

FREE AGENTS

"pilot"

written by

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PRODUCTION COMPANY NAME
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3RD DRAFT

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COLD OPEN

INT. HELEN'S APARTMENT -- BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Dark. Then a lamp reveals Alex and Helen, who have just had sex for the first time. Silence, which Alex fills, awkwardly--

ALEX

So, what happens now? First time I've had casual sex this century, so...

(off Helen's silence)

Not that last century was packed with casual sex. I can barely remember the last time I made love to someone I didn't have at least a mortgage with.

HELEN

We could take out a small loan together, if that would make you more comfortable.

ALEX

No, it's okay--

HELEN

Well, I'm honored to be your first meaningless screw of the millennium.

ALEX

Oh, no, I didn't...this's going well. See, I figured you say something like, "what're you thinking?" and I'd say something like, "I'm thinking, can I make it to my clothes without you noticing I have no abs." Which you probably won't think is funny.

(she doesn't)

You'll just think it's a juvenile way of avoiding a serious question. To quote my ex-wife--

HELEN

I'll call you a cab.

She opens a drawer, roots. Alex sees it's full of condoms.

ALEX

That's impressive. In my limited experience, I never got past the three pack. That's making a statement--

HELEN

I can shop on the internet?

ALEX

No, like, "This is 2011, I'm an independent woman and I can buy a hundred condoms and that doesn't make me a slut or anything--

Helen puts the phone down. Turns to Alex.

HELEN

Is that what I was saying?

ALEX

I'm not editorializing. It's great--

HELEN

Or was I saying, "This is 2010 and I'm going to buy condoms to have sex with my fiance?"

Alex winces. Looks above the bed, where there is a large professional portrait of a handsome thirty-something MAN.

ALEX

With--

HELEN

Pete. Yes.

Alex looks around -- more similar photos decorate the room.

ALEX

Right. And Pete and Pete, and Pete--

HELEN

I know, they're a bit much, but we had them done just before he died.

ALEX

No, I'm not--I'm sorry--

HELEN

What the hell. "What're you thinking?"

ALEX

I'm thinking, it was my son's birthday Sunday and I wasn't with my kids.

Alex stares into space, tearing up. A beat, and Helen dials.

HELEN

Hi, I need a cab, please?

END OF COLD OPEN

ACT ONE

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM -- DAY

ALEX slumps at the conference table with a few others. DAN -- early 30's, frat-boy handsome, confident -- sits beside him.

DAN

Don't take this the wrong way, but you look like hell.

ALEX

Oh, just, up late night, you know, rough night--Is there a right way to take that?

DAN

As an honest, constructive note.
(smirk, back slap)
So what was her name, bro?

ALEX

What, who..? Oh, no, no--

Enter executive GREGG -- 40, with the soft, exhausted look of a married man with kids -- has entered.

GREGG

You got some? Back on the horse? Tell.

Behind him HELEN enters, now in crisp business attire.

ALEX

No, come on--

GREGG

He did! Look at his face!

HELEN

I can't wait to hear this.

DAN

Ink's barely dry on the divorce papers and he's back on the horse. My new sexual hero--

ALEX

There's nothing to hear--

GREGG

Alex, please, the closest I got to sex this month was trying a new lotion on my wife's C-section scar--

STEPHEN -- Dayton group CEO, 50, handsome, charming, amoral -- enters. Glances at Alex.

STEPHEN

Good morning, PR professionals. Alex, you look like hell.

DAN

He was up all night doing el nasty.

HELEN

And was about to tell us about it.

STEPHEN

Well, this's our staff meeting.
(checking watch)
Make it fast. Just the good parts.

ALEX

Okay, fine. I met a woman, we had wild animal sex all night--

GREGG

Yes. Sex like animals--

HELEN

Animals, like, sloths, or iguanas--

ALEX

Like panthers. Can we get on with the meeting now--?

STEPHEN

We've got two minutes. Some details--

GREGG

Describe the lingerie.

DAN

Boobs. Size and shape. And positions--

HELEN

And feelings, don't forget the feelings.

ALEX

Right. Lingerie. Surprisingly drab, considering. Boobs, you know, roundish, and enormous--

GREGG

No kids? Not all mangled and weird?

ALEX

Career woman, barely knows what kids are. Positions, well, the works. Missionary, dog-style, cat-style, reverse crab, flying dutchman, bondage, and, uh...that's the limit of my imagination. I was up late working.

"BOO's" all around. Helen gives him a private smirk--

STEPHEN

Okay. Speaking of imagination--

He hits a remote, and a newspaper headline projects up front. A kid puking in front of a school. The headline: "Bad Eggs. Salmonella Outbreak linked to Happy Farms."

