

PICK

FADE IN:

INT. IAN'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - DAY

IAN HARPER (30's), boxers and T-shirt, fills a bath with hot water. He puts his hand in to test the temperature, and retracts it quickly, shooting an angry look at the tub.

He grabs the hair dryer, tries to reach the edge of the tub, but the cable is too short.

He unplugs the dryer, plugs in a curling iron. Still can't reach the tub.

Ian stares at the iron - eye rolls.

EXT. JEFF'S HOUSE - DAY

Ian, still in his boxers and T-shirt, stands in front of his next door neighbor JEFFREY (40's).

IAN

Thanks.

Ian holds an extension cord.

JEFF

Wanna come over later? We're making original Tagliatelle Bolognese.

IAN

(turns to leave)

I'm kinda busy right now.

JEFF

Oh. Okay. See you around.

Ian makes a beeline back to his property, which is separated by a bed of roses.

His shirt gets ripped on a thorn. Without acknowledging it, he continues to his weed-infested lawn, then into his house.

INT. IAN'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - DAY

Ian plugs in the extension, places the curling iron near the tub. He exhales deeply, summoning all his strength.

He climbs in the tub. Stands there. Reconsidering.

IAN

What am I doing?

He grabs the shower curtain to pull himself out and accidentally wipes the extension into the tub.

It tumbles into the water but nothing happens. The circuit breaker activates with a clicking noise.

Ian breathes a sigh of relief. Crack! The shower curtain rod breaks off the wall.

Ian tries frantically, arms flailing, to grab a hold of anything -- in vain.

He crashes to the floor, wrapped in the shower curtain.

Subdued moans can be heard from underneath.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A TV plays video of Ian and wife LAURA HARPER, 30. Friends sing "Happy Birthday Laura". HELEN (30's), Laura's best friend, delivers a cake with a "30" on top. Cheers as Laura blows out the candles and kisses Ian.

Ian sits watching in a daze. The TV screen goes dark. He stares at his own reflection for a while.

PARROT (O.S.)
You're a loser, Ian.

Ian slowly turns toward the parrot, sitting in a cage.

PARROT
Ian, you're such a loser!

Ian stares at the table in front of him.

A dozen envelopes are ripped open. On the papers it reads: "Payment request", "overdue notice", "final warning"

The front door opens.

TOM (8), Ian's son, walks in.

IAN
Hey, Buddy.

Ian gets up and gives him an emotional hug.

IAN
I missed you. You had fun at your grandparents?

Tom starts picking his nose.

TOM

Grandpa let me play with his balls. But they were too heavy after a while, so we played computer.

IAN

That's, that's, you shouldn't play so many video games. It's unhealthy.

Tom still picks his nose.

TOM

I'm hungry. Today is Meat Loaf Day.

IAN

What day?

TOM

Meat Loaf Day.

IAN

Like Pancake Day?

TOM

Mom always made meat loaf on Wednesdays.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

On the stove are the leftovers of a lost 'kitchen-battle'; burned potatoes, green beans and meat loaf.

Ian dumps the last slice of a delivery pizza into the bin. He stops and glances at the ancient refrigerator. A photo stuck on the door:

Laura, smiling coyly. Next to her is Helen making a face, and Ian, laughing.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Ian prepares breakfast. Burned waffles. He opens the waffle iron and accidently burns his hand.

He hurries to the sink and holds his hand under cold water, when he hears a THUMP from upstairs.

He looks at the ceiling.

INT. TOM'S BEDROOM - DAY

Ian stands in the doorway, looking at something inside.

Tom lies on the floor with his legs awkwardly trapped in one torn pantleg. He rolls over on his stomach, trying to free himself.

TOM
I can't get out.

Ian stares expressionlessly at him.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Ian rips off a big strip of duct tape. Tom stands on a chair as Ian tapes the torn parts together.

IAN
Hold still.

TOM
Everybody will see it.

IAN
You're eight. Nobody will look.

TOM
That doesn't make sense.

IAN
Trust me, duct-taped jeans are totally in. Let's go.

EXT. IAN'S HOUSE - DAY

Ian and Tom walk toward an old car parked in the driveway.

JEFF (O.S.)
Hey there, neighbor.

Ian turns, annoyed, and sees Jeff approaching.

JEFF
I really don't wanna be a pain, but I wanna power-wash the deck and the extension cord I loaned you is the only one I have with a ground fault circuit interrupter so I can't electrocute myself, and--

While Jeff speaks, Tom gets into the back of the car.

IAN
That's why I couldn't kill myself in the bathtub.

JEFF
Ohhh.

IAN
Yeah.

JEFF
No.

Ian nods.

JEFF
I don't know what to... I mean,
that's...

IAN
Yeah.

JEFF
Wait a sec...

Jeff decides not to believe Ian and laughs it off.

JEFF
You big joker. Almost got me. C'mere.

Jeff hugs him intensely.

IAN
You take care now.

Ian tries to free himself.

JEFF
Tom's trousers are taped. You noticed?

IAN
It's vintage.

EXT. SCRAPYARD - DAY

Ian and Tom watch a car crusher crushing a wrecked car. Ian slowly drifts off.

MEMORY FLASHES

-- A salesman opens the door of the car, hands Laura the keys and shakes Ian's hand.

-- Ian and Laura drive through the countryside.

-- Ian and Laura make-out in the back seat.

-- Ian opens the door and helps Laura out, holding BABY TOM.

BACK TO SCENE.

A LOUD BOOM from the machine jolts Ian back to reality.

SCRAPYARD GUY (O.S.)
Wanna have your wife's box?

