREDITH

Oh, go to hell. Here, come on.

Meredith guides Ben by the hand.

EXT. PORCH - DAY

Meredith locks the door with her free hand. With the other hand, she leads Ben to the porch swing.

DRIP, DROP the rain overhead, the couple swings.

BEN

So, then "For Sale by Owner."
You're the owner.

MEREDITH

That's me.

BEN

There's no number on the sign.

MEREDITH

Well, you've got my number.

Ben LAUGHS and moves his arm around Meredith's shoulders.

MEREDITH (continued)

I know, I need to sell the place,
or move in, but...

BEN

I know.

MEREDITH

Sure, maybe a yard sale.

BEN

Or a fire sale.

MEREDITH

Or just a fire.

BEN

Flood'd work.

Off the porch, the wind HOWLS and the rain goes falls.

EXT. OFFICE - DAY

Just past the small overhang of the office back door, rain trickles over the city.

NICK

Wait, you're not inhaling.

Meredith gulps back a recently dismissed puff of smoke. She then coughs.

NICK

You quit; didn't you?

MEREDITH

No, I didn't quit. I cut back.

NICK

Fuck!

MEREDITH

Nick, it's okay.

NICK

You're okay. I'm the one standing out here by myself. Everyone else, staying inside, breathing the fresh air. Nick's all alone, killing himself. Left for dead, smoked out.

MEREDITH

Nick, you know I might be leaving soon.

With a final real drag, Meredith disposes her nearly full cigarette.

NICK

Word gets around. Where are you going to go, New York?

MEREDITH

Nothing like that. Back to school, maybe. Or just, something else. Something more appropriate for my major.

NICK

There's so much opportunity for us English majors, but there's always school. So, are you getting out of town? Leaving us.

MEREDITH

Not anytime soon.

NICK

Good, was it anything I've said, or done, or sang.

MEREDITH

You know, honestly I liked your song. I sent it to the client right away. Pushed for it. I just never, ever, want to hear it again. Ever.

NICK

Thanks.

MEREDITH

You've always been a good friend.

Meredith hugs Nick, who stumbles, totally shocked. He settles with an awkward, one-handed man hug.

MEREDITH (continued)

Can I have another cigarette?

Nick pushes back.

NICK

No way. I'm not going to waste them on wasters. Get your own damn cigarettes if you're only going to smoke half-way. I'm out.

Meredith laughs and stands as Nick smokes. They watch the rain subside.

EXT. HOUSE PARTY - NIGHT

On the wrap around porch, COLLEGE STUDENTS drink and smoke and talk. Over the balcony, JESSICA, a young undergrad in a pretty polka dot dress, pukes.

At the steps, Meredith stops Ben.

MEREDITH

You said this was a grad party.

BEN

Might be some undergrads here too.

JESSICA

Mr. M!

BEN

Please, Jessica, call me Ben.

JESSICA

Ok, Mr. Ben. Hey, Doctor Cain just left.

HONK, HONK. Ben and Meredith turn to see a Volvo with Doctor Cain and his wife PROFESSOR PARTENHEIMER. The stop in front of the bus, decked with lights and camp equipment.

DOCTOR CAIN

Hi Ben, we're leaving. Did you have to invite the class?

BEN

Sorry, John.

Meredith turns back to the party. Ben and Doctor Cain exchange hand gestures about her. Doctor Cain approves.

INT. HOUSE PARTY KITCHEN - DAY

Around the keg, a GROUP OF WELL DRESSED INTELLECTUALS hold red cups. Ben and Meredith, drinking imported bottles, stand with Patricia and Steve.

PATRICIA

See people say that. I mean, they don't, you know, they don't think about erosion. You know, it's not as obvious as, like, inflation. But they notice that, they notice when the money runs out with the soil. Then you've got the dust bowl, then you've got a WPA show, right?

Patricia, now in thick, party glasses, sloshes her drink.

BEN

People aren't going to react to anything less. I don't know what you're expecting.

Meredith moves her head back and forth as if watching tennis. She drinks slowly from her odd shaped beer.

MEREDITH

-I've got to use the restroom.
Patty, where's the restroom?

PATRICIA

It's down the hall, but I'd use the one upstairs if I were you. Just tell anybody, you're cool, if they ask. People aren't supposed to be up there, they are of course.

Rocking his great frame forward, Steve joins the cause.

STEVE

Somebody told the undergrads.

BEN

It wasn't just me. Jasmine brings her little friends. I figured it was fine. I only mentioned it because they asked, "Mr. M, what you doing this weekend?" I didn't think they'd come.

PATRICIA

Those girls adore you.

Meredith makes an awkward exit, sliding past Steve's immense belly and big beer stein.

BEN

I just figured they were really interested in soil science.

PATRICIA

Meredith's nice. How'd you meet.

BEN

Oh, we're neighbors...

INT. HOUSE PARTY HALLWAY - NIGHT

A COLLEGE COUPLE talks over their cups. Meredith hurdles a PASSED OUT UNDERGRAD. She knocks the door, marked "W.C."

MEREDITH

Anyone in there?

With no response, Meredith opens the door revealing Jessica, leaned over the toilet. Meredith pulls out of the room.

MEREDITH

Oh sorry.

JESSICA

Don't be. Hey, didn't you come here with Mr. M?

MEREDITH

Ben, yeah.

Jessica gives a thumbs up and leans back over the toilet.

MEREDITH

Need me to hold your hair or anything?

Jessica switches her thumbs up to a shooing gesture. Meredith exits to the hall, and gingerly steps around the VARIOUS PARTYGOERS. At the foot of the stairs she passes a GROUP OF GRAD GUYS around a group of UNDERGRAD GIRLS.

KRISTIN, dressed as if it were an 80's party, stops her.

KRISTIN

Where are you going?

MEREDITH

Up-upstairs.

KRISTIN

We're not supposed to go upstairs.

BECKA, who looks older and maybe wiser, stops the blockade.

BECKA

Hey, aren't you the girl who came with Mr. M?

MEREDITH

Yes. I'm here with Ben.

Josh, the same man who ran the previous party, steps up.

JOSH

Ben's cool.

BECKA

So, what class are you in?

MEREDITH

Oh, I don't go to class. I'm out of school. I work in town.

KRISTIN AND BECKA

Literally?

MEREDITH

Yeah. Um, I literally work in town.

BECKA

So how'd you meet Mr., ah, Ben?

MEREDITH

He's my neighbor.

With both hands, Becka pushes Meredith.

BECKA

No way!

MEREDITH

Yes, we are are neighbors.

JOSH

Cool.

KRISTIN

So, you need to go upstairs?

MEREDITH

To the bathroom.

BECKA

Na-uh, there's a bathroom upstairs.
Holy shit, Jessica's been in this
one for like an hour. Here, hold
this.

Becka passes her beer to Josh, and grabs Kristin who passes her beer to Meredith who then hands it to Josh who passes it to a friend. All three women go upstairs. The men, each holding two glasses, drink.

INT. HOUSE PARTY UPSTAIRS - NIGHT

The PARTY SOUNDS are muffled, but still very present as Meredith waits with Kristin.

MEREDITH

So, um, what's your major?

KRISTIN

Education. I take Mr. M's course cause it's easy and it's science and we need a science and so, he's cool. The other day we had class outside, and he told us to study our seats, like for real, because we were literally sitting on the ground. When did you graduate?

MEREDITH

2002.

KRISTIN

No way, like high school?

MEREDITH

No college.

KRISTIN

No fucking way, you look so young.

Meredith nods her head and blows up a lock of hair.

MEREDITH

Thanks.

INT. HOUSE PARTY BATHROOM - DAY

The bathroom is small but nice compared to the total disarray of the house. On the mirror are pictures, mostly of Patricia and Steve, but Ben is in several. He looks very happy. The world behind the photos is mountainous and green.

STEVE (O.S.)

Wait, wait, wait, I didn't make us
turn around. The doctor made us
turn around.

INT. HOUSE PARTY KITCHEN - DAY

A crowd gathers around Ben, Steve and Patty. They tell a story and block the keg.

PATRICIA

Doctor?

STEVE

Yes, he's a doctor.

BEN

Doctor Cain? John has a PhD in soil
science. He's a dirt doctor, a
vacuum. He can't diagnose a broken
ankle. Obviously, you were fine.
You were out of breath, you were
fat, you weren't hurt. Besides...

Ben makes a flippant gesture, but Patty returns with gusto.

PATRICIA

We wanted to climb the mountain.
Instead what? We get half way up
and someone "sprains his ankle." So
we had to carry him. Fat as can be,
down half a mountain.

STEVE

You didn't have to carry me.

PATRICIA

We carried him, basically. And so
then, we all fall. Like a hundred
feet. Rolling down this hill.

STEVE

Mountain.

PATRICIA

Down a mountain, we're rolling, and now we're all over the place. Ben's in the lead because he's in better shape, even for falling. He's down first, and we all pile on him.

BEN

Now my ankle is broken. Snapped.

STEVE

So I carry him back to camp.

PATRICIA

We carry him.

Becka pulls Kristin, who pulls Meredith, who is followed by Josh and his friends.

STEVE

People from Illinois shouldn't climb mountains. They shouldn't even climb stairs.

Jessica, who has been staring at Ben throughout the story, interrupts much to Patricia's disgust.

JESSICA

How's your ankle?

BEN

Better.

Becka pulls Kristin who pulls Meredith who is followed by Josh and his friends.

BECKA

What happened to Mr. M's ankle?