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

Happy Farms Organik, a division of our fine client Omdyne Chemical, has a little public relations problem. So, let's spin this, shall we?

INT. DAYTON GROUP -- DAY

Alex crosses the floor, as Helen veers by. Smirks, quietly--

HELEN

If you'd wanted to be tied up, you just had to ask--

She heads off. Whatever Alex might've said or done is cut short as Executive assistant EMMA -- 20's, pretty -- intercepts him with several files and messages.

EMMA

Laura called, Laura called, and Laura called. In summary, call your ex-wife. And clips on the Flora Shampoo puppy testing flap. Nice job.

She holds up clips showing a puppy looking sad, with the headline, "Ow, My Eyes!"

ALEX

Thank you. You've brightened my day.

EMMA

I'm not paid enough to brighten.

Gregg collects his own messages. Follows Alex--

GREGG

So how'd Billy's birthday go?

ALEX

Well, I got him a remote control car.
She got him an actual little car he
can drive around in.

GREGG

Total defeat. That's not even fair.

Stephen is approaching...

ALEX

You split up, it's like cage fighting.
No rules, to the death--

STEPHEN

Alex, don't sweat this. You've already
given your boys a great gift. We're
driven to achieve by troubled
relationships with our fathers. You
think my oldest would have the luge
ranking he does if he weren't trying
to prove something to me?

(arm on Alex's shoulder)

C'mon, let's talk.

INT. ALEX'S OFFICE -- DAY -- CONTINUOUS

They enter. Alex sits, as Stephen closes the door.

STEPHEN

So. The Flying Dutchman, huh?

ALEX

What? Oh, I just made that up--

STEPHEN

No, it's real. But that's not what I
wanted to talk about. Alex, how're you
doing?

ALEX

Oh, well, it's tough, you know--

Stephen starts giving Alex a weird pals-y backrub thing.

STEPHEN

I do know. I've been divorced three
times. I know what it's like. Mind
scattered. Distracted. Know what I did
after my first divorce? Dropped
everything, took a week in St. Barts.
Met the runner-up for Ms. Maryland in
a cabana mix-up. Three nights later, I
could barely remember my ex's name.

ALEX

Sounds great, but I don't think--

STEPHEN

--no, of course, the money, and you've used all your vacation days. A shame. St. Bart's is amazing. But you know what you do have? *Work*.

ALEX

To take my mind off my problems--

STEPHEN

Good spin. I was gonna say to avoid being fired. Forget this other stuff, focus on your work.

ALEX

Okay, Stephen. Thanks for saying that.

Stephen gives Alex another squeeze on the shoulders and goes. Alex glances at a PHOTO on his desk -- him and his kids TOMMY, 12, and BILLY, 8 in happier days. Then he shovels a load of files onto his desk and gets to work.

INT. DAYTON GROUP -- DAY

ON HELEN, seen through the glass wall of her office as she finishes work for the day.

ALEX heads across the office, watching her. He approaches the printer, where Gregg is talking with Dan--

GREGG

--come on man, I'd be a great wingman--

DAN

It's impossible. You even understand the definition of the word--?

Dan sees Alex, as he removes a press release from the printer. "For Immediate Release: Salmonella Risks Overblown."

DAN (CONT'D)

There you are. Okay. So we agree, right, that you do need to get back on the horse? I mean, sure, divorce, it's a bummer, you're off your game--

Emma approaches with documents and files.

EMMA

Okay. The Happy Farms files, and the organic farming data.

ALEX

Thanks. I'm looking at a late night,
any chance of you ordering me takeout?

EMMA

Slim to none.

DAN

That's where I come in, with a perfect
opportunity for you. Check this.

He shows Alex a picture on his phone. An attractive woman,
SUSAN. Emma and Gregg lean in.

GREGG

Whoa. Man, you have to hit that--

EMMA

No chance. Unless she has a deformity
you can't see in this picture--

DAN

This's the chick I'm hooking up with.
Her body has no deformities. She
called, she's got a librarian friend,
one of her cats died, and now she's
coming with us, so I need a wingman--

GREGG

I can do it--

DAN

You're married. You can't be a
wingman, ever again. Accept it.

(sock's Alex's arm)

It's perfect. You watch me, see how
it's done, rehearse the moves. Dude, a
cat lady, it's like a chick with
training wheels--

ALEX

I don't know, I'm swamped with work, I
haven't moved into my new place...I
don't know if I'm quite ready--

Helen is passing, on her way out.

HELEN

Good night. Dan, just curious, who was
your old sexual hero?

DAN

Derek Jeter.

Helen makes a "hmmm..." face and goes. Alex watches her--

GREGG

You were gonna replace Jeter with him?

DAN

Nah, it was just to psyche him up.

Alex grabs his papers and hurries after Helen.

INT. DAYTON GROUP -- RECEPTION AREA -- NIGHT

Helen heads for the elevators, ready to leave for the night.
Alex catches up as she hits the button.

ALEX

So, what if I asked properly?

HELEN

About being tied up? I was kidding.

ALEX

I mean, everyone thinks I should get
back on the horse, so I was wondering
if maybe you might like to, uh...be
that horse.

HELEN

Hmm, let me think that over--

ALEX

That didn't come out right. I mean,
like a normal date. Dinner. Movie--
(she just laughs)
Was it the crying? I don't usually cry
after sex. Before or during sure, but--

The elevator arrives. They get in.

HELEN

It's not that. I like men who cry--

ALEX

Then we should probably get married.
You'd be very happy.

INT. ELEVATOR -- DAY

Alex and Helen ride, as elevator music plays.

HELEN

Can I be honest?

ALEX

Please. I've done nothing but lie all day long. And we've seen each other naked, I think it's obligatory--

HELEN

You aren't ready for a relationship. It's all too raw. We can't talk five minutes without you going maudlin over your kids or having an existential crisis or crying--

ALEX

--which you said you liked--

HELEN

Alex, don't take this the wrong way, but you're an absolute mess.

ALEX

A mess, maybe, but absolute?

HELEN

You're crying right now. Are you aware of that?

A beat. Alex realizes, yes, there are tears on his face.

ALEX

No, what--?

(cocks ear to listen)

God, it's this song. My kids loved this song, we'd do this dance, you'd do your hands...you wouldn't be impressed, they were bad dancers, but...god, what if that was the happiest I'll ever be--?

HELEN

Crying, kids, existential crisis.

(checks watch)

Two minutes. A new record.

They arrive at the ground floor. Exiting--

INT. LOBBY -- NIGHT

Alex follows Helen--

ALEX

That doesn't mean I'm not ready.

HELEN

You said it yourself.

ALEX

To Dan? I just meant, logistically--

They're passing the Lobby desk, where WALTER -- 40's, odd -- sits in his security guard uniform--

WALTER

Alex. My man.

ALEX

Walter--

Walter waves with his handgun. Alex continues, pleased--

HELEN

"My Man?" Since when are you and the security guy so tight?

ALEX

Since I've been crashing in my office, waiting for them to finish painting my apartment. It's cool, you know, me and Walter, two, weird lonely guys talking about guns, mostly. Crossbows--

HELEN

You're making my point for me--

ALEX

Okay, since we're being honest. Was it the sex?

HELEN

Yes, it was the sex--

ALEX

God. See, I married early, I didn't have wild years to learn the advanced stuff. And people joke about sex in marriage because it is a joke--

HELEN

It wasn't the sex.

ALEX

So it was good? Be honest.

HELEN

Do you really want to know? Be honest.

ALEX

Yes. No. Or, just the good parts--?

HELEN

Alex, stop. I know what this's like. You think you're sailing through life, but then your boat sinks, and now you're in the middle of the ocean, grabbing anything that floats. But you *will* get through this, and you'll come out a stronger person. I know. I had it rough but now I'm fine--

ALEX

--except for some problem drinking occasionally mixed with impulsive sexual acting-out. Speaking of which--

Helen just glares at him. Nerve struck. She tenses.

HELEN

I don't think we should sleep together again. Ever.

ALEX

So, that's it? I'm dumped?

HELEN

That would imply we had a relationship.

And she heads off--

ALEX

Is it because we work together?

INT. DAYTON GROUP -- NIGHT

The Janitors are cleaning the office--

INT. ALEX'S OFFICE -- NIGHT

Alex is out of his tie, working, looking lost. There's a blanket and pillow on the couch. Walter sits on the couch, idly handling his pistol--

WALTER

--those kid cars aren't so great. The engines have no torque. Turning radius is just crap. I know from experience. Don't sweat it. The kids and this divorce thing, I mean, my parents split up, and I turned out fine--

The phone rings. Alex picks up.

ALEX

This's Alex--

INT. STORE -- CHECKOUT LANE/INTERCUT

Helen is in line at the store. She's got a single frozen dinner, a bottle of wine, and a small box of cookies.

HELEN

I didn't answer your question. Yes.
Because we work together.

ALEX

So? The Clintons. The Osbournes.
Freddie Prinze, Jr. and Sarah Michelle
Gellar. All worked together, no
problem. My point being, it can work--

HELEN

Just forget last night ever happened.
We'll be friends. Good night, Alex.

She hangs up. The clerk is eyeing her.

CLERK

Is that all?

HELEN

What? Yes.

INT. ALEX'S OFFICE -- NIGHT

Alex stands there. Hangs up the phone.

WALTER

So, you wanna check out that video of
my Tae Kwan Do practice?

ALEX

That sounds about right.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. DAYTON GROUP -- DAY

Helen and Emma coming off the elevator.

EMMA

--I was, like, wow, you lease a BMW, please marry me. I'm twenty six. By my plan, I have two years of fun dating before serious dating to be married with two kids by thirty four--

HELEN

I had a plan like that--

EMMA

--and your fiancée has a heart attack. Thanks a lot. Seriously, at six months, guys should show you their medical info--

(Helen shrug, nods)

What's it been, a year? You need to get back out there. We're going to this new club, Fossa, you should--

HELEN

No. Clubs're just warehouses where they keep the assholes at night. I got engaged specifically so I'd never have to set foot in one again.

Passing reception, receptionist MARGARET (prim, pleasant, 40's) holds out a FedEx for Emma--

EMMA

Where're you gonna meet guys? On the street? Don't say online, or I'll puke. You're way too hot to be an old maid, and you know what they say, use it or lose it.

MARGARET

Now, when they say that, what's the "it" they're refering to?

EMMA

Your vagina.

MARGARET

Oh. I thought it was something else.

They continue along toward Emma's desk--

HELEN

Look, I'm fine right now. Men are a hassle. If I was so desperate to have something hairy messing up my house and slobbering on me when I was trying to sleep, I'd get a newfoundland--

Dan hovers at Emma's desk looking for something. He sees her--

DAN

Emma, did a package--?

Emma flings the FedEx envelope at him. Alex passes.

ALEX

Oh, hey, Dan. So, I'm in. For the double date thing.

DAN

Oh. Yes. Sweet.

ALEX

Morning Helen.

Helen gives him a look as Alex continues by. Dan shows Emma his cell photo--

DAN

Did I show you this? Chick I'll be hooking up with?

WITH ALEX, as he glances back to gauge the effect of his announcement on Helen. Helen is giving him a look.

He smiles a little, then almost runs into Stephen--

STEPHEN

Ah. Alex. I wanted to show you this before you went out to do the press kit with Omdyne.

Stephen holds out an iPad. Alex looks, then suddenly RECOILS.

ALEX

What the--?

STEPHEN

Flying Dutchman.
(rotating screen)
It's actually much easier with a third person involved.
(closes iPad)
Okay. Remember. Focused on work.

INT. OMDYNE CEO OFFICES -- HAPPY FARMS

Alex attends POLK, the CEO of Omdyne Chemical, who sits in his chair with napkins in his collar, being powdered by MARINA, the make-up woman. A video crew stage-manages his office, putting up family portraits and nature images--

POLK

--I don't know why we need to respond to this flap at all. Know how many people'd have salmonella without companies like us? Everyone! We should give everyone salmonella, just so they'd know what it'd be like. Then maybe they'd shut the hell up.

ALEX

Possibly. But for now, let's go with, like, "our eggs are farm-fresh, we love kids," that kind of thing.
(then, low, to Marina)
Anything you can do to make him look less mean. Okay--

HELEN stands by a monitor with JIM -- a pothead artiste.

HELEN

Let's frame in the wife and kids--

Jim tweaks the camera on the tripod, trying to carry polk and the portrait. Gets a weird unbalanced/arty frame.

JIM

How's that?

HELEN

Jim. Move the whole thing.

Alex approaches, as Helen steps back.

HELEN (CONT'D)

So you're going on the date with Dan?

ALEX

I am. Because I'm ready, and I gotta take that first step, right?

HELEN

As long as trying to nail a bereaved cat lady isn't some--
(looking up)
What is it, Jim?

Jim is standing there, looking befuddled.

JIM

Move the chair, or the picture?

HELEN

Move the camera.

(as Jim leaves)

--isn't some pathetic attempt to make me jealous.

ALEX

That's ridiculous--

HELEN

Good. Then I'm all for it. I can help.

ALEX

What do you mean? Help with what?

HELEN

Alex, my god. Everything. You're a shambles. And I know what it's like, your life's fallen apart, you're working all the time. And, as a woman, I can tell you things you won't hear from guys, so I'd be a useful friend. Which we agreed we are. Friends.

ALEX

What, we, like, help each other?

HELEN

You, since I've got myself together--

ALEX

Marina! He's way too yellow!

(back to Helen)

Together, as in, staying in every night in an apartment festooned with huge portraits of your dead fiance--?

Helen shoots a deadly glare at Alex, as Jim approaches.

JIM

Okay, we're set.

HELEN

Good. Let's roll.

(then, to Alex)

Festooned? What's that supposed to--?

ALEX

Festooned. Very decorated. What's it been, a year? How long're you gonna--?

HELEN

We're talking about you. Now, what're you going to wear?

INT. DEPARTMENT STORE -- DAY

Helen is looking at shirts as Alex stand by, anxious, checking his watch.

ALEX

I have a meeting. Stephen used the word "fired" yesterday, and I can never tell the difference between his joking voice and regular voice--

HELEN

We'll say we hit traffic. You need a new you. This you is too Willy Loman.

ALEX

It's who I am. A divorced, overworked white collar guy nearing middle age--

She holds up a very (perhaps too) stylish shirt for him--

ALEX (CONT'D)

No.

HELEN

Why not?

ALEX

Because I'm not an Armenian gangster.

HELEN

It's not going to kill you to be a little stylish.

ALEX

Me in that shirt would be a lie. I'd be lying to the world. I'd be like Dick Cheney. Worse--

He holds up the shirt to a passing SALESLADY.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Me in this shirt. Be honest.

SALESLADY

Very nice.

ALEX

She's lying. She's paid to lie, it's her job.

HELEN

Alex, you're in PR, you of all people know you need to create an image.

ALEX

--which, when we do it, is a tissue of lies. Are you saying women want to be lied to? Are you all insane?

HELEN

It's a shirt.

ALEX

If you saw me in this shirt, would you want to sleep with me?

HELEN

No. But I know you--

ALEX

Exactly. We know each other, there's no illusions.

HELEN

You're not trying to sleep with me.

ALEX

I already did. Accomplished, I might add, in Willy Loman attire--

HELEN

But now we're just friends, and so you need this shirt.

ALEX

This is nuts. This's not possible.

HELEN

You're not *that* hopeless.

ALEX

No, this "friends" thing. I've seen all those movies. It never works--

HELEN

We're doing it right now. Come on--

Helen rolls her eyes, walking off with some clothes--

ALEX

I'm saying there's always tension--

They pass the corner of the home electronics section, where all the TV's are playing the News--

REPORTER (V.O.)

--Happy Farms has yet to respond to the outbreak, which sickened several children--

We see the same clip of the kid vomiting. Alex grimaces, as his phone rings--

ALEX

God, they love that puking kid--
(answering his phone)
Yes, Stephen, we're stuck in traffic.
I'll call the station now.

INT. DEPARTMENT STORE -- DRESSING AREA -- DAY

Alex and Helen bring clothes to a dressing room. Alex is heading inside--

ALEX

(into phone)
It's Alex Taylor, calling about Happy Farms. Yes, I'll hold--
(as Helen follows him in)
You can't come in here.

HELEN

It's faster. And it's not like I haven't seen everything already.

INT. DEPARTMENT STORE -- DRESSING ROOM - DAY

Alex and Helen in the small room. Alex tries to talk on the phone while trying on clothes. Helen helps. It's intimate--

ALEX

(into phone)
--Mike, read the press release I sent. Happy Farms is organic, you know what that means? Manure--Yes they are. With a "K," but it means the same thing--

She's buttoning his shirt for him as he continues--

ALEX (CONT'D)

--come on, give me *some* love! If I wanted to get totally ignored, I'd call my ex-wife! Something. A nibble--

The door suddenly opens, revealing the mad-looking Clerk.

CLERK

Okay, this isn't a motel--
(as Alex points to the phone)
Oh. Sorry--

HELEN

We're just friends.

Alex just smiles as the clerk closes the door. As Helen fusses with him, he looks at himself in the shirt--

HELEN (CONT'D)

There. It's great. New Alex--

ALEX

--is John Stamos's lamer brother.

HELEN

Don't tuck, you're not a pro golfer--

She untucks him. There's a moment, as she's close to him that he gets an intimate look. Their faces close--

HELEN (CONT'D)

Okay, what're you doing?

ALEX

What do you mean?

HELEN

You were doing that look--
(does "sensual" look)
--and the slow lean in thing--

ALEX

Well, I mean, you're all touching me,
we're, like, inches apart in this tiny
room where you came in--

HELEN

--to help you pick clothes! This's why
men and woman can't be friends--

ALEX

Which is just what I was saying--

HELEN

--because of you. It's your problem--

ALEX

I mis-read the signs. Which were
highly ambiguous--

HELEN

Okay. If this is going to work we need a safe word.

ALEX

Safe word?

HELEN

If you get confused in a situation, you say the safeword, and I'll know--

ALEX

So, what, I say "potato" or something--

HELEN

--and we pause, take a deep breath, and we're friends again.

(off her watch)

Okay, now we're late, we should go.

ALEX

Thank god, I've never wanted to be back at work so badly.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM -- DAY

Dan is at the whiteboard, while Stephen, Gregg, and a few others sit around, listening.

DAN

-- it's PR basics, pure and simple. Emphasize positives, get 'em out front, keep the bad out of the light--

Alex and Helen hurry in, taking seats with their files--

HELEN

Sorry we're late, traffic. What're--?

(looking at whiteboard)

Wait, "baggage?" What account is this?

ALEX

(realizing)

Oh, my god, this's me, isn't it?

ON THE WHITEBOARD -- "positive" and "negative" columns. In the Negative column -- "Divorce/Baggage," "Kids," "Old," and "Looks?" There's nothing in the Positive column.

DAN

Your big date's coming up, we thought we'd work out a strategy--

STEPHEN

--but we're stuck on the positives.
Helen, throw in if you have any--

Helen just gives Alex a little smirk.

INT. STORE -- CHECKOUT LANE -- NIGHT

Helen stands there again, watching her items -- frozen dinner, bottle of wine, dessert -- move past. She catches the CLERK glancing at her. A stiff little smile...

INT. HELEN'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

WINE POURS. Helen pulls her frozen dinner from the microwave. She starts toward the table, where work is stacked, when she finds herself looking up into one of the portraits of Pete.

She turns. Another one. She looks. Starts counting them...

INT. DAYTON GROUP -- NIGHT

The janitors clean. And there's Alex, still in his office.

INT. DAYTON GROUP -- ALEX'S OFFICE -- NIGHT

Alex, in oxford and boxers, is proofreading copy, while Walter sits on the couch, watching a video of himself perform karate moves on Alex's TV. The Shirt hangs in the corner.

WALTER

Ohh. This's a good move coming up
right here. Nice--
(off the shirt)
Who's shirt is that?

ALEX

I'm not sure--
(phone rings, pick up)
This's Alex.

INT. HELEN'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT/INTERCUT

Helen paces, on the phone.

HELEN

There's twenty one.

ALEX

Twenty one what?

HELEN

Pictures of Pete. Many are small.
Twenty one is not "festooned."

ALEX

Is that what you're doing tonight?
Counting pictures? I'm just watching
some karate videos, I could swing by--

HELEN

I just wanted to correct the figure.
Enjoy your evening.

She hangs up. Alex hangs up. Looks over at Walter, who has
paused the video.

WALTER

You ready? I didn't want you to miss
this. The mantis style--

INT. ALEX'S OFFICE -- NIGHT

Alex is working. His New Shirt still hangs in his office. He
looks up to see Stephen looking in--

STEPHEN

Nice shirt. Sexomnia?

ALEX

Is that a kind of shirt--? I don't--

STEPHEN

A medical disorder. The compulsion to
have sex while asleep. When we were
raising awareness for Sexdoz, Pfizer's
Sexsomnia pill, we got John Stamos to
appear on "Today" as a celebrity
sufferer. I gave him that shirt as a
thank you. Nice choice.

Stephen heads out. Alex looks uncomfortable. Enter Helen.

HELEN

Okay, maybe it's a little Stamos. You
don't have to do this. If you're not
comfortable--

ALEX

No, I'm totally comfortable. I'm
ready. It's going to be great. I just
hope you're not jealous thinking of me
having scintillating conversation with
a large, sophisticated cat lady, while
you sit home alone with your work.

HELEN

Actually, I have plans for tonight, so
don't worry about me.

ALEX

Great. Then I won't.

INT. DAYTON GROUP -- DAY

The office bustles with activity. Alex exits his office, goes to hand a fax to Emma, who is munching a large Chinese Chicken Salad at her desk. Helen follows--

ALEX

Can you fax this, Emma? Thanks--

Emma holds out a message slips.

EMMA

Oh, and "Mr. Bobi--"

ALEX

(reading)

Yes! The place is ready, thank god.

Helen appears, reacting to the news.

HELEN

You're no longer homeless? And it's your first date tonight? I barely recognize this New Alex.

Dan and Gregg are passing--

DAN

You ready to do this thing tonight?
Back on the horse!

ALEX

Yes. Bring on the horse.

HELEN

Just be confident. I know it's a cliché, but women like confidence.

ALEX

I don't feel very confident.

HELEN

Pretend.

ALEX

I'll try, but I'm a terrible liar.

EMMA

So naturally you chose a career in corporate public relations.

ALEX

I wanted to be a music journalist.

EMMA

Really? That's so cool.

ALEX

It was actually, I had a column in a weekly paper and--

EMMA

See? Lying. Easy.

(to Helen)

I should have his job.

HELEN

Which isn't to say don't be vulnerable. We like that, too.

ALEX

Confident, yet vulnerable. Great. Those aren't opposite things.

GREGG

And suggest out-there sex stuff. I read women now're cool with way more than when we got married.

(off Helen's look)

In *Marie Claire*.

HELEN

How's your banter?

ALEX

My what?

DAN

You know, the crap you have to say before women will sleep with you.

HELEN

Go ahead. Try bantering with her.

GREGG

Ask her if she has flying dreams. It's a sign she likes sexual control.

(off their looks)

Self. These are your magazines.

ALEX

(prepares, then--)

Okay...um...okay--

DAN

Women really invest in their hair. Say you like their hair.

ALEX

I like your hair.

EMMA

(icy deadpan)
Take me now.

HELEN

Just be light and casual and witty.

ALEX

Okay--so, um, is Chinese chicken salad a salad made with Chinese chicken, or is it a chicken salad made in a Chinese style--?

EMMA

Aaannd...no sex for you.

DAN

And dude, don't talk about food. I forgot to mention, this chick didn't say "My librarian friend" she said, "my big librarian friend." I think she might be a bit, you know, large. But don't sweat it, just makes her an easier mark. You'll do great, man.

EMMA

Or go down in flames.

HELEN

Or, you don't have to go--

ALEX

You just worry about your big night, I'll be fine.

INT. STORE -- NIGHT

THE CLERK scans several bottles of wine as Helen swipes her card. He gives her a look. Helen looks back, uncertain--

CLERK

So...having a party?

HELEN

(snapping a little)
Okay, enough.

CLERK

Um, sorry?

HELEN

I come in here, I see you looking at my stuff, looking at me. No. I don't have to explain anything to you. So just keep your editorializing to yourself and compute this stuff--

The ASSISTANT MANAGER approaches--

ASSISTANT MANAGER

Hi. Is there a problem?

HELEN

No! There's no problem whatsoever, as I've been trying to explain to--
(reads nametag)
"Marvin" here--

Assistant manager glances at Marvin, who just shrugs, like, "I have no clue what is going on..."

HELEN (CONT'D)

I am buying wine. I'm not having a party. It's for me. Alone. So what? I'm fine with that. I'm fine, okay?

Helen grabs her bag and stalks out. Off the Manager and Marvin exchanging a look--

EXT. RESTAURANT -- NIGHT

Alex and Dan wait. Alex nervous. Dan texting and talking--

DAN

So you just watch and see how it's done. Don't worry if she's fat or weird, this's just practice. And don't mention divorce, it's a downer--

ALEX

(anxious)

Maybe they're not coming. You know, maybe it's for the best, I don't know if I'm quite ready for this, I look like a professional gambler and I do have lots of work--

DAN

Dude, no! You are! Back on the horse! Just watch me, you'll be fine--

(MORE)

DAN (CONT'D)
(seeing someone)
Hey! Susan. This's my friend Alex!

Here's Dan's friend, Susan--

SUSAN
Hi. Susan. Julie should be here any--
oh, there she is. Julie!

JULIE approaches. Very attractive. Alex and Dan just stare.

DAN
The big librarian?

SUSAN
Archive director for the University.
She's one of the biggest librarians in
the state.

Dan leans in to Alex, low--

DAN
Dude. Switch.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. HELEN'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

ON A GLASS OF WINE, as Helen pours. She hits the iPod button, and Abba's "Fernando" blares.

Helen takes a big swig, walks over to biggest picture of Pete hanging in the living room. She sizes it up, and then--

HELEN

Pete. I'm sorry, but it's time--

--she goes to lug the large picture off the wall. Which turns out to be more than she bargained for, in her state. She wobbles, then falls backwards with the picture on top of her.

INT. RESTAURANT -- NIGHT

Dinner. Alex -- tipsy, very awkward. Susan and Julie seem pleasant and interested. Dan, unhappy.

ALEX

--on the train back from Milwaukie I see a paper on the seat, open to my music column, and someone says, "excuse me, that's my seat--"

JULIE

--and it was her?

ALEX

She'd just moved to the city, and--
(off Dan's glare)
--we got married, and later split up,
and who wants to talk about that?

DAN

Exactly! Okay, who wants wine?
And something a little more upbeat?

Dan is giving Alex the "talk to her" nod...go on...

ALEX

Right. So...your cat died?

Julie nods, as Dan grimaces in dismay--

ALEX (CONT'D)

No. Um, how's your salad?
(another glare from Dan)
Not that I care about...never mind--

JULIE

Do you have pictures of your kids?

ALEX

(off Dan's look)

No. No, I don't--

SUSAN

It's just so sad--

DAN

It's a cat. One up from a squirrel--

SUSAN

I mean his marriage. How they met, it was just so romantic--

DAN

Yeah, I think I can hear--who's that writer? They did that movie? Where the guy writes letters--

JULIE

You mean, Nicholas Sparks?

DAN

Right! Listening to that story, I was like, hey I think I can hear Nicholas Sparks masturbating!

SUSAN

I love Nicholas Sparks.

Dan stops laughing. Julie and Alex share a smile at Dan's expense. A nice moment.

JULIE

I like your shirt.

and then ALEX'S PHONE rings. He checks ID -- Helen. Looks up at Julie. They're actually hitting it off somewhat. Ug--

ALEX

Um, excuse me a second...

Alex gets up and wanders off to take the call in private.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Hey. Okay. Almost cried, but kept it together, I think I'm actually doing-- Helen, Are you okay? Is that Abba?

INT. HELEN'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT/INTERCUT

Helen is drunk, "Fernando" still blasting away over and over.

HELEN

I was just thinking, if it wasn't going well, maybe you could help me out with something, but if it's going well, then, good luck--

ALEX

Help with what?

HELEN

Nothing, nothing--

ALEX

Helen, do you need something? Be honest--

He catches Julie glancing at him from the table. A smile. Alex smiles back, pleased with himself--

ALEX (CONT'D)

'Cause I just got smiled at, which, if memory serves, isn't a bad sign, so--

HELEN

No, I'm good. Okay, sorry, I'm fine.

She hangs up. Alex starts back, and his phone RINGS AGAIN. Off Alex, looking from the phone to Julie at the table--

INT. RESTAURANT

Dan explains his joke to the unsmiling women as Alex returns.

DAN

(miming jerking off)
"Oh, we met at camp..." Like, Nicolas Sparks, totally getting off on how romantic that story is--
(as Alex returns)
Alex, it's funny, right? You got it--

ALEX

I did get the concept. I have to run, unfortunately. Something...came up.

A brief glance with Julie, a shrug, and he goes--

INT. HELEN'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

"Fernando" is still playing. Helen opens the door for Alex. Bleary, tipsy, trying to hide it.

ALEX

Sorry, there was traffic, so--
(listening)
Still, with "Fernando--?" Helen--

HELEN

I shouldn't have called. I ruined your date. The cat widow, was she horrible?

ALEX

Actually, um...The good news is, Dan is a huge clod with women--

HELEN

How was your banter? She didn't have a Chinese Chicken salad did she--?

ALEX

(taking away her glass)
I know I called you a problem drinker, but you're actually quite good at it. Is this why you wanted me to come by?

HELEN

I couldn't do it. Physically but also, just, it's been a year, I'm fine, and you're right, all these photos, it's not normal, so I was gonna take the big ones down, but when I tried--

That's when Alex sees the large portrait of Pete splayed on the couch with red wine spilled on him.

ALEX

So...you're fine, you're saying.
(she glares at him)
I understand. I've been there. And we're friends, so, okay, tell me where you want these to go, and I will try to be the male and carry them...
(heading to stereo)
But first, I don't know what you think "Fernando" is actually about, but it's actually a song about remembering the Mexican-American war, which really makes no sense in this context--

He turns to see Helen looking at him. A pregnant pause--

HELEN

Is it wrong that I called?

ALEX

No. I mean, we're friends, I'm your friend, you needed a friend, just to help out, like we talked...about--
(there's an intimate look)
Okay, um...potato.

INT. HELEN'S APARTMENT -- BEDROOM -- DAY

Helen and Alex in bed together. Neither sure what to think.

ALEX

So, what're you thinking? I'll go first. I'm thinking we need a new safe word. I suggest "Ficus."
(beat)
She liked the shirt.

HELEN

See? I told you.

ALEX

But I ended up in bed with you, so--
(beat)
You know, I read in the Times, there's this new thing called "Friends with Benefits", where you're friends, but you sleep together, and it's fine.

HELEN

Alex, that's so 2008. And we work together--

ALEX

We do work together, it's awkward.

HELEN

So're you gonna call her? Cat lady?

ALEX

What? Like, it worked? You're jealous?

HELEN

Okay, forget it. I'm not helping you.

END OF ACT THREE

TAG

INT. DAYTON GROUP -- DAY

Dan and Gregg at the coffee area--

DAN

--she's tight, but I'm like, damn, her friend's hot, and she's digging me--

Alex and Helen come in. Dan sees Alex--

DAN (CONT'D)

And then there was this guy, who was just, like, "oh, my divorce, my kids," totally messing with my game. Good thing you left. Where'd you go anyway?

ALEX

Just, had to help a friend with something. Sorry about your game.

DAN

I'da totally hooked up if you hadn't brought the room down. Dude, I tried, but it's official. You're hopeless.

As Alex and Helen continue along

HELEN

Well, at least it's official.

ALEX

Yeah, it's not knowing the official status that's tough.

They pause before Alex's office--

HELEN

Alex, really. Thanks...for last night.

ALEX

Sure. No problem.

An awkward beat...then a hint of hug gesture, aborted...

ALEX/HELEN

Ficus. Right...

CUT TO BLACK

END OF SHOW