A SCRAPYARD GUY (50's) approaches, holding a cardboard box covered with smiley stickers.

IAN
What?

SCRAPYARD GUY
Your wife's box? Was in the trunk.

IAN
Sure.

Scrapyard guy hands him the box.

INT. IAN'S HOUSE - GARAGE - DAY

Ian puts down the box, looks around and sees Laura's painting equipment standing in the corner - easel, brushes, paint etc.

He sighs.

INT. IAN'S BEDROOM - DAY

Ian sleeps in bed and is awakened by a LAWN MOWER.

Ian notices Tom standing in the doorway, staring nervously, with a dark, wet spot on his P.J.s. Tom disappears again.

The sound of the lawn mower subsides. Ian turns to the empty side of the bed, his fingers glide over the sheets.

IAN
I need you!

A moment, before Ian hears a GARDEN SHREDDER. Ian looks out of the window, where Jeff is shredding a tree. Ian frowns.

INT. TOM'S BEDROOM - DAY

Ian strips off Tom's wet bed sheets and wipes the mattress with kitchen towels.

Tom sits, embarrassed, on a chair.

IAN
I didn't know, that you, um, were having problems again.

Tom stares to the floor.

Ian stuffs the sheets, together with the towels, into a bag.

He heads to the door, stops in front of Tom. He is tempted to say something comforting, but then just walks out.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Ian enters. He opens the garbage bag, takes a sniff, closes the bag very quickly in disgust.

Ian's CELL PHONE RINGS, it's "Mom". He takes the call.

IAN
Hi, mom... Uh-huh...

Ian loads the washing machine with the towels and linen.

IAN
Just listen. You try to mediate between me and dad, which is very nice of you. I say: "Mom, you're very nice", which you are, but in the end, nothing changes, because dad won't budge an inch.

INT. IAN'S PARENTS HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

MARTHA (50's), Ian's mom, sits at the table on the phone.

MARTHA
Are you pulling my leg? Because it sure sounds like it.

INTERCUT

IAN
Do I ever make fun of you?

MARTHA
You can get very agitated and squinky at times. And besides, you never know if you'll have enough time left to say the things you wanna say to somebody.

IAN
What's that supposed to mean?

MARTHA
Your father has been having heart troubles lately.

Ian rolls his eyes, knows she's lying.

MARTHA
Sometimes at night, when I lie on his chest, I hear his heart beat. It beats very oddly.

ART (60's), Ian's dad, in perfect shape, does stretches dressed in a jogging suit.

Ian closes the washing machine, opens it again and adds way too much detergent. He starts the machine.

IAN

Stop making me feel guilty. I wasn't the one who started it. -- And when was I ever squinky? I'm not squinky.

MARTHA

Are you okay?

IAN

I'm trying, but I don't know how much more I can handle.

Ian's DOORBELL RINGS.

IAN

Helen is here. I gotta go.

He heads toward the door.

MARTHA

If you need anything, your father and I are there for you.

IAN

Thanks. I know.

He opens the door. A woman Ian doesn't recognize stands on the porch. This is MS. WRIGHT (40's), lush and vigorous.

MS. WRIGHT

Good morning, I'm Ms. Wright from social services.

She puts out her hand. Ian is a bit confused by her happy appearance. After a moment, he takes the hand.

MARTHA

Ian, what did you do?

IAN

Ma, I'm hanging up now.

MARTHA

Don't you dare! Put me on speaker phone. I wanna talk to her.

MS. WRIGHT

Oh, hello, to the voice from the telephone.

Ian lets her in and lights a cigarette.

IAN

I've been quite busy lately, but we're doing fine.

Ms. Wright looks around: dishes piled up in the kitchen, full ashtrays everywhere, Tom's toys scattered on the floor.

They sit down on the couch.

MS. WRIGHT

Mr. Harper, are you aware of the other casualty involved in your wife's car accident?

IAN

Not really, no.

MS. WRIGHT

Her name was Nina Robertson. You see, Ms. Robertson was a professional hostess.

IAN

(confused)

O-kay...

MS. WRIGHT

How can I put this delicately? About fifteen years ago you "engaged" with her. -- You have a daughter!

IAN

Come again?

MARTHA

Holy cow!

MS. WRIGHT

You have a daughter!

TOM (O.S.)

Dad?

MARTHA

Ian.

Ian turns half around, still shell-shocked, and --

IAN

Tom, go upstairs!

-- sees that Tom stands naked on the stairs.

Tom hesitates.

IAN

I said, go upstairs, and put some clothes on.

MARTHA
Why's Tom naked?

Tom obeys and goes upstairs.

IAN
Tom's nakedness is not the issue!
(to Ms. Wright)
Let me get this straight: You claim I
have a daughter I didn't know of for
fifteen years?

MS. WRIGHT
As far as I'm aware, Ms. Robertson
wanted to get an abortion, but then
decided against it and, well, her name
is Joyce.

IAN
You're kiddin', right? Did my father
put you up to this?

MARTHA
Your father wouldn't do that.

Martha glances at Art, who only rolls his eyes.

MS. WRIGHT
Mr. Harper, this is real!

IAN
Okay, okay, okay, let's assume for
argument's sake everything you just
said is true: She was a hooker. There
must be a hundred possible fathers.

MS. WRIGHT
She didn't become a prostitute until a
year later.

IAN
Why? I mean, but how can she be
certain?

MS. WRIGHT
She told her daughter you're the
father. As Joyce's legal guardian, I
have an obligation to investigate this
new development.

IAN
Investigate away.

MS. WRIGHT
This means taking a paternity test.

IAN
Wow, wow, wow.