

Parenting Rules!

by
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FADE IN:

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

This is obviously a new house in a beautiful new housing subdivision. It's got a two car garage and two floors. The lawn is brand new with clear lines where the sod was laid.

TOM McALESTER, 30, opens the garage door speaking on his cellphone and walks out to the BMW sitting in the driveway. He's wearing a blue chambray shirt and khaki pants under a black leather jacket. A black Saab is in the garage.

TOM

Frank, the question you have to ask yourself is if you want to play with the big boys or if you want your money wasted by some old-fashioned business model that's going the way of the dinosaurs? It's time, Frank.

He peeks in the BMW and doesn't find anything. He's got a pair of expensive SUNGLASSES propped up on his head.

INT. HOUSE

Tom walks around his brand new house looking and looking for something while still on the phone. The house is nice but a bit obvious and clichéd, right out of a POTTERY BARN catalog.

TOM

Whoa, whoa, whoa Frank. Of course it's your money. Of course, buddy. But, you've got to see things from my Kenneth Coles.

He goes upstairs and into the master bedroom, searching, and through that into the bathroom where his new wife, BROOKE McALESTER-CLARK, 29, sits at a makeup mirror.

BROOKE

Two minutes.

He looks at his watch (Tag Heuer) and at her outfit. She's wearing a black turtleneck and khaki slacks. He cups the cellphone mic.

TOM

You said that two hours ago.

A thigh-length black coat sits nearby. He hears something that takes him back to the cellphone.

TOM (CONT'D)

As soon as you sign the check that's my money, buddy, and I'm going to work it like the prettiest girl in a Tijuana whorehouse. Do you want to make money or what?

He ducks back into the bathroom cupping the mic again.

TOM (CONT'D)

We can't just show up. We have to show up on time.... Where are my sunglasses?

Brooke glances at him. He turns back to the conversation.

BROOKE

They're on your head.

TOM

Those business models were whack, Yo! That was dotcom thinking. Extricore has product, we've got revenue and we've got capital. It's time!

BROOKE

Okay, at the picnic, when they start asking when we're having kids just say we haven't decided yet.

TOM

But, we have decided.

BROOKE

I haven't.

He steps out of the bathroom. She's finishing her makeup.

TOM

What's the big deal? It's the thing to do when you grow up.

He's talking to "Frank," not Brooke.

BROOKE

What's the hurry?

TOM

The hurry is that we're a month and a half away from launch. Businesses are like children, Frank.

(MORE)

TOM (CONT'D)

You've got to mold them into what you want them to be. They're not going to do it on their own, ya' know, no matter how cute they are. And that takes money!

BROOKE

Can you just do me a favor? When they ask just say that we haven't decided yet!?

TOM

So, we're going to play with the big boys and to do that we have to ante up. It's time, Frank.

He hangs up decisively and turns back into the bathroom.

TOM (CONT'D)

It's time, Brooke.

He looks at her in the mirror and then at himself...and he finds his sunglasses.

TOM (CONT'D)

There they are! Who put them there?

Brooke is about to respond when he walks away. She turns back to the mirror to finish but, she stops short and stares at herself, thoughtfully.

EXT. BACKYARD

A banner reads: THE ANNUAL MCALESTER FAMILY PICNIC. Tom and Brooke arrive at his parents' home, a huge mansion on a big plot of land on the outskirts of the city suburbs. The picnic consists of a diverse group of affluent white people.

The picnic is pretty classy, a catered affair. It's more of a networking event than a family picnic despite the kids and grass and sunshine.

Tom and Brooke walk up from the driveway and the valets. They find Tom's parents STANFORD and DOROTHY, 60s. Dorothy and Brooke air-kiss.

BROOKE

Hi, Dorothy.

DOROTHY

Hello, Brooke.

Stanford gives Brooke a half-hug and kiss, holding a drink, while Tom kisses his mother and then shakes hands with his father.

TOM

Dad...

STANFORD

Thomas.

DOROTHY

Tom, is that last year's BMW you're driving?

TOM

Uh, yes mom—

DOROTHY

(interrupting)

Have you seen your sister and Brett's new Jag? It's lovely.

Tom is put in his place and shoves his hands in his pockets inadvertently mimicking his father's pose.

TOM

So, would you like a drink, Dad, Mom?

He looks at the drink in his father's hand.

DOROTHY

No, thanks.

STANFORD

I'm fine, Thomas.

TOM

Excuse us.

Tom leads Brooke away from his parents who stay behind to greet other guests.

TOM (CONT'D)

What's wrong with my car?

BROOKE

I dunno....

They split up and Tom finds a bar on his own. Two of his buddies, MIKE and PETER (each 30), wearing khaki and some form of blue shirt are standing by the bar. Mike hands Tom a beer.

TOM

Dudes.

PETER & MIKE

Dude.

PETER

Do you guys really know all of these people?

TOM

Not anymore...

Tom scans the picnic and groans. Peter and Mike look at him.

They spot BRETT BOYNTON, 40ish, Tom's brother-in-law and his sister TIFFANY, 35, with their two kids at a table. They look like they just stepped off a J.Crew catalog cover. Tom stares at the portrait in envy and disgust.

His sister's kids ruin the portrait a little. The daughter, 9 year-old BRIX, is clearly a Britney Spears fan club president and her brother JAKE, 15, wants to be Eminem.

Brett approaches the bar and spots Tom.

BRETT

Tom, how are things? Did ya' see the new Jag?

TOM

Great! No...

His sister waves at him which he returns unenthusiastically.

BRETT

(answering anyway)

Couldn't be better. How's Brooke? Any developments?

TOM

Not yet.

BRETT

Don't wait too long...

Brett has a shit-eating grin on his face and winks at Tom, knowingly. He spots Mike and Peter and nods at them.

BRETT (CONT'D)

Men...?! So Tom, how's that company you're...starting?

TOM (CONT'D)

(pause)

Brooke and I are a team. Brooke will take care of the kids, I'll take care of the money.

Mike and Peter look at him and smile.

PETER

Do you even like kids?

TOM

I love kids! I'd be a great father! It'd be cool to have some sons and play touch football and stuff.

PETER

What if they're GIRLS?

MIKE

What if they're GAY?

Peter laughs. They nudge each other, encouraging each other.

PETER

Yeah! What if they're LESBIANS—

MIKE

(interrupting)

You could play touch football with your LESBIAN DAUGHTERS!

A brightly colored beach ball hits Tom in the face making him spill beer on himself.

TOM

Son of a—

A gaggle of ten-year-olds retrieves the ball without apology and runs off. An ineffectual FATHER hurries after them.

FATHER#1

Okay kids, easy does it.

Tom checks his shirt and jacket and then looks at Peter and Mike who are waiting. Tom gets fed up with them.

TOM

I've got to wash this off.

He barges off.

MIKE

Wait 'til his lesbian baby vomits on him...

Peter busts up, laughing.

Tom maneuvers through the picnic...

He looks at the parents in the crowd chasing after all these kids. Tom sees a LITTLE GIRL, 7 or 8, having a tantrum as her FATHER tries to appeal to her.

FATHER#2

Raine, they don't have donuts here,
Honey.

LITTLE GIRL

But I want some!

FATHER#2

I know, Honey. But sometimes we
can't have what we want—

LITTLE GIRL

(interrupting)

I can!

Tom grimaces as he passes the display. He comes across two PARENTS, each in conversation with other adults as their DAUGHTER tugs on them for attention.

MOTHER#1

I told him, I HAD to have the
ecru.

DAUGHTER

Mommy? Mommy? Mommy?
Mommy? Mommy?

FATHER#3

I told him, I need a tax
deferment for all of my
assets, not just the ones
from this marriage.

DAUGHTER

Daddy? Daddy? Daddy?
Daddy? Daddy?

Tom passes them and comes upon a MOTHER with her two PERFECT CHILDREN who are dressed identically to her. Tom looks around and spots her HUSBAND who clearly is flirting with ANOTHER WOMAN on the other side of the picnic.

Brooke is moving about the crowd when she's ambushed by AUNT EMMA, 80s.

AUNT EMMA

Brooke, Darling. When are we going
to have some babies?

Brooke chokes.

BROOKE

You and me? I don't think that's
possible, Auntie.

AUNT EMMA

You and Tom! Don't you want
children, Brooke?

Brooke cringes.

INT. HOUSE

Tom finds a bathroom off a large den facing the picnic area.
He slips inside and tries to wash the beer off his shirt.

TOM

Damn kids.

EXT. BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Brooke is talking to STACEY who's holding her infant girl.

STACEY

...You have NO IDEA.

BROOKE

But, how did you know you were
ready for it, for the job?

STACEY

What job?

BROOKE

Parenting!

STACEY

Oh, at this age, kids just eat and
sleep and poop. All you have to do
is learn to say "NO" a lot and
teach them what not to do. You
know, raise them with good
Christian family values.

She nods at Brooke as if it all makes perfect sense.

STACEY (CONT'D)

(aside)

I'd kill for a cigarette, right
now.

(pause)

I left them in the car.

Brooke just nods back and smiles.

INT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Tom steps out of the bathroom with his head bowed as he wipes at the wet spot on his shirt and almost bumps into a TEENAGER waiting for the bathroom.

TOM
Excuse me—

TEENAGER
(interrupting)
Yo! Is it safe to go inside, G?

Despite being a white kid he's doing the best ghetto impersonation he can muster including the swaying slouch and sloped shoulders.

Tom scowls at him as he gets his drift.

TEENAGER (CONT'D)
KnowwhatImean, knowwhatI'msayin'?