MEREDITH

Ben, I'm gonna' have a cigarette.

At the word, "cigarette," Patricia lights up.

BEN
 Okay, I'll be out in a
 second. We were on a
 research trip, Steve,
 Patty, Me, Doc Cain...

PATRICIA
 You smoke?

MEREDITH
 Yeah.

PATRICIA
 Fucking fantastic. Let's go.

EXT. HOUSE PARTY PORCH - DAY

China lamps glow through smoke and and mist. Patricia puffs from a clove cigarette.

PATRICIA
 Nobody smokes anymore.

MEREDITH
 I know. I just about quit.

PATRICIA
 Quit? Don't. Everyone should smoke,
 it's perfect. It's a conversation
 starter, like this we're having a
 conversation. This wouldn't have
 happened without cigarettes. We
 would have just been Ben's friends.

Meredith nods, realizing she can speak.

MEREDITH
 So you've known Ben a long time?

PATRICIA
 Yeah, we uh, we used to date. Years
 ago, back when we started school.

MEREDITH
 When was that? He's never told me
 his age, is his birthday coming up?

PATRICIA
 Oh, he's old, 2001, eh, we started
 then. I guess that would make us...

Patricia counts on her fingers.

PATRICIA (continued)
26? Ben's birthday's in the summer.
We'll have a party. Not like this
one. I hate it when he invites the
undergrads. They're always like,
"How much for cups?" and "Who lives
here?"

Meredith averts her eyes and coughs a bit of smoke.

PATRICIA (continued)
It's cool that he invited you. He
never has a girl. You're actually
the first girl he's brought over.

MEREDITH
What about all them?

PATRICIA
Oh them, he's oblivious. He thinks
every phone number is for a class
question. I had to tackle him, we
were playing ultimate frisbee. What
did you even do to get him? Did
you have to hold up a stereo or
something?

Ben opens the screen door.

MEREDITH
I wear nice perfume.

Meredith displays her uncented wrist and Patricia sniffs.

BEN
Oh, were you guys talking about me?

PATRICIA
Of course.

BEN
Good, then. Good I hope. You having
a good time?

MEREDITH
Yes, Patty's nice.

PATRICIA

Meredith's nice. We should go camping this year. Do you camp?

MEREDITH

No, I could though. How much does it cost?

PATRICIA

Ha! You're going. She's going.

BEN

I didn't know we were still doing it. What with us finishing school.

With grand gestures, Patricia sloshes her beer and ashes her cigarette with abandon. Others duck in the wake.

PATRICIA

We're not finishing school. We're not finishing anything. We're going camping, you're going camping, me, you, Steve. We can fit everyone in the bus. Invite the undergrads if you want.

BEN

I thought you hated them.

PATRICIA

I'd don't ha-

Becka walks straight through the screen door.

BECKA

Oh, sorry, I broke your door.

PATRICIA

Hate them.

Ben and Patricia laugh. Meredith follows. Becka half-laughs.

EXT. CAVALIER - NIGHT

Ben adjusts his seat, first forward, then back, then way back. He closes his eyes, YAWNS, then moves his chair back again. Meredith drives.

BEN
You have fun?

MEREDITH
Yes. Eventually.

BEN
Thanks for driving.

MEREDITH
It's no problem.

Meredith passes through a yellow light and then an open road beyond a clear field.

INT. MEREDITH'S KITCHEN - MORNING

Meredith drinks a glass of water, and then pours another.

Ben turns from around the corner. He rubs his eyes.

BEN
Did you make coffee?

MEREDITH
No, I was going on a run.

BEN
I'll come with you.

MEREDITH
It's a long run.

BEN
I'll bike. I need the exercise. I feel awful. You ever get that way?

MEREDITH
Hung over?

Ben makes opens, but doesn't close, each cabinet before grabbing the filters. Meredith ducks under an open door.

BEN
Is it okay if I ride along with you? I'll carry water or Bugles or something.

MEREDITH

Yes, but hurry up, it's a race.

BEN

But the coffee.

A drop of coffee drips to the empty glass.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

The coffee, near full, drips. Ben leans over it like a crystal ball. Meredith runs in place.

EXT. PARK ROAD - DAY

Ben drinks from a large puppy print thermos. Bugles SNEEZES in the bike basket. Meredith runs.

BEN

Need any water?

MEREDITH

No.

BEN

Coffee?

Meredith grabs the puppy mug and takes a swig.

EXT. PARK ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Bugles, runny-nosed, stares at Ben, who eats a slice of bacon and gives Bugles ther remainder. Meredith is now in front of them. Ben pedals to catch up.

Meredith accelerates as they approach.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

The soybeans are higher now, though still low to the ground. Meredith, running, rubs sweat from her brow.

BEN

How far are we running today?

MEREDITH

I'm running ten miles.

BEN

I know. How far have we gone?

MEREDITH

Three miles.

Ben brakes.

BEN

I think I'm going to turn back.
Bugles doesn't look so good.

Bugles has curled into a whimpering ball. Ben slows to make his point. Meredith keeps running.

MEREDITH

Okay, I'll see you later.

BEN

Don't you need anything?

MEREDITH (O.S.)

I'm fine.

Ben walks his bike around and retreats. Meredith runs ahead.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Sweat through, Meredith breaths with determination and difficulty. Panting, She races past a tractor, planting.

EXT. OVERPASS - DAY

Traffic below builds with the day's heat. Over the overpass, Meredith shares a county road with a tractor and a trailer.

At the top, she WINCES, hand at her side. With controlled, deep breaths, she sprints down the only "hill" for miles.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

Crossing an invisible tape, Meredith slumps and slows her gate. She jogs with shorter strides until walking, holding her side.

She stops her iPod, mid WINEHOUSE, and checks her time.

ECU: 01:35:10

MEREDITH

Fuck.

She wipes sweat and tears from her flushed cheeks.

INT. MEREDITH'S APARTMENT - DAY

Ben and Bugles lie miserable on the couch. Both rise to greet the door.

BEN

How'd it go?

MEREDITH

Slow.

Meredith removes her arm band, and shirt.

BEN

Oh. How slow?

MEREDITH

My mile time was, like 9:30.

BEN

Is that bad?

MEREDITH

I want to run an 9 minute mile.

BEN

Close. Hey, I can't make it.

Removing her second shoe, Meredith stands up.

MEREDITH

What?

BEN

I can't make it to your race.

MEREDITH

I didn't ask you to come.

BEN

Well, I wanted to, but I can't. I have a meeting with the faculty. It's over the weekend because of finals schedule and all that. It's just a formality anyway, they've already approved my stuff, plus it's like our third meeting, we have another on monday, but I have to go. I can watch Bugles for you, while you're away, if that's okay?

MEREDITH

Okay, fine.

BEN

I'm proud of you. Bugles is too, of course.

MEREDITH

He doesn't look proud.

BEN

No, he looks sick.

Bugles rolls over on his belly on Ben's belly. Ben rubs Bugles belly.

INT. VETERINARY WAITING ROOM - DAY

A SMALL DOG with a large cone on his head, sit with his LARGE OWNER, a woman in a very comfortable blouse.

Bugles rests on Meredith's lap, she reads a Dog Fancy, with CESAR MILAN on the cover.

INT. VETERINARY OFFICE - DAY

On the table, bugles lays on his back, eyes up to a moving light. The VETERINARIAN, a tall woman with short, off-decade hair and large glasses, moves the light.

VETERINARIAN

He's got Beagle Pain Syndrome

MEREDITH

Awe, he's in pain.

VETERINARIAN
 He has Steroid Responsive
 Meningitis-Arteritis.

Meredith lowers her head and begins to cry. Bugles with his runny nose, mimics his owner.

VETERINARIAN
 Oh, I'm sorry. Your dog should be
 fine. We'll give him some medicine.

MEREDITH
 What if he got really sick. Would
 you put him to S-L-E-E-P?

Meredith says each letter with a hand blocking her mouth.

VETERINARIAN
 Yes, but he's fine.

MEREDITH
 Yes, but what if he was real sick?

VETERINARIAN
 There are veterinary hospitals.
 There are treatment centers. We
 have some brochures.

The Vet reaches for some literature, and a box of Kleenex. First she removes a Kleenex then passes the rest to Meredith, who blows her nose. The Vet wipes Bugles' nose.

INT. MEREDITH'S OFFICE KITCHEN - DAY

"RUN WITH THE LITTLE DOGS!" a flyer reads. Nick reads the rest with a smile, "HELP MEREDITH HELP THE LITTLE PUPPIES. IN TWO WEEKS, MAY 14TH, SHE RUNS A HALF MARATHON IN COLUMBUS, OH. ALL PROCEEDS GO TO THE BIG FOUNDATION FOR SMALL DOGS."

Nick pours a cup of coffee into a mug labeled, "NICK."

INT. MEREDITH'S CUBICLE - DAY

Standing in the hall, coffee in hand, Nick shakes his head.

NICK
Puppies. Tiny, sick puppies.

MEREDITH
I know, someone has to help them.

NICK
Well it's not going to be me.

A CRASH sounds over the cubicle wall.

VALERIE (O.S.)
I'll help. How much do you need?

MEREDITH
It's a donation.

VALERIE
Do you have a suggested donation?

MEREDITH
5 dollars.

Valerie returns to her cubicle with more RUCKUS.

NICK
How about I just buy you a beer.

MEREDITH
A five dollar beer?

NICK
Sure, we'll go top shelf.

Valerie peeks her head and five dollars over the wall.

VALERIE
We're going out?

NICK
Yes, we have to celebrate.
Meredith's finally running away.

Valerie holds up a high five.

VALERIE
You quit?

MEREDITH

No, I'm running a half marathon. I might quit though?

VALERIE

Today.

MEREDITH

Sure.

A chair rolls directly into Nick.

CRAIG

Sorry, Nick. Hey Meredith, you need some money?

MEREDITH

No.

CRAIG

For the dogs, the little ones.

MEREDITH

Yes, they need money.

Craig removes money from his pocket, not even his wallet.

CRAIG

Is twenty okay, I don't usually carry much cash on me.

MEREDITH

Twenty is fine.

Craig hands her the money and then looks up at Nick, Valerie, and back to Meredith. He backs away as Nick scoots.

NICK

What a jerk store.

Up the stairs, heavily styled hair rises. Robert follows. He snap/points at Nick.

ROBERT

Hey, Nick, buddy, what's shaking.

Nick walks away as if he heard a phone ring.

ROBERT (continued)
Meredith, do you take credit cards?

MEREDITH
No.

ROBERT
That's going to make this
difficult. I was going to donate on
the company card, tax purposes. We
could just give you the money. Hmm,
you're just about due for a raise,
you want a raise?

MEREDITH
I quit.

Robert nods his head.

ROBERT
What, smoking?

MEREDITH
No, why do you need a cigarette?

ROBERT
Yes. So what did you quit, running?

Meredith hands him a near empty pack.

MEREDITH
No, I'm quitting, here.

Robert supports himself on the cubicle.

ROBERT (continued)
Figured this might happen. You hear
things 'round here, thin walls.

He knocks the cubicle wall.

MEREDITH
So, consider this my two-week
notice.

Rob nods.

ROBERT

Okay, say, can I also borrow your lighter.

Meredith reaches into her purse and hands over the lighter.
AS Robert descends the stairs, Valerie rises over the wall.

VALERIE

So, without a job, how are you going to raise money for the little sick dogs?

MEREDITH

I was thinking about having a yard sale.

VALERIE

Give me my five dollars back.

EXT. BLIND PIG BEER GARDEN - AFTERNOON

"YARD SALE!" a flyer reads. Nick frowns through the rest, "RUN WITH THE LITTLE DOGS! HELP MEREDITH AND ALLISON HELP THE LITTLE PUPPIES..."

Nick lights a cigarette for Meredith then Jenny Grace, he also hands her the flyer.

NICK

Nice job on the flyer, Valerie.

VALERIE

Thanks.

JENNY GRACE

Who's Allison?

MEREDITH

My friend, we're running the race together.

Valerie sashes her martini as she impersonates Meredith.

VALERIE

"My friend! My boyfriend!" We never get to meet any of these people.

MEREDITH

I like to keep my professional and personal life separate. I have work friends and real friends.

Nick does a spit take on a small amount of beer.

NICK

Well, you're quitting; so can we finally be real friends.

Meredith tips her head to weight her options.

NICK (continuing)

Just get back to me on it, asshole.

JENNY GRACE

Now where's this guy?

Craig turns to the conversation for the first time.

CRAIG

What guy?

VALERIE

Meredith's guy.

JENN WRIGHT

Is he coming?

MEREDITH

I haven't called him.

JENNY GRACE

Call him.

MEREDITH

I think he has a meeting.

Nick waves his own phone at Meredith. His screen has a picture of Craig eating a sandwich.

NICK

Call him, we want to meet this guy.

VALERIE

He's really a professor?

MEREDITH

He's going to be a professor.

JENNY GRACE

Well what is he now?

MEREDITH

A college student.

Valerie spits out her drink like it's bad yogurt. She also adds a RETCHING noise.

MEREDITH

Like you've never dated a college guy.

VALERIE

When I was in college.

Valerie crooks her neck to one side.

VALERIE (continued)

And High School. The thing about college guys is, they're stupid.

JENN WRIGHT

Well that's why they go to college.

VALERIE

I don't want a guy who's in college, I want a guy who's in real estate, or professional basketball.

MEREDITH

Ben's a grad student. He's finishing his master's.

JENNY GRACE

Is he smart?

MEREDITH

Yes. I'm going to call him. Here, give me a second.

The waitress returns with the drinks as Meredith removes her phone, and dials.

INT. COLLEGE - DAY

Late afternoon sun comes through the oak windows of an aged classroom. Light reflects off wood floors and the bald heads of PROFESSORS, all sitting around Ben, bathed in light.

BEN

I've been testing small samples for months now in a controlled environment. This summer, I'll use the five acre-

Ben's phone rings to the the tune of the Pixie's "Meredith."

BEN (continued)

Sorry. I forgot to turn of my phone. This summer, I'll-

Doctor Cain leans forward. The other professors follow, and soon everyone is on the edge of their seat waiting for the phone to ring.

DOCTOR CAIN

Who's that?

BEN

It's nothing, I'm sorry.

With the CREAK of chairs, all the PROFESSORS join in. PROFESSORS 1 and 2, bald bearded men like Doctor Cain. Professor Partenheimer, the only woman, starts the conversation.

PROFESSOR PARTENHEIMER

A girlfriend?

PROFESSOR 1

You don't have have to answer that.

PROFESSOR 2

Does Ben have a girlfriend?

BEN

Yes, it's my girlfriend. I'll call her back.

DOCTOR CAIN
Is it serious?

BEN
What? Um, yes it's getting there.

Doctor Cain and Professor Partenheimer join hands.

PROFESSOR PARTENHEIMER
Are you getting married.

BEN
We have no plans to marry.

DOCTOR CAIN
Do you love her?

Ben nearly kicks out his chair.

BEN
Excuse me?

DOCTOR CAIN
Call her back.

BEN
What? We're in the middle of a meeting, this is—

PROFESSOR 1
—Can I borrow your phone?

Ben hands the phone over without even noticing. Professor 1 flips the phone open and presses a few buttons.

BEN
—this is for my degree. I want to finish this research. I want to make sure that it's going—

PROFESSOR 1
—It's her.

Professor 1 extends the open phone to Ben, who takes the phone like wet dynamite.

BEN

Hello. Yes, sorry, I was in a meeting. Well, I am in a meeting. No, it's fine. Okay. No I'll come, Mike and Molly's okay. I'll be there after the meeting.

PROFESSOR 1

Well, don't let us stop you.

PROFESSOR 2

Please, Benjamin. We will meet again on Saturday—

PROFESSOR 1

No, I think this is fine. Ben, we're proud of you, we know you'll continue to impress.

BEN

Thanks, so...

PROFESSOR 1

Go, go.

Ben grabs his bag, then his other bag, then his suitcase. He pushes back his chair but then just leaves it as he walks then jogs out the door.

Professor Partenheimer squeezes her husband's hand.

EXT. CHAMPAIGN, IL - EVENING

Past the bars, near full, and the restaurants, already full, Ben rides his bike into the high wind.

He ducks through a parking lot and then a park. Down the underpass of Chester Street, Ben speeds past the train station. CROWDS OF STUDENTS, packed for home, cover the sidewalk. Ben drops his bike to the street.

EXT. MIKE AND MOLLY'S - DAY

Ben bikes straight to the fence and, still moving, dismounts to park. As he's chaining his bike. Meredith sees him.

MEREDITH

Hi, Ben.

JENN WRIGHT

That's him?

MEREDITH

That's Ben.

Ben looks for an entrance, but has to go around. At this point, the entire table stares through the bars.

EXT. MIKE AND MOLLY'S BEER GARDEN - EVENING

Between two conversations, Ben drinks a black and tan. He sips the duotone beverage and turns his head as if slowly saying "no."

NICK

That's what I told
Robert. You can't
give the Christmas
bonus in January. It's
ridiculous.

JENNY GRACE

He's great, he's
bowling.

JENN WRIGHT

Bowling?

Ben's watches both groups as the talk becomes more animated. He bounces from statement to question.

MEREDITH

I know January, is
there even a holiday in
January.

VALERIE

New Years Day.

NICK

Doesn't count. It's a
December holdover and
New Years Eve hangover.

JENNY GRACE

I made him a little
shirt. Or had it
embroidered with "Jeff."
You should see him, oh,
I wish I was there. No
not really. We've agreed
to have our space. Even
after the wedding. He
has his thing, bowling,
I have my thing,
drinking.

Valerie holds her drink and straw like a reporter's notebook.

VALERIE

Ben, you're smart, are there any
Holidays in January?

BEN
Casmir Pulaski Day.

VALERIE
That's in March, right?

MEREDITH
(to herself, singing)
"On the first, of March,
on the Holiday."

BEN
My family celebrates it year round.

Nick laughs and splashes his drink.

NICK
Are you Polish?

BEN
No, Lord no, British, Scotch/Irish,
a quarter Cherokee.

JENNY GRACE
You're half Indian?

Ben raises a hand and speaks in broken English.

BEN
And how.

VALERIE
How do you feel about the Chief?

BEN
Fuck the Chief.

Nick spits his drink and gives Ben a high five. Ben still has his hand raised as a mock Indian.

NICK
Fuck the Chief.

VALERIE
How can you say that? He's stands
for the school.

NICK
Not anymore.

BEN

I don't hate the Chief, it's not a racist thing, well it kind of is, but the point...

EXT. MIKE AND MOLLY'S BEER GARDEN - NIGHT

The lights are on, the garden is crowded. At the back, Jenny dances with her husband in his bowling shirt.

Craig and Valerie have separated from the group and attached themselves to each other.

Meredith, Nick, Jenn, and Ben sit together at the table. Nick, Jenn, and Ben smoke.

MEREDITH

Jesus Nick, what's the point?

NICK

I mean monster trucks, right?

MEREDITH AND JENN WRIGHT

Yeah.

NICK

Do you think, they think, they're monsters?

BEN

No, absolutely not, no. They think they're just regular trucks.

NICK

I like the way this guy thinks.

Craig walks past, placing a hand on Meredith's shoulder.

CRAIG

I'm going to go.

MEREDITH

Okay, now?

CRAIG

Yeah, I have to get up to work in the morning.

NICK

Well so do we, obviously.

Craig smiles and waves goodbye.

NICK

Asshole. Anyway, they must suspect something.

BEN

Oh, they have their suspicions—

Valerie swings her purse through the conversation.

VALERIE

—I have to go, too.

Meredith stands up, a little drunk, to hug her friend. Jenny waves, Nick continues with Ben.

NICK

They must. All those wrecked cars.

MEREDITH

Who do they think they're fooling?

NICK

What, you mean—

Nick moves his arms like the SCARECROW giving directions. Then his face resolves like he found a brain. Jenn laughs, checking her watch.

JENN WRIGHT

Oh, actually, I have to go too.

NICK

Don't tell me this is some kind of, what's the word—

Nick snaps his fingers three times.

BEN

—Ménage-à-trois.

NICK

He goes to college.

JENN WRIGHT

It is not some kind of men-ogg-a-tra. I have to meet Andrew, men-oga-mously.

MEREDITH

Actually we should go too. I've had too much to drink. Thanks for that.

Meredith stands up with her purse.

BEN

Really? We're leaving?

NICK

Oh, so everyone's leaving me. It's just me and GREASE 2 over there.

MEREDITH

You're coming to the sale right?

NICK

What's in it for me?

MEREDITH

Beer?

NICK

I'll be there.

Meredith hugs Nick. Ben shakes his hand. All three, Jenn, Ben and Meredith, leave as one. Nick sits and drinks.

EXT. SPRINGFIELD AVENUE - DAY

Past the Engineering Quad, with its engineers and modernist sculpture, Meredith leans on Ben, pushing his bike.

MEREDITH

I think Nick likes you.

BEN

Yeah?

MEREDITH

He hates everybody. This is good, it means we can hang out more.

BEN

You wanna' hang more.

MEREDITH

Yeah, I've got nothing, but time on my hands now.

BEN

You know, I can go this weekend. If you want. I can go.

MEREDITH

No meeting, did you fail out?

BEN

They approved everything already.

MEREDITH

Does that happen often?

Ben shrugs as best he can and still push the bike. The shoulder raise causes Meredith to stand on her own.

BEN

They know me, they trust me. I've been here, like, forever.

MEREDITH

They just want to get rid of you.

BEN

That's not it. Anyways, I can go next weekend.

MEREDITH

Well...

Meredith lags behind and Ben stops his bike to catch down.

BEN

What?

MEREDITH

I was kinda set to go alone. Well, Allison's coming, but we won't run together. And besides, my parents will be there.

BEN

You don't want me to meet your
parents?

MEREDITH

No, I don't want you to meet my
parents. Not yet, at least.

The couple stops walking and stares through each other. Ben loses the staring competition, and jumps on his bike.

BEN

Here, hop on the handlebars.

Meredith shakes her head.

BEN

Don't worry.

Meredith sits on the handle bars and leans against him. He pedals to a shaky start. They pass through the Engineering Quad, around the Boneyard creek, past the fountains, the statues, and the COUPLES in the dark.

EXT. MEREDITH'S HOUSE - DAY

The lonely brick house looks lively with the massive yard sale. Most of Meredith's living room sits on the yard. Bugles and Kirby play in a small pin with a sign that says "HELP US."

Steve and Patricia's yellow school bus BEEPS to back up. With the powerful ALARM blaring, Steve opens the emergency exit. Ben helps him lift out more patio furniture. Nick, beer in hand, points where everything should go.

Valerie and Craig check one couch at a time.

CRAIG

I like this one.

VALERIE

Have you tried this one?

Meredith takes ten dollars from a ELDERLY COUPLE. They take a book shelf. Ben turns to help them lift it, letting a table to land on Steve's foot.

MEREDITH

How are we doing?

Allison counts money.

ALLISON

Not bad. Considering the lack of advertisement.

MEREDITH

Yeah, sorry about the song.

Nick approaches, Dukes up.

NICK

Listen, give me a break, I can't write a song for every sale. That's not how genius works.

MEREDITH

I just wanted a little jingle.

NICK

Well, sorry, you're not the boss of me anymore.

Nick tips back a beer as if it were fine wine.

ALLISON

Is he always that funny?

MEREDITH

No, he's usually an asshole.

Allison watches Nick as he "helps" Ben move another couch. Jenny Grace and her fiancée, Jeff, approach.

JENNY GRACE

Hey Meredith.

MEREDITH

Hey Jenny, Jeff. Anything I can help you with?

JENNY GRACE

Um, we were...

JEFF

We're interested in the house.

Jenny's face fill with a grin to big to show. She hugs Jeff to hide it.

MEREDITH

Allison can help you with that.
Allison.

Meredith snaps at Allison who still watches Nick, who is now failing to beat Ben's Skip-it score.

ALLISON

Right this way.

Allison leads the couple toward the empty house. Meredith smiles as more of her junk sells.

EXT. NEIL STREET - COLUMBUS - DAY

RUNNERS gather, warming up. In front of the community pavilion and across from the Nationwide Arena the "START/FINISH" banner hangs over the street.

Near the middle of the large pack, Meredith stands, stretching. Her number, 506, hangs on her back.

She takes a drink of water as the pack starts to move, first at a walk. Allison already rushes to catch up.

MEREDITH

Thanks for doing this with me.

ALLISON

Thank you. It's nice to have someone to push a little.

MEREDITH

Yeah, thanks.

The women reach the line and immediately split. Meredith starts her watch. The pace increases.

Everyone runs around the corner to Vine Street.

EXT. PARK AVENUE - DAY

Still in heavy congestion, Meredith moves past the slower runners. At this point, several competitors are in stride with her. They rise over the highway and dip into the art district.

EXT. NEIL STREET - DAY

Entering Ohio State University, the pack disperses toward the refreshments. FRATERNITY AND SORORITIES offer water and sports drinks from their Greek labeled tents.

Meredith runs on, past the campus buildings and both the CHEERING and DISINTERESTED STUDENTS.

EXT. OHIO STATE STADIUM - DAY

Around the stadium, Meredith's setting her own pace in front of a group of MALE RUNNERS, close behind.

A WOMAN, near Meredith's age, in an Ohio State shirt, passes and Meredith, in an orange Illini outfit gives chase.

In her peripheral vision, Meredith sees other ORANGE FIGURES in front of the stadium. Her PARENTS hold two signs: "ILL" and "INI." Meredith smiles and gives a quick wave.

PARENTS

Go Meredith!

EXT. NORTH HIGH STREET - DAY

Runners stretch far in front and far behind Meredith, but she is now almost on her own. A few men struggle to keep up. The red Ohio State girl stays ahead.

EXT. SPRING STREET - DAY

The race with the Ohio State girl is not going well. Meredith lags behind, but keeps up pace, wincing. Past a fenced house, a BEAGLE runs along with them. He's tired from repeating this small lap.

Meredith AWES and slows a bit. When she looks back the other girl is far ahead and the men are catching up. Meredith races on, now with more effort.

EXT. WASHINGTON AVENUE - DAY

At a refreshment tent, in front of the topiary garden, Meredith runs through to get a paper cup of sports drink. She spills it down her throat and shirt. Throwing down the cup, she grabs her side and grimaces, but steadies and straightens herself back to the route.

Checking her watch, 01:09:45, 9.1 MILES, Meredith grins then GRUNTS.

EXT. SOUTH HIGH STREET - DAY

Meredith is completely on her own. Runners are everywhere but her pace is separate and determined. She runs through the Brewery District and under the 70 overpass.

Emerging, BOOS chorus from yards ahead. Meredith turns to see a MICHIGAN CLAD GIRL, catching up.

EXT. FRONT STREET - DAY

The pace quickens, runners pass Meredith who passes others. They race toward the arena and A LARGE CHEERING CROWD.

Meredith rounds the corner.

EXT. SPRING STREET - DAY

Now moving with the crowd. Meredith clears her head and focusses forward. Spitting sweat and fighting her side, she elongates her stride and enters the straightaway.

EXT. NEIL STREET - DAY

Alone in the midst of the race, Meredith charges past STRUGGLING FINISHERS, past the girl in the Ohio State shirt, but there are several others dressed the same. The Michigan girl passes angry competitors.

Meredith blinks her eyes, and opens them blank to the finish line. A large clock displays the overall time.

She kicks her leg over the line and, near falling, stops her own watch. Recovering and jogging with the other recent runners, Meredith smiles.

Shaking away sweat, Meredith grabs her side. Jogging to a walk, she looks over to a bleary cheering rabble. The WINNERS are already on platforms, the FINISHERS pile up behind her.

Walking and wiping her eyes, Meredith switches her clinched teeth to a grin then back before checking her time. She CAUGHS A LAUGH and looks around, smiling.

Catching her breath, and shaking back to calm. Meredith looks once more at her stopped watch.

ECU: 01:58:08

FADE OUT