TOM
(taking umbrage)
Excuse me?

TEENAGER
Outta the way, Pops!

The kid saunters into the bathroom, holding up his pants and shuts the door in Tom's face. Tom becomes incensed and contemplates busting the bathroom door down but he refrains.

EXT. BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Tom walks out of the house and runs into Brooke as she's heading inside.

TOM
Hey.

She looks up and frowns at him.

BROOKE
Thanks for backing me up.

She bypasses him forcing him to follow her.

TOM
Whattayamean?

BROOKE

If someone asks me one more time when we're having kids I'm gonna' strangle them.

TOM

You okay? You're acting kind'a tense.

She stops and looks at him, frustrated.

BROOKE

I've got a lot on my mind, Tom!

TOM

Like what?

That burns her. She leads him away from the different cliques and she turns to face him.

BROOKE

I missed my period!

He stares at her, blankly, for a full three counts and then his eyes widen.

TOM

Are you pregnant? That's great!

BROOKE

No, you moron! It's only been two weeks. But, I've always had a very regular schedule. I don't know if I'm...pregnant.

TOM

Well, why don't you just take a test?

BROOKE

It's not the simplest thing in the world!

TOM

You just pee on a stick or something!

BROOKE

I mean that I haven't been ready... to... "pee on a stick or something."

Tom shakes his head.

TOM

...ready?

She stares at him dumbfounded and finally shakes her head, exasperated and storms off.

TOM (CONT'D)

What's the big deal?

Tom shakes his head at her ridiculous fears and looks around. He looks at his milieu, the social circle to which he belongs. Is he ready?

He stares at the assorted, cute, lovely, rowdy, bratty, snotty and basically obnoxious kids in attendance. Tom turns away and sees one of the younger fathers in attendance, changing a diaper.

The tableau starts out quite wonderfully, but then the YOUNG FATHER opens the diaper. Suddenly everything starts to look like D-DAY, OMAHA BEACH. Faint sounds of MACHINE-GUN FIRE intrude and INCREASE IN VOLUME.

The young father gags and pinches his nose. His eyes water as he looks up and sees Tom looking at him. He gives Tom an imploring look which seems to say "Help!" or "Run for your life!" One table downwind reacts in horror.

STANFORD (O.S.)

By the time I was your age I
already had two kids, yep...

Tom turns and looks at his father who's appraising him and gives him a blank smile. Stanford turns back to the picnic.

STANFORD (CONT'D)

Children are your legacy...

Tom gulps.

TOM

Excuse me.

He hurries to find his friends. He gets a few paces away when he almost trips over a child. He looks down at 6 year-old DAVE DIPWHIPPLE and his chocolate-covered hands. Little Dave then pats Tom's pants with both hands.

Tom looks up, appalled. The boy's parents, MR. AND MRS. DIPWHIPPLE, are sitting at a table right behind him and look on without stopping him.

MRS. DIPWHIPPLE

He's in the top of his kindergarten class.

Tom grimaces at them as the Dipwhipple's other two children, DORA, 8, and DON JR, 9, point and laugh at Tom.

MRS. DIPWHIPPLE (CONT'D)

Those are khakis, right? That should come out okay.

Tom groans and turns to find another way through the picnic. He takes a few steps and encounters a 6 year-old toe-headed girl, MELANIE, standing in the way, looking up at him.

He stops abruptly and tries another way. But, he's blocked again by Melanie.

MOTHER#2 (O.S.)

Melanie? Melody? Come here now!

Actually that's MELODY, 6, Melanie's twin sister. Tom does a double-take between the two little girls and groans. He gets past the twins and finally finds Mike and Peter.

TOM

Let's find a bar!

INT. BAR

PETER & MIKE (O.S.)

She is?!?

Tom downs a tequila. Mike and Peter flank him at the bar.

TOM

Yeah!

(pause)

Well, no. Not really. She's late!

Peter catches on after a moment.

PETER

She missed her period?

The bartender glances at them. Tom shushes him; they're in a bar, a male domain.

MIKE

That's not the same as being pregnant, Tom! Has she taken a test?

TOM
She's afraid to...

Peter and Mike let out whistles.

MIKE
(lying)
Well,...it's probably nothing—

PETER
(interrupting)
I thought you wanted her to get pregnant!

MIKE
Yeah!?!

Tom looks at him and Mike, chagrined.

TOM
I do... It just caught me by surprise is all.

MIKE
You guys use rubbers?

TOM
No, man.

MIKE
Well then, what did you expect?

TOM
She's on the pill!

MIKE
That's only ninety percent effective.

TOM
Ninety nine.

PETER
I think it's ninety five!

MIKE
Whatever! There's still a chance—

TOM
(interrupting)
I know that!

Tom SLAMS the shot glass onto the bar for another drink. The bartender refills it. Tom hands him a credit card. Tom knocks back his drink and gestures for another one. Mike and Peter check with each other. They gesture to the bartender.

PETER & MIKE

Beer?

The bartender pours them beers. Tom knocks back the tequila.

TOM

Scotch on the rocks.

The bartender pours.

MIKE

You trying to give yourself a hangover? What are you so worried about? You don't know if she's pregnant.

PETER

Right! Just relax. Worry about it later.

MIKE

It'll turn out fine. We should probably be getting back to the picnic—

TOM

(interrupting)

The picnic!

(pause)

Something about seeing all those kids and those parents... I don't know. It just freaked me out.

He gulps audibly. They stare at him.

TOM (CONT'D)

I might be a FATHER!

He kills the Scotch on the rocks and gestures for another.

EXT. BAR

The three of them stumble out of the bar with Tom very drunk and mumbling to himself. Mike and Peter aren't that much better off, but at least they can drag Tom to their car parked at the curb.

MIKE

Hold him while I open the door.

Peter gives Mike a look as he gets behind the wheel.

MIKE (CONT'D)

What? I only had three beers.

PETER

What about the ones at the picnic?

MIKE

Those were picnic beers.

Peter struggles to hold Tom up as Mike unlocks the car doors. Tom whimpers.

PETER

Relax...

TOM

(imploring)

Nine months! Don't you know how short nine months is?

He tries to focus on Peter and then the implications of his own question come crashing down on him. He shoves Peter aside and hurries down the block, as if escaping.

PETER

Whoa!

Mike looks over the car roof. BONG! Tom stumbles headlong into a sign post and falls backwards onto the sidewalk. They run over to him and slap his face.

PETER (CONT'D)

Tom, buddy? Talk to us.

MIKE

Ohmygod, ohmygod!

PETER

What?!?

MIKE

He committed suicide!

PETER

Damn!

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BARRACKS - MORNING

A KLAXON goes off startling Tom out of a sound sleep. It's still dark out. He sits up and a headache knocks him back down, groaning. His arm flails to the side searching for the "snooze button" but can't find it.

The buzzing continues and he squints around looking for the offending item.

MR. CRUZ

Wakey, wakey! Time to get up!

MR. CRUZ, 50s, an animated Cuban, is strutting around the barracks with a pointer. Groans and moans are heard throughout the room.

Tom manages to open his eyes enough to get a good look and realize that he's in a barracks full of bunk beds. In fact his bunk-mate above him drops to the floor and moves off. There must be thirty people in these barracks, all in action.

The klaxon stops.

TOM

What the....

MR. CRUZ

Get up, Mr. McAlester!

TOM

What am I doing here? Where am I?

Mr. Cruz gives him a patronizing look and smile. The rest of the coed trainees quickly file past, apparently knowing where to go and what to do.

MR. CRUZ

You're getting up, sir. Boot Camp, of course!

TOM

Boot Camp? I don't belong here!
Where's my house? Where's my wife?

Tom gets out of the bunk and notices how cold the floor is. He spots some sandals and hops into them. Mr. Cruz assesses him as a strange specimen.

All of the other trainees are about nineteen years old with Tom the only thirty year-old, and it shows. Mr. Cruz double-checks a clipboard on the bunk bed.

MR. CRUZ

Aren't you a little old for this?
Haven't you already done your
compulsory training?

TOM

Huh? What? Compulsory?

Tom stares at Mr. Cruz, lost. Mr. Cruz smiles and shrugs.

MR. CRUZ

Well, you're here now. Come on.

He points him in the same direction as the rest. Tom moves in that direction and notices that he's wearing a BRIGHT BLUE BRACELET on his wrist. It has an LCD screen and a readout that currently reads: IN TRAINING.

He glares at it, confused. It has two buttons and no markings. One button is green and the other is red.

He tries to find the buckle or clasp to remove the bracelet. He can't find anything that helps.

EXT. BARRACKS

Tom, still examining the bracelet, follows the trainees outside on their way to another building clearly labeled SHOWERS/LAVATORIES.

He pauses and looks around the compound and across a grass field leading off to a stand of trees fencing in the area. Tom holds his temples as his head pounds. Mr. Cruz blocks his line of vision with a suspicious smile.

MR. CRUZ

Come along, Mr McAlester.

He physically leads Tom back in line. Tom holds up his bracelet.

TOM

Wait, what's this thing?!?

The flow of trainees carries him away.

INT. CLASSROOM #1

Everyone's showered and combed and sitting at individual booths set up in rows throughout the room, kind of like a visiting section in a prison, where an INSTRUCTOR tests each trainee. Everyone except Tom.

Tom hurries in to the last available booth and sits down, embarrassed, opposite INSTRUCTOR #3.

At BOOTH #1...

INSTRUCTOR #1
Why do you want to have children?

Each instructor has one hand hovering over a BUZZER, waiting for the wrong answer.

TRAINEE #1
To be a good parent.

INSTRUCTOR #1
Correct.

At BOOTH #2...

TRAINEE #2
To be a good parent.

INSTRUCTOR #2
Correct.

At BOOTH #3... Tom is disoriented but tries to focus on an answer.

TOM
I want to have a family—

BUZZER!

INSTRUCTOR #3
(interrupting)
Wrong!

TOM
I want to do it while I'm young—

BUZZER!

INSTRUCTOR #3
(interrupting)
Wrong!

TOM
I want to hear the pitter-patter—

BUZZER!

INSTRUCTOR #3
(interrupting)
Wrong!

TOM
I want to have a son—

BUZZER!

INSTRUCTOR #3
(interrupting)
Wrong!

TOM
I'd like to take my kids camping—

BUZZER!

INSTRUCTOR #3
(interrupting)
Wrong!

TOM
I want to have a daughter?—

BUZZER!

INSTRUCTOR #3
(interrupting)
Wrong!

TOM
Oh, oh! I want to leave a LEGACY!—

BUZZER! BUZZER! BUZZER!

INSTRUCTOR #3
Wrong! Wrong! WRONG! Did you
learn nothing in Junior High?

Instructor #3 glares at Tom as if he were a complete idiot.
Mr. Cruz has gravitated towards the mad buzzing.

MR. CRUZ
Class? Mr. McAlester seems to be
having some trouble with the first
question. "Why do you want to have
children?"

TRAINEES
TO BE A GOOD PARENT!!!

MR. CRUZ

Thank you, class.

Mr. Cruz smiles at the sheepish Tom. Instructor #3 continues to glare at him.

INSTRUCTOR #3

Invariably, the child you will have will want the exact opposite of what you want! Therefore, anything you say that starts with "I want" is not a good enough reason for having kids!

Instructor #3 gapes at him, waiting, while Mr. Cruz watches.

TOM

...to be a good parent....

INSTRUCTOR #3

Correct. Now, what is good parenting?

Tom stares at Instructor #3, terrified and lost.

INT. BABY-LAB - DAY

The whole class is now in a room full of work tables, or islands, like a high school chemistry class. Thirty women line the walls of the lab, mothers who have volunteered their toddlers for this phase of the training.

Each student has a toddler on their work table with all of the necessary accoutrements laid out beside them. Everyone seems to have a toddler who is bawling their head off...

MR. CRUZ

Today you will learn the correct way to determine a dirty diaper, change a dirty diaper and dispose of a dirty diaper. The street is not the proper place for a dirty diaper!

...except for Tom whose TODDLER in front of him is happily playing with his feet and smiling at Tom. Tom isn't sure about this but he smiles back at the toddler.

Tom spies on the other kids and seems encouraged by his toddler's sunnier disposition.

MR. CRUZ (CONT'D)

If you require help, raise your hand and an assistant will come to you. However, that will count against your grade.

Tom gulps.

MR. CRUZ (CONT'D)

On my mark, open your toddler's diaper and follow the diagram on the board.

Mr. Cruz brings his pointer down...

MR. CRUZ (CONT'D)

Mark.

...and starts a timer in his other hand. The students open the diapers with trepidation.

Tom looks around the room at the different reactions. By and large all of the students grimace at first as they open the diapers, but they seem surprised to not find greater horrors awaiting them despite the crying.

Tom looks around some more, encouraged, and then looks at his toddler who is still happily playing and drooling.

TOM

Okay, here goes little guy. Help me out, okay?

Tom carefully undoes the tape holding the diaper closed and opens it and looks inside.

The stench hits him right in the face and he GAGS instantly. He pinches his nose and tries to hold his breath, but he can smell it through his eyes, his ears... His classmates immediately around him groan. Tom TURNS RED.

Tom's eyes water as he looks at his smiling toddler. This time, the toddler's smile seems to have a different and sinister significance as he seems to wink at Tom, enjoying his predicament.

Tom looks over at the toddler's proud battle-hardened mom who is smiling at Tom with the same sinister glee. Tom raises his hand.

TOM (CONT'D)

Help....?

INT. HALLWAY

Tom is patting himself down looking for something and troubled that he can't find it. The trainees are moving about, apparently on a break.

Tom spots a PAYPHONE and hurries over to it as someone is leaving it. He cuts in front of a short female trainee waiting in line.

TOM

I can't find my cellphone!

She scowls at him and slouches. Tom dials a number and waits. The call goes through after several rings.

TOM (CONT'D)

Hello? Brooke?

RECORDED TOM (O.S.)

You've reached Tom McAlester's voicemail. Leave me a message!

BEEP. Tom hangs up before the recording.

TOM

Who changed the message?

(pause)

How did they change the message?

(pause)

Where's Brooke?

He's about to try again but a bell rings calling everyone to the next class. Tom grimaces as he replaces the handset and spots the bracelet on his wrist. He waves at a trainee hurrying by and holds up his bracelet.

TOM (CONT'D)

Do you know what this is?

They don't answer and finally Tom runs off as well.

INT. CLASSROOM #2

The trainees are all in a room with the babies from the baby-lab in their arms. Tom looks around and curiously notices that all of the guys have blue bracelets like his and all of the gals have pink bracelets.

MR. CRUZ

Feeding an infant.

There's a large kitchen with multiple sinks and refrigerators for the preparation of food for the babies. Tom's stomach growls and he starts to look around at the kitchen and the other trainees.

MR. CRUZ (CONT'D)

The average baby can only eat a quarter of a cup of solid or mushy food at one sitting—

Tom tentatively raises his hand interrupting Mr. Cruz.

MR. CRUZ (CONT'D)

Yes, Mr. McAlester?

TOM

Speaking of food, when do we get to eat anything?

Mr. Cruz pauses for effect as the rest of the trainees point, jeer and chuckle at Tom.

MR. CRUZ

Like real parents you trainees have to fend for yourselves as the chores of parenting allow you.

TOM

Excuse me?

MR. CRUZ

There's food everywhere, Mr. McAlester. Everyone else has had their breakfast while you were busy taking an inordinately long shower.

Tom shrinks into his seat and adjusts his hold on his baby. He looks around and, sure enough, the other trainees are munching on energy bars, fruit and other snacks.

LATER

Tom has heated up some mashed peas while holding his baby in one arm. The trainees are now spoon feeding their babies while the instructors supervise them.

Tom pours the peas into a bowl and with a spoon he dabs a spot of peas on his wrist and the temperature seems to be okay. He vacillates with the spoon in his hand and then looks around furtively.

He takes a spoonful and tastes it. It's good, surprisingly. He sneaks another taste and enjoys it while the baby gurgles to itself.

Suddenly, Tom devours the bowl of peas, licking the spoon and making the bowl RING with the scraping spoon as he tries to get every last drop. He moans contentedly, somewhat satisfied.

MR. CRUZ (CONT'D)
Mr. McAlester?

Tom looks up and sees Mr. Cruz and the other trainees shaking their heads.

MR. CRUZ (CONT'D)
Shame on you.... That was supposed to be his!

He points at the baby in his arms who also seems to be judgmental. Tom is chagrined as he looks at everyone and attempts to respond.

TRAINEE #1
Feel better?

TRAINEE #2
Would you like some mashed yams?

TRAINEE #1
How about some applesauce?

Tom's embarrassment gives way to the possibility that they might be serious....

TRAINEE #2
Baby-food-eater!

MONTAGE

Tom sits through numerous presentations and discussions about the anatomy of babies, the proper way to hold them, digestion, hygiene, swaddling, etc.

As the classrooms change different instructors and trainees make their feelings known by glaring at Tom or simply shaking their heads at him.

Tom holds up his bracelet.

TOM
Do you know what this is?

END OF MONTAGE

INT. BARRACKS - NIGHT

All of the trainees are ready for bed. They're all exhausted. Tom approaches Mr. Cruz, rubbing his temples.

TOM

Uh, when can we go home?

MR. CRUZ

At the end of the week.

Tom gapes at him.

TOM

That's ridiculous! I need to get home, to my wife. She's going to kill me when I get home!

Mr. Cruz gestures for some help. Immediately two instructors appear, flanking Tom. They lead him to his bunk, forcibly.

TOM (CONT'D)

I need to go home! This is illegal! I want my lawyer! This is kidnapping! That's a federal offense!

The rest of the trainees are disrupted by Tom's outburst and sit up to watch.

The instructors literally lift Tom by the shoulders and feet and plop him onto his bunk.

TOM (CONT'D)

I know my rights!

But the effect of the pillow overwhelms him and he's asleep instantly. Mr. Cruz and the instructors smile down at the somnolent Tom. They leave him and Mr. Cruz stops at the door.

MR. CRUZ

Alright everyone! Lights out!

Mr. Cruz turns the lights out.

TOM

(asleep)

This is a nightmare...

LATER

The klaxon goes off again and Tom sits upright, wide awake.

TOM (CONT'D)

No, no, no....

He looks around and sees that it's still pitch black outside.

MR. CRUZ

Alright everyone, midnight feeding.

TOM

What?

All of the trainees trudge out of the barracks...

EXT. BARRACKS

...out into the cold night, hopping and skipping to keep warm...

INT. NURSERY

...and into the nursery where the babies from the baby lab are all bawling their heads off because they're hungry.

MR. CRUZ

Find your baby and prepare their bottle and feed them. The sooner you do this the sooner you can get back to sleep!

The trainees do as told, half asleep.

LATER

Most of the trainees have gone back to the barracks and sleep, but Tom is still trying to make his baby go to sleep. Instead, his baby seems to want to play at making faces.

TOM

You're sleepy...getting sleepy....

INT. BARRACKS - CONTINUOUS

Tom finally returns to his bunk and sets his head on his pillow when the klaxon goes off again.

TOM

No, no, no....

The rest of the trainees get up again and file out.

MR. CRUZ

Two a.m. feeding! Let's go.

INT. NURSERY - CONTINUOUS

Tom is feeding his happy baby again as his head nods.

INT. BARRACKS - CONTINUOUS

Tom's head hits his pillow again.

LATER

The klaxon goes off again.

MR. CRUZ

Four a.m. feeding! Let's go.

Tom just drools onto his pillow as Mr. Cruz and another instructor study him.

EXT. TRACK FIELD - MORNING

All of the trainees run out of the barracks, in running gear, and file past a table of instructors where each are given old grey baby dolls. Mr. Cruz has a jogging outfit on.

MR. CRUZ

You will all run one mile while carrying one of these baby dolls. They each approximate the average weight of a real baby to help you develop your muscles for all of the lifting you need to do in childcare.

As Tom drags himself to the table he's surprised by how heavy the baby doll is when they give him his.

MR. CRUZ (CONT'D)

As soon as you get your baby doll assemble at the starting line right over here. Hurry, hurry, hurry.

Mr. Cruz stands at an arbitrary spot on the field.

MR. CRUZ (CONT'D)

Instead of a boring run around the track we're going to run cross-country around the campus. You'll all follow me and I'll show you the way. Don't worry, I won't go too fast.

Tom joins the rest at the starting line, worried. Tom is startled when he sees another instructor take out a pistol. Mr. Cruz makes sure all of the trainees are ready and he nods at the instructor and turns to get ready to run.

His skinny Cuban legs pump up and down and the instructor raises the starter pistol and FIRES. Tom drops his baby doll. An instructor frowns and makes a note on a clipboard.

Mr. Cruz is off and running, very quickly, and the trainees hurry after him, all of them carrying their baby dolls. Tom snatches his baby doll up and hurries after the group.

All of the trainees have different ways of carrying their baby dolls, but most opt for the two-arm-cradle across the chest as a way that shakes and rattles the doll the least.

Tom's arms immediately ache and start to fail him and he moves the doll around as he runs: under an arm, over his shoulders, under the other arm, clutched to his chest.

Along the course Mr. Cruz starts to do arm exercises with his baby doll, lifting and lowering it in rhythm. Tom groans when he sees this and tries to follow the example.

Unlike the teenagers around him Tom is exhausted and he can barely lift the baby doll as Mr. Cruz indicates. Tom stumbles and trips and his baby doll goes flying ahead of him. As he loses his balance he tramples the doll.

He regains his balance and desperately collects the baby doll, wiping off any telltale footprints. He looks up and sees another instructor making a note on a clipboard and shaking their head.

Tom is ashamed but he collects himself and runs after the rest with his baby doll.

LATER

All of the trainees are back at the starting line, holding or cradling their baby dolls as is their wont. But Tom is the only one doubled over, sucking air, with his hands on his knees, with his baby doll hanging from one weak grip.

The assembled instructors and Mr. Cruz look at each other, compare notes and shake their heads.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Tom again is trying to find Brooke on the phone. There's a long line of trainees waiting to use the payphone.

He hangs up in defeat, finally releasing the payphone. He turns to the closest trainees who couldn't care less.

TOM

I can't find my wife.

The bell rings and they all groan, scowl and complain at him.

DISSOLVE TO:

MONTAGE

Tom sits through another series of lectures, discussions, classes and labs related to every aspect of children, child rearing and childcare. Throughout, Tom seems to have a pounding headache.

1. One lecture has slides projected on a screen of an infant as the instructor points out salient facts.
2. Another lecture has slides projected on a screen of a toddler, distinguishing salient facts.
3. Another lecture is about pre-schoolers and kindergarten kids distinguishing the salient facts.
4. Tom is in a lab with live pre-schoolers the object of which is to maintain some order. His fellow trainees seem to handle this well, but Tom is an abject failure.
5. Another lecture is about elementary school kids with the appropriate slides.
6. Tom is assigned a book to read to a class of elementary school kids. They all laugh and point at him until he realizes what they're pointing at. He turns around and zips up his fly. He turns back to reading, red in the face.
7. Another lecture is about teenagers with the appropriate slides and actual living, breathing teenage volunteers who line up in front of the class while the instructor points out salient facts like slouching, bad attitudes and basic ennui.
8. Tom has to try speaking to a group of four teenagers. He tries some lame opener to which they roll their eyes. He tries another tack and they roll their eyes. He tries a third tactic and they just stare at him.

END OF MONTAGE

INT. BARRACKS - NIGHT

Again Tom's head hits the pillow and he's out cold for the night.

TOM
(asleep)
This is a nightmare...

INT. CLASSROOM #3 - MORNING

Tom is sitting in the middle of the class. All of the trainees are wearing baby carriers with bags of flour in them.

MR. CRUZ
You may think this is just a bag of flour. Nonsense!

He SLAMS the pointer on a Tom's desk making everyone jump except for Tom who is so tired he just watches.

MR. CRUZ (CONT'D)
This is an object that requires about the same care and concern as a toddler with the fortunate difference that if you really mess things up...

He stops and looks at Tom.

MR. CRUZ (CONT'D)
...it's only a bag of flour.

Someone snickers. Mr. Cruz whips around but doesn't locate them.

MR. CRUZ (CONT'D)
The purpose of this phase of your training is to teach you to think of your responsibility at all times rather than simply focusing on yourselves. For the next twenty four hours you will take your children everywhere you go and bring them back here in exactly the same condition you got them. Any damage to your children will be reflected in your grades.

Tom raises his hand tentatively.

MR. CRUZ (CONT'D)
Yes?

TOM
Does this mean we get to go home?

MR. CRUZ

Yes. This completes the retreat portion of your training, Mr. McAlester.

Tom smiles.

MR. CRUZ (CONT'D)

Dismissed.

The class stands and files out of the classroom leaving Tom in his seat asleep, with a smile on his face and his hands clasped around his bag of flour.

Mr. Cruz smirks at him and walks over with his pointer raised...

EXT. STREET - DAY

Tom is trying to get around the crowds of people without bumping into anyone with his "child" in his baby carrier.

He dodges a bicyclist on the sidewalk. He dodges a construction worker with a hand cart full of protruding pipes. He dodges a group of rambunctious kids chasing each other down the street.

TOM

Hey, watchit!

Standing next to a newsstand, where he took refuge, Tom looks down at his "child," and sees a puddle of flour at his feet, streaming from the bag.

The newsstand has a shelf and the shelf has a corner and the corner has punctured his bag of flour. Tom shrieks and runs off looking for a remedy.

TOM (CONT'D)

My bag of flour, my bag of flour!

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING

Tom hurries to the doors and sees a teenager walk out. He recognizes him as the punk teenager, ghetto wannabe, from his parents' picnic.

The teenager spots Tom in his distress and holds the door open for him, surprising Tom. Tom then notices that the teenager, who doesn't recognize him, is not dressed like a suburban thug. Instead he's just Gap neutral.

TOM
...thank you.

TEENAGER
You're welcome, sir.

Tom's eyes pop.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING

Tom makes it to the elevators and goes inside with a gaggle of people. He desperately tries to stanch the flow of flour from his "baby."

Trying to press the button for his floor is tricky. A YOUNG WOMAN, 20s, going to work, is witness to this.

YOUNG WOMAN
What floor?

TOM
Three, please.

She presses the button for him. He smiles at her, embarrassed.

TOM (CONT'D)
Thanks.

YOUNG WOMAN
No problem.

Tom spies on her as if thinking that she should be doing this job instead of him. But, that doesn't change a thing. The elevator door opens and she steps out with a smile to Tom.

Tom nods at her and notices she too is wearing a pink bracelet. But, he's too late to ask her about it.

INT. EXTRICORE

Tom rushes out of the elevator and past the EXTRICORE reception area and the receptionist, LEONARD, 20, gay, Chinese. He too has a bag of flour in a carrier.

TOM
Morning...

LEONARD
Good morning!

Tom stops when he sees Leonard's bag of flour. Leonard is faxing something and swaying back and forth, rhythmically, pretending it's a real baby. He gives Tom a second look because Tom is staring at him.

TOM

You too?

Leonard scowls, confused.

LEONARD

Me too, what?

Tom points at the bag of flour. Leonard peers at him.

TOM

But, you're...gay!

Leonard scowls at him, offended.

LEONARD

So?

Leonard sits down to some other work, annoyed.

TOM

Sorry...

Tom moves on. He walks into the rest of the small office space. His new company has about twenty employees spread out in cubicles and offices.

Tom makes it to his office and his secretary ROXANNE, 20s, walks in.

TOM (CONT'D)

I need some tape, fast.

She stares at him for not saying "good morning."

ROXANNE

What kind of tape?

TOM

Any tape. Tape! Tape!

She hands him Scotch tape from his desk dispenser as he's taken the leaking bag of flour out of his carrier to repair the rip. He realizes that it's not going to do the job.

TOM (CONT'D)

Packaging tape.

Roxanne rolls her eyes and does an about face to retrieve the tape. She returns with a wide roll of duct tape. Tom sets about "bandaging" the "wound."

TOM (CONT'D)

How are things here!?! I've been sequestered in this insane boot camp for a week! Did anything explode while I was gone? Did Frank push the package through? Have Sally and Walter been managing the launch? How are we on our timeline?!?

ROXANNE

I thought you did Toddler Training years ago?

He stops in mid repairs and stares at her.

TOM

I did?

ROXANNE

Doesn't everybody?

She holds up her bracelet. Tom's eyes pop open and he gets confused about which question to ask next...

TOM

But, what about...work? This... "training" is going to ruin my business-

ROXANNE

(interrupting)

Relax! Thanks to President Rodham, childcare's credited to your business taxes.

He does a double-take at her. He shakes his head and it hurts him.

TOM

I need some aspirin.

He looks in his desk and finds some. Roxanne steps out, back to her desk.

TOM (CONT'D)

Oh, Roxanne? Can you help me print out the Swanson proposals this afternoon?

ROXANNE (O.S.)

I have to pick up the kids from school. I think Sally handled that.

Tom scowls, confused. Out of habit he's picked up his letter opener in one hand and fiddles with it.

TOM

You have kids?

ROXANNE (O.S.)

No, silly. Stephanie and Lazarus. My long-terms? You know, every other day!?

TOM

Right... Sally sent out the Swanson proposals?

ROXANNE (O.S.)

I think so.

TOM

Well, what about the P and L report?

ROXANNE (O.S.)

Walt did that, I think....

TOM

How about the server overhaul plan?

ROXANNE (O.S.)

Tim did it.

TOM

Really?

Tom is disappointed that he's not been missed, at all. She realizes this and tries to soften the blow, too late.

ROXANNE (O.S.)

I dunno', I just work here.

Tom sits down at his desk and sighs. He throws the letter opener at a DARTBOARD on his wall. The letter opener hits a wire outline and BOUNCES back and sticks in his bag of flour sitting on his desk.

Tom jumps up chagrined and checks the bag carefully.

LATER

Tom walks up to his office door and looks at Roxanne at her desk.

TOM
Roxanne, I can't find my wife!

Roxanne looks up from her work, confused, without turning.

ROXANNE
...you don't have a wife!

TOM
What are you talking about?
Brooke?! We've been married for a
year now?!

Roxanne turns to look at him.

ROXANNE
She's your fiancée!

TOM
You're telling me I don't know
whether I'm married or not?

She shrugs at him because he's being a jerk and turns back to her work.

ROXANNE
Whatever. Call her at work...

She rolls her eyes without him seeing.

Tom is now troubled and retreats into his office. He sits at his desk and stares at his taped up bag of flour as he puts on his headset and opens a line. He tentatively dials a number from memory and waits.

BROOKE (O.S.)
Hello?

TOM
Ohmygod! Brooke! Where have you
been? What are you doing at your
old job? What's going on?

BROOKE (O.S.)
Hello? Who is this?

TOM
It's me, Tom!? What do you mean?

BROOKE (O.S.)

You confused me. I thought it was you, but then you asked all these weird questions... I'm working, you dork! What do you think?

TOM

But, but, why aren't you at home?

BROOKE (O.S.)

What home?

TOM

Our home! The house?!?

BROOKE (O.S.)

Your house? That's the lamest marriage proposal I've ever, ever heard, Tom. Why don't you call back and try again.

TOM

But.

She hangs up leaving him even more confused. And the aspirin isn't helping his headache.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING

Tom saunters out of the office building and joins Peter who's waiting for him on the sidewalk.

TOM

"This" is the way things are?

PETER

What is wrong with you? Why the panicked phone calls?

TOM

Me? Toddler training, child rearing? This is ridiculous!

Tom leads them down the sidewalk.

PETER

How else do you think you become a parent? You don't just GET PREGNANT.

Peter chuckles at how ridiculous that is.

TOM

That's Brooke's job. I'm starting a business, you're finishing your Masters. We don't have time for this!

Again, Peter scrutinizes Tom. Tom stares back at him.

PETER

Of course we do. Everybody does. It's called baby-sitting!?! A third of my credits are from baby-sitting. Even the military does it.

(pause)

The only way you can skip baby-sitting is if you're in live combat or criminally insane in some maximum security prison somewhere.

(pause)

There was that one astronaut who got a reprieve from the President because he was in orbit, but...

(pause)

Otherwise, EVERYONE ELSE IS ON-CALL.

Tom scowls at the idea. A class of special education people walks by with their counsellors. Peter jerks a thumb at them and NODS.

TOM

Why?

Peter gapes at him.

PETER

Are you retarded?

He catches himself and glances at the special ed. class.

PETER (CONT'D)

It's the law, you goof! Everyone has to be trained on how to be a parent.

TOM

What if you don't want to be a parent?

PETER

You don't have to become a parent. You just have to be trained as one.

(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)

Or you can get sterilized, but no one seems to choose that option.

Tom is horrified. Tom remembers and holds up his bracelet.

TOM

Do you know what this is?

Peter shakes his head and walks away.

INT. HOUSE - EVENING

PETER

You're acting like you've never heard of this.

Tom, still carrying his bag of flour, and Peter walk in. Tom rubs his temples and looks at the house in relief.

TOM

Brooke? I'm home!

PETER

(frustrated)

I already told you, she doesn't live here!

Tom hurries upstairs to the bedroom. Peter follows him.

Tom rushes into the messy bedroom. There's no way a woman lives here, it's not messy enough.

Peter joins him as Tom yanks the closet open. It's all his clothes and his belongings. Tom steps over to a bureau and yanks open the drawers. All of it is his. Not a bra nor a panty in sight.

TOM

You were at the wedding. You gave that lame toast, "Tippecanoe and Tyler too."

Peter gapes at him. Tom rushes to the bathroom door. No pantyhose or bras drying.... Tom looks at Peter, who joins him at the door.

PETER

You're freaking me out, man. How can you not remember this?

Tom sits down on the toilet.

TOM

All I remember is we went to my family's yearly picnic, Brooke freaked me out telling me she was late on her period and then you, me and Mike got plastered.

(pause)

And then I woke up in "Hogan's Heroes" with the baby Nazis.

He points at the bag of flour and baby carrier. Peter misconstrues "baby Nazis" at first but then he figures it out.

PETER

We didn't get plastered; you're not supposed to if you're on-call. I left early. I had to baby-sit.

(pause)

Is Brooke pregnant?

Tom grimaces.

TOM

I don't know. I barely exchanged three words with her today; after a week of trying to get her on the phone!

Peter shrugs at him. Tom shakes his head.

TOM (CONT'D)

You want a beer?

Tom barges past him and hurries to the kitchen. He yanks the refrigerator open.

TOM (CONT'D)

There's no beer!?!

He looks at Peter apprehensively. Tom looks like he's about to cry.

TOM (CONT'D)

If she doesn't live here...

PETER

In her apartment!

INT. CAR

The bag-of-flour-laden Tom is driving intently with Peter in the passenger seat.

TOM

When did she move back? How could she? How is it still available?

(pause)

This is irritating.

Peter looks at Tom.

PETER

Tell me about it.

JUMP CUT TO:

The bag-of-flour-laden Tom is driving intently in the opposite direction.

TOM

Her neighbor said she hasn't been home for a couple of days. But I talked to her today...

PETER

If a cop sees you driving like that you can get a pretty big ticket-

TOM

(interrupting)

Why? It's just a bag of flour!

PETER

You're supposed to pretend it's a real baby!

TOM

Whatever.

Tom pulls over and lets Peter out at his home. Peter shuts the passenger door and leans in.

PETER

Take a hot bath and try to relax. I'm sure she'll call you.

Tom grumbles and Peter walks away.

PETER (CONT'D)

Goodnight.

TOM

Yeah, sure.

INT. CLASSROOM - MORNING

The whole class is together again. Mr. Cruz is weaving around them, looking at all of their "children." Everyone has a perfect bag of flour in their baby carrier except for Tom.

Tom's "child" is duct-taped, leaking, singed, and torn. Mr. Cruz stops in front of Tom and whacks the bag of flour, producing a white cloud. Tom snatches the pointer before Mr. Cruz can do it again.

Mr. Cruz smiles at him. Tom releases the pointer, sheepishly.

MR. CRUZ

Mr. McAlester. What happened to your "child?"

TOM

I... had some...difficulties.

MR. CRUZ

Very disappointing, Mr. McAlester.

Mr. Cruz walks back to the front of the class. He turns around abruptly.

MR. CRUZ (CONT'D)

How many of you bought new bags of flour before coming here?

Tom perks up and looks around. Mr. Cruz studies everyone as they suddenly lose their cool and become very nervous.

MR. CRUZ (CONT'D)

Come on, 'fess up. How many of you had bags similar in shape to Mr. McAlester's, who replaced them with brand new ones?

Slowly, the students look around the class and raise their hands. Tom watches as everyone, except for himself and one very prim and proper young Japanese woman, raises their hand in confession. Tom fumes.

MR. CRUZ (CONT'D)

I trust you all appreciate your responsibilities much more now.

Nervous chuckles go around the class. Tom glares at the rest of his class.

MR. CRUZ (CONT'D)
Very well. Your next assignment!

EXT. PARENTING BOOT CAMP - MAIN BUILDING

Tom is leaving with his next assignment, a realistic baby doll that he has in his baby carrier.

MR. CRUZ (V.O.)
This is a Baby-Think-It-Over. It is designed to mimic the behavior of a real baby by requiring attention throughout the day.

He walks to the bus stop on the corner to wait as he's bouncing Baby-Think-It-Over to keep it from crying. The baby doll is making whiny noises. The bus arrives and Tom lines up to get on.

He bounces Baby-Think-It-Over while digging for his bus fare. He feeds a bill into the fare machine and waits for a transfer from the BUS DRIVER.

MR. CRUZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Your Baby-Think-It-Over will get cranky, hungry, whiny, tired, sleepy, playful, and...

But, the bus driver is looking at Tom's crotch, rather than handing him a transfer. Tom looks down at himself to see where his Baby-Think-It-Over has mimicked peeing all over him.

MR. CRUZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)
...periodically soil its diaper, which you'll have to change, just as you would with a real baby.

Tom does a slow burn.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Tom is visiting Peter at his baby-sitting charge. Tom has his Baby-Think-It-Over. Peter is baby-sitting JASON, a two year-old boy.

They have a basketball game on the TV, in the living room. Peter is sitting on the floor, leaning against the sofa, playing with Jason and his toys.

Tom is collapsed on the sofa, barely keeping his Baby-Think-It-Over from bawling. Jason keeps looking over at the doll and pointing at it.

JASON

Bee bee.

PETER

It's not a real baby.

TOM

It's a nightmare!

Peter looks at him, knowingly.

PETER

Careful, it can hear you.

TOM

(sarcastically)

It's all in the tone of voice...
It doesn't really matter that I'd
like to tear its head off...

Peter smiles at Jason who is looking at Tom askance, recognizing sarcasm. Baby-Think-It-Over starts to fidget and cry, on cue, as if reacting to his tone. Tom starts some emergency bouncing and cooing.

PETER

You can't underestimate them.

TOM

It's okay... Don't cry. Please,
don't cry you lousy little piece of
plastic!

PETER

Patience, grasshopper.

TOM

How do you manage?

PETER

Don't you like kids?

TOM

Not twenty-four hours a day. Don't
they get to you?

PETER

They're not doing it to annoy you.
They're growing up. If they could
say, "Gee, I seem to have filled my
diaper." or "Hi, I have opposable
thumbs, but I don't know how to use
them." they would.

He looks at Tom.

PETER (CONT'D)

Someone did it for you, now it's
your turn to do it for him... or
it.

TOM

Good for you, Gandhi.

PETER

Did Gandhi have kids?

TOM

How should I know?

Tom's Baby-Think-It-Over starts to cry in earnest now.

PETER

Tsk, tsk...

TOM

Oh, no.... Don't do that! Don't
cry, don't cry.

Peter looks at Jason, afraid he'll start crying too.
Instead, Jason seems to know that it's a doll and finds it
very funny. The more it cries the more he giggles and
laughs.

PETER

Good boy.
(to Tom)
See? He knows.

Tom desperately looks for the magic position that will
appease Baby-Think-It-Over and make it stop crying.

TOM

Can he talk to this one and tell
him to chill?

PETER

How will you learn if Jason does
all your work for you?

TOM

What good is he?

Peter picks Jason up, offended, playing with him.

PETER

Whattaya talking about? He's great! Hey, buddy. Hungry? You want some dinner?

TOM

Starved! Whattayagot?

PETER

Not you! Him!

Peter looks at him. Tom's crestfallen as he continues to battle his Baby-Think-It-Over. Peter gets up and carries Jason to the kitchen. He takes out some baby food and holds each up in turn for Jason's opinion. Tom joins them.

PETER (CONT'D)

You want the green mashed stuff, or the yellow-orange mashed stuff?

Jason points at something else in the refrigerator.

PETER (CONT'D)

I don't know. The red mashed stuff didn't agree with you too much.

(to Tom)

Talk about diaper from hell.

TOM

Why are you coddling him? He can't tell the difference. You're the adult!

Peter and Jason face Tom, offended.

PETER

There's no point in forcing him to eat something he doesn't like. What do you think he is, a baby doll?

Peter laughs at his own irony. He turns back to the food and holds up the green one.

PETER (CONT'D)

How about the green stuff, okay?

Jason doesn't seem to mind. Peter starts to prepare it.

PETER (CONT'D)

Your problem is that you look down on kids.

(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)

But, see, they're fully formed personalities from the moment they're born.

Tom's Baby-Think-It-Over is still bawling and it's getting distressing. He shifts it around and finally puts it on his shoulder and pats its back. It starts to settle down a bit.

TOM

You just said they can't control their bowels and stuff, they're developing.

PETER

But their minds, their characters, are already set. They're just miniature versions of the assholes they're going to grow up to be.

Tom's doll stops crying. He freezes, focusing on whatever it was he did right.

TOM

I thought you liked them.

PETER

I do like them. But, you gotta be realistic. Some of them are assholes. Not Jason, here. But, they really are distinct people, in tiny bodies. They're not dolls...or pets. Sheez, pets have personalities, so why wouldn't kids?

Peter takes Jason's meal out of the microwave and pours it into a bowl.

PETER (CONT'D)

Our job is to help kids discover who they are and prepare them for successful lives as fully functioning adults. You can't do that if you just dismiss them from the get go.

Tom is still patting his Baby-Think-It-Over and hesitates for a moment, considering what he's doing and why... He looks at Peter.

TOM

When did you become Yoda?

Peter rolls his eyes.

PETER

What do you think all this training
is for?

INT. SUBWAY - MORNING

Tom is exhausted, going to work, wearing a sports coat and tie, carrying a shoulder bag and of course Baby-Think-It-Over. As he waits on the platform with the rest of the commuters no one looks at him oddly, they're used to it.

A YOUNG MAN, 20s, stops next to Tom. He too wears a baby carrier, but with a real baby in it. Tom glances at him and nods. Contrary to Baby-Think-It-Over, the real baby is contentedly asleep.

Tom SPIES the young man's quiet baby, jealously. Tom notices that the young man does not wear a bracelet of any color.

YOUNG MAN

Is that the Mark IV?

Tom snaps out of it and tries to spot whatever the young man is talking about and then gapes at him.

YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)

That's the Mark IV!

Tom waits for a clue, a lead, something.

YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)

Your baby carrier. That's a Mark IV, right?

Tom tries to remember and looks for a tag without setting off Baby-Think-It-Over.

TOM

Yeah, I think so—

YOUNG MAN

(interrupting)

I knew it! That was a great year.
Beautiful design! That was the
first year they used triple
stitching on the shoulder straps!

The young man is inordinately fascinated by the subject. Tom inadvertently glances at the young man's carrier.

YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)
(immodestly)
Yeah... This is the Quantum,
Series Six!

Tom gapes at him.

YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)
The BMW of baby carriers. Over and
under supports, reinforced X
spacer!

He turns to show off something on his back.

YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)
Triple-stitching all over. Even
the label is triple-stitched. It
has this unique uni-body structure
with quick releases that let you
transfer the little one to your
partner in case of spills,
emergencies or other situations.

The young man arches an eyebrow, nodding at Tom while
rhapsodizing. Tom starts to look at the young man
doubtfully.

YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)
In addition to that, the chest
plate has a fish bone ribbing
structure that adds strength
without adding weight. It's one
hundred percent synthetic so it
washes out perfectly while-

Tom is now frightened.

TOM
(interrupting)
Please, get away from me. Now...

The young man stops short and smiles uncertainly. Tom is now
openly glaring at him.

TOM (CONT'D)
Shoo.

The young man smiles uncertainly again. Something in Tom's
look makes the young man turn, embarrassed, and step away
from Tom.

Tom goes back to waiting for the train with the rest when Baby-Think-It-Over decides to start crying. Tom curses under his breath.

Tom holds up his bracelet.

TOM (CONT'D)

Hey, do you know what this is?

INT. TAQUERIA - EVENING

Mike, Peter, Tom and Baby-Think-It-Over are having dinner. Apparently, Baby-Think-It-Over is being very good and sleeping. Tom is speaking normally, animatedly.

TOM

And I can't find Brooke anywhere. She doesn't answer her cell phone and she doesn't return any voice-mails. This isn't like her. What did we fight about at the picnic?

Mike and Peter shrug.

MIKE

HellifIknow. Were you being a jerk to her again?

Tom frowns at him and thinks a little....

PETER

You still claim to know nothing about this?

TOM

I dunno what I think.

PETER

You sure you didn't hit your head or something?

TOM

No! ...I don't think so...

MIKE

Whatever. Here's to quiet times, while we have them.

He hoists his beer bottle and they toast.

TOM

Are you doing this too?

MIKE

I'm about to get a long-term.

PETER

Do you know who they're assigning you to?

MIKE

I've tried pulling some strings, but you know how it is. They want you to do a good job no matter who it is.

(pause)

It's funny how quickly you get emotionally attached to some of these kids.

PETER

Tell me about it.

Tom watches them with fascination, if not horror. It's as if his guy friends are talking about drapes or duvets.

PETER (CONT'D)

Last time they rotated me I cried like a baby.

Peter's half joking.

MIKE

Wienie.

They look at Tom.

PETER

Speaking of crying like a baby. Why's yours so quiet?

Tom looks around conspiratorially and leans in.

TOM

I figured out how to turn it off...

They gape at him and bust up laughing. They point at his Baby-Think-It-Over. Tom nods and makes a sign of it being turned off. Peter and Mike jab each other.

MIKE

What about the satellite telemetry?

Tom's face sags. Mike looks at Peter conspiratorially.

TOM
You're kidding! Dudes, I was going
crazy, I needed a break.

PETER
They just add it to your overall
time.

Tom looks at each in turn, horrified, as they smile back at
him gleefully.

TOM
You don't know what a nightmare
it's been.

PETER & MIKE
Uh, hello? Yes we do!

Peter and Mike hold up their bracelets. Tom remembers.

TOM
What is this?!?

Suddenly his buzzes on his wrist, making him jump and shriek.
He looks at the LED and it reads: CENT-ADMIN VISIT, 8:00 AM.

PETER & MIKE
It's a LoJack of course.

Tom stares at them as it buzzes.

EXT. CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION - MORNING

Central Administration is your basic bureaucratic building,
but it's huge. A lot of money funds this bureaucracy, second
only to the Internal Revenue Service.

Tom walks briskly towards the entrance with Baby-Think-It-
Over. On his way in, he passes many people, coming and
going, with their own "assignments."

INT. MS. TORVALDSEN'S OFFICE

MS. TORVALDSEN, 60s, is sitting behind her desk. She has the
presence of a Marine Corps drill instructor with the look of
Dr. Ruth Westheimer. She is the DIRECTOR OF CHILDCARE
SERVICES, MUNICIPAL, according to her nameplate.

Tom steps inside and sees Ms. Torvaldsen staring at him with
her grim expression. He smiles uncertainly and steps closer.
He coos and baby-talks to Baby-Think-It-Over, making a big
show of how good he is with it.

MS. TORVALDSEN
Hello...Meester McAlester! Come in
and take a seat.

He gulps again and does as told. He bounces Baby-Think-It-Over to keep it from crying. Ms. Torvaldsen stares at him, seated there, making him more nervous.

MS. TORVALDSEN (CONT'D)
Thank you for coming in, Meester
McAlester.

He's waiting for the other shoe to drop and trying to figure out if he shouldn't just confess.

TOM
Sure thing, Director... I just
needed a break!

MS. TORVALDSEN
I received an emergency call.

TOM
I haven't been sleeping much—

He points at Baby-Think-It-Over who is fidgeting and threatening to cry. Indeed, Tom has bags under his eyes. Ms. Torvaldsen peers at him over her glasses.

MS. TORVALDSEN
(interrupting)
We need someone to fill in some
rotating assignments immediately.

TOM
I was desperately tired—

MS. TORVALDSEN
(interrupting)
Why do you keep speaking when I'm
trying to tell you something?!?

Tom stops short. She stares at him as an odd specimen.

MS. TORVALDSEN (CONT'D)
Due to some freak diaper accidents
we've lost three trainees, level
two and three. Don't ask!
(pause)
Listen to your training!

Tom doesn't ask.

MS. TORVALDSEN (CONT'D)
I'm placing you on these rotating assignments until we can fix the schedule.

Baby-Think-It-Over starts to cry in earnest, startling Tom.

TOM
Why, why me?

Ms. Torvaldsen stands abruptly and walks around her desk, over to Tom, and reaches into his baby carrier and flips a switch, turning Baby-Think-It-Over off. He flinches.

MS. TORVALDSEN
Annoying little bastards!

She turns, just as abruptly, and hands him a printout.

MS. TORVALDSEN (CONT'D)
Because you're available. Here's your schedule.

He takes the printout and scans it.

She ushers him out of her office. Tom hurries to her door. Ms. Torvaldsen stops him and takes Baby-Think-It-Over away from him.

MS. TORVALDSEN (CONT'D)
I'll give this back to Meester Cruz.

Tom wants to hug her but refrains.

TOM
(gratefully)
Thank you.

She smiles at him, waiting for him to leave. He gets the message. He cheers up.

TOM (CONT'D)
Well, goodbye, Ms. Torvaldsen.

He walks out.

MS. TORVALDSEN
Goodbye, Meester McAlester...
We'll just forget about your turning off Baby-Think-It-Over without permission.

TOM
(still cheerful)
Okay!

He stops short and turns around as she closes the door in his face.

INT. CAR - DAY

Tom is driving and on his cellphone. He looks at his bracelet. It reads: ON-DUTY.

TOM
Hello? Brooke? Pickup, pickup,
pickup. Okay, fine. I left you
another message last night. Call
me.

He hangs up angrily and puts the phone away.

INT. EXTRICORE

Tom shows up at work, anxiously. Everything seems fine, business as usual. Roxanne swoops by.

TOM
Roxanne! How's things?

She looks at him, papers in her hands, things on her mind.

ROXANNE
Things?

TOM
I've been gone all morning.

He looks at his watch.

TOM (CONT'D)
Any crises, anything explode, any—

She gives him a "see for yourself" expression. Tom's disappointed to find that he hasn't been missed again.

TOM (CONT'D)
Okay....

Roxanne walks away and stops abruptly, turning back to Tom.

ROXANNE
Oh, your mom called. You're
expected for dinner tonight or
something.

She turns and goes about her business. Tom nods to the empty space.

Tom goes to his office, picks up the phone and dials. The other end of the line rings and rings.

TOM
Brooke? Answer the PHONE!!!

BROOKE (O.S.)
Hi, this is Brooke, leave me a message. (BEEP)

TOM
CALL ME!

INT. TOM'S PARENT'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Tom is sitting at the dinner table with his parents, eating. Tom seems apprehensive about being there.

STANFORD
I thought you completed your training right after high school.

Tom gapes at him.

TOM
...I don't get it either.

DOROTHY
It sure is different than when we had you kids.

TOM
Really? How?

DOROTHY
We didn't have training. Not until later.

STANFORD
We would have screwed you kids up good if it weren't for the training. We didn't know what we were doing!

Tom is shocked.

TOM
What do you mean?

STANFORD

I probably would have done the same things my father taught me about raising kids. "Kids should be seen, not heard" and I probably would have forced you into the family business like my dad did with me.

Tom's jaw drops.

DOROTHY

Certainly. I remember the most important thing I learned from the training; to consider my children for who they want to become rather than what I might want them to be.

Tom's jaw drops lower. His mother notices.

DOROTHY (CONT'D)

What's the matter, Tom?

TOM

I...I...I never would have guessed.

His father looks at his mother.

STANFORD

I think that's the point, Tom?

Tom nods uncertainly.

DOROTHY

Have you heard about Brett and Tiffany?

Tom prepares himself for some materialistic comment.

TOM

What has the great Brett purchased now?

His parents look at Tom, confused. Nonetheless, they're excited to tell the story.

DOROTHY

They've decided to take a sabbatical and sail around the world with Jake and Brix.

STANFORD

The kids will get school credit for the trip.

TOM

Brett and Tiffany? My sister Tiffany?!

His parents nod.

TOM (CONT'D)

Around the world? What on one of those amusement park cruise ships?

STANFORD

No. Brett's boss is loaning him a sail boat.

DOROTHY

A seventy-footer...

Tom's eyes widen.

TOM

The four of them, on one boat? The whole time...?

His parents nod, completely unaware of Tom's apparent concern.

STANFORD

I'm so jealous of them!

DOROTHY

Me too!

Tom stares at his parents.

TOM

Wow...

STANFORD

So, how's Brooke?

Tom lets go of his shock.

TOM

Uh, I don't know. I've been trying to talk to her. It's weird. She hasn't returned any of my calls.

STANFORD

Hhmm.... Maybe she's busy.

DOROTHY

Are her charges going okay? She seemed to be having some problems.

TOM

I...have no idea...

DOROTHY

Well, give her a kiss from us when you see her.

Tom nods his head absentmindedly. Stanford stands up, finished, clearing his plates.

STANFORD

Dessert?

LATER

Stanford comes back with a tray and three plates with a tort of some kind. Tom is in shock that 1.) his father is serving them, and 2.) that he seems to have made the dessert.

DOROTHY

It's part of his pastry class.

STANFORD

It's a Linzer tort. It's totally organic, no sugar, just fruit and much better than anything store bought. I showed Brett how to make it. That way the kids can get used to eating properly instead of all that crap sugar stuff. Eat up.

Tom gapes at his father. Stanford retrieves a bottle and three little glasses and pours for them.

STANFORD (CONT'D)

This port should go perfectly with the berries in the tort.

He sits down again and dives into his dessert.

STANFORD (CONT'D)

How's Extricore doing, Tom?

Tom snaps out of it and looks at his father surprised in a new way.

TOM

Uh, well... Things are looking...good.

STANFORD

You know, I'm really proud of you,
Tom.

Tom almost spits his port.

STANFORD (CONT'D)

Starting that company. I don't
know if I'd ever have the guts to
do something like that.

He looks at Tom, in the eye, and holds his port in a toast.

STANFORD (CONT'D)

I think that's really impressive
and I wish you all the luck in the
world.

Tom is frozen in place. His father gets a little choked up
and to break out of it he clinks his glass to Tom's. Tom
suddenly responds.

TOM

Tha...thanks. Dad...

Dorothy is all smiles and teary as well and she wipes them
away with her napkin. Tom practically gulps down all of his
port.

DOROTHY

The tort is wonderful, Stan!

STANFORD

Thank you, Sweetie.

He notices Tom's empty port glass a little shocked.

STANFORD (CONT'D)

More port?

He starts to pour and Tom accepts readily.

TOM

It's really good....

He rubs his temple....

INT. MORTENSEN HOUSE - DAY

Tom steps in, blinking, and MOTHER#2 reaches into the closet
by the door and produces a contraption and scares him with it
as she fires a flash and blinds him. She's talking a mile a
minute.

MOTHER#2

We'll be back a bit late. The twins should be asleep by then. Everything's in the red binder. The kids are upstairs. I'll introduce you in a moment.

The contraption chirps and then flashes a green light while displaying his picture and identification on a screen. She smiles and nods.

She points out a red binder next to the kitchen phone.

MOTHER#2 (CONT'D)

Here's their vital statistics and emergency information, by the phone. Our numbers are printed here. Help yourself to anything in the refrigerator...except for beer of course...

She looks at him, suddenly embarrassed and concerned.

MOTHER#2 (CONT'D)

But, I don't have to tell you that, pardon me.

(pause)

I'm sure everything will be fine. You come highly recommended by the director herself.

TOM

Twins?

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

Tom is heating up dinner as the twins barge into the kitchen. He looks at them and recognizes them as the blondes he ran into, one by one, at the picnic.

TOM

Which one is Melody?

Melody raises her hand. Tom peers at both of them, trying to memorize the differences.

He notices that both girls have a small mole on their left cheeks. Both kids have identical cowlicks that make their hair look identical. Both kids slouch and shift their weight exactly the same way.

And, of course, they're both dressed identically.

TOM (CONT'D)

Where do you want to eat dinner, in
the kitchen or the living room?

MELODY
Kitchen.

MELANIE
Living room.

Tom blinks.

TOM (CONT'D)

What do you want to drink?

MELODY
Juice.

MELANIE
Milk.

TOM (CONT'D)

Okay...

INT. LIVINGROOM

Tom is holding his temples, fighting off a headache.

MELANIE
Beauty and the Beast!

MELODY
Little Mermaid!

The kids chant their choices as Tom tries to see straight.

LATER

The three of them are watching ALADDIN. Tom spies on each to see if the detente is holding.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Tom collapses on his bed, his head hitting the pillow as he stares at the ceiling. He rests his arm on his forehead. The bracelet is in front of one eye. It reads: ON-CALL.

He gets up and goes into the living room where the answering machine is. There's no blinking red light. He presses the button to review messages, just in case. Nothing.

TOM

Where are you?!?

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DIPWHIPPLE HOUSE - MORNING

Tom drives up to the curb and parks. He climbs out, dressed casually, but neatly, and hurries to the front door. He knocks on the door and it's almost immediately opened by a woman, MRS. DIPWHIPPLE, 40, dressed for work and harried.

TOM

Good morning. Tom McAlester.

MRS. DIPWHIPPLE

Oh hi, Tom! You're early! I'm
Doris Dipwhipple. Come in.

INT. DIPWHIPPLE HOUSE

She opens the door wide. Tom can hear three kids in the kitchen making a ruckus. She produces the same contraption and flashes Tom. The screen okays him. He blinks and rubs his eyes.

In the kitchen Tom sees MR. DIPWHIPPLE, DON, 40s, shirt and tie, and three children, DAVE, 6, DORA, 8, and DON JR, 9. The kids are eating breakfast while Mr. Dipwhipple is trying to put a shirt on Dave.

Tom suddenly recognizes the family from the picnic as well.

MR. DIPWHIPPLE

Good morning! You must be Tom,
from Central.

MRS. DIPWHIPPLE

Yes, dear. Kids? This is Mr.
McAlester, Tom. Please say hello
to Tom.

THE KIDS

Hello....

TOM

Hi, guys.

MRS. DIPWHIPPLE

That's Don Jr, Dora and Dave. And,
that's my husband, Don.

Mr. Dipwhipple waves.

MRS. DIPWHIPPLE (CONT'D)

I understand you're rated level 2!
How impressive! Aren't you
excited? Do you want children?
Would you like some coffee or some
breakfast, Tom?

Tom stares at her, forcing a smile onto his face.

TOM

No, thank you. Very much so...

MRS. DIPWHIPPLE
...Which, sorry?

TOM
No breakfast, thank you...

MRS. DIPWHIPPLE
Do you prefer to be called Tom or
Mr. McAlester?

TOM
Tom's fine.

MRS. DIPWHIPPLE
Kids? You can address Mr.
McAlester as Tom.

THE KIDS
Tom!

Tom smiles, uncertainly.

MRS. DIPWHIPPLE
Somehow, the baby-sitter assigned
to the kids died in some sort of
diaper accident. Isn't that
horrible?
(pause)
The kids will be going to school in
the middle of the week.

The kids bitch and moan.

MRS. DIPWHIPPLE (CONT'D)
And Central Administration says
that we'll have our permanent baby-
sitter by then.

Tom smiles weakly.

MRS. DIPWHIPPLE (CONT'D)
It's so nice of you to volunteer to
help us out.

She takes his hand, genuinely.

MRS. DIPWHIPPLE (CONT'D)
Thank you.

Tom's caught off guard.

TOM
You're welcome.

MRS. DIPWHIPPLE

I'll be back at two. Don will be off tomorrow afternoon. The kids have lunch at noon, but no snacks until then. They have homework to do, so no TV. These are their reading books and you can read to them from this one if you'd like.

(pause)

Do you have any questions?

Tom has a million questions.

TOM

...no.

MRS. DIPWHIPPLE

Okay. Well, they're all yours.

Mr. Dipwhipple puts on his sport coat and grabs his wife's and his attache cases, ready to head out.

MR. DIPWHIPPLE

Keep an eye on the boys, Tom.

Tom glances at the boys who seem innocent enough.

TOM

I will.

Mrs. Dipwhipple joins her husband, putting on her jacket and taking her attache case.

MRS. DIPWHIPPLE

Thanks again, Tom. You're a lifesaver.

TOM

No problem.

Tom smiles uncertainly. Doris and Don Dipwhipple leave, waving.

MR. & MRS. DIPWHIPPLE

Bye, kids!

THE KIDS

Bye!

The door closes. Tom turns to the kids who should still be eating their breakfast and smiles. They're gone. They've taken their breakfasts to the living room and turned on the TV.

LIVING ROOM

TOM

Okay. Nice try, guys! You're Mom said no TV. You have homework.

DON JR

Oh come on!

DAVID

We don't have that much homework. We can watch one hour.

TOM

That doesn't matter. Please, come to the table and bring your homework.

DON JR

The dog ate it.

Tom does a double-take. He looks at Dora for help.

DORA

We don't have a dog.

Tom smiles at her and walks over to the TV and turns it off. It comes back on. Tom turns it off again. It comes back on again. Tom looks at the boys.

TOM

Okay. Where's the remote?

They remain silent.

TOM (CONT'D)

Dora? Do you know who has the remote?

DORA

Nope.

TOM

David?

He looks at the six year-old who is sitting on his hands. Tom considers his options: Does he reach under this kid in search of the remote or what?

TOM (CONT'D)

Don?

Don Jr stares at him the same way. Tom steps forward and reaches under David, looking for the remote. The six year-old SHRIEKS at the top of his lungs.

DAVID

You're touching my private places!
Stop!

Tom jumps back, horrified.

TOM

No I'm not! I was looking for the remote.

DON JR

I saw you!

TOM

No. I was looking for the remote!

DON JR

We have a surveillance camera! We have you on videotape!

TOM

No. Just give me the remote!

Tom returns to the TV and turns it off. It comes back on immediately. He tries to catch whoever has it but fails.

TOM (CONT'D)

Turn the TV off now. Otherwise...
I'll tell your parents.

Tom stares at the boys.

TOM (CONT'D)

I'm going to pick each of you up.
One of you is sitting on the remote. I'm going to find it.

DAVID

You'll be videotaped!

He turns around, paranoid, looking for the camera.

TOM

I don't care. It'll show that I was just looking for the remote.
(to whomever)
I'm just looking for the remote because they're supposed to do their homework, not watch TV.

DON JR
(petulantly)
It doesn't record sound. That's
illegal, Tom!

Tom stops and turns to glare at him. He's getting more and more frustrated.

TOM
Come on, guys. Be a pal. Give me
the remote and I won't tell your
folks.

DAVID
One hour.

DON JR
It'll be our secret.

TOM
Sorry, no.

DAVID
Just one hour.

TOM
You have to do your homework.

DAVID
We don't have that much homework.

TOM
Tell you what, since you don't have
that much homework, do it first and
I'll let you watch TV afterwards.

He turns the TV off. They turn it on with each comment and he turns it off again.

DAVID
Before.

TOM
Afterwards.

DAVID
Before.

TOM
Nope. That's the deal. Take it or
leave it.

DON JR

Before.

TOM

Sorry.

The TV turns back on.

TOM (CONT'D)

Stop that! Come on now! Give me the remote! If you don't give me the remote there'll be no TV at all.

He turns it off. It turns back on. He fumes. He moves to turn it off but stops short. The TV turns off.

TOM (CONT'D)

Ah ha! Gotcha!

It turns back on. He cringes.

TOM (CONT'D)

Come on, guys. Don't be like this. This is only my second time baby-sitting and if you help me out I'll make it up to you.

The boys sit up, intrigued. Tom realizes he just blew his negotiating leverage.

TOM (CONT'D)

That's not exactly true. I've done this alot, but I'm a bit rusty. Just cooperate and we'll all be happy. Okay?

Nothing. Tom starts to get irritated. He moves towards them and stops short, reevaluating. The boys just smile and giggle and...watch TV.

Tom turns around, steps to the wall and unplugs the TV. Don Jr and David SCREAM BLOODY MURDER in two sustained EAR-SPLITTING SCREAMS.

Tom jumps up gestures for them to be quiet. The boys take breaths as needed and keep SCREAMING at the top of their lungs. Tom runs around frantically.

TOM (CONT'D)

Be quiet! Be quiet! Be quiet!
Please!

He gives up and plugs the TV back in.

TOM (CONT'D)
Okay, okay. Stop screaming.
Please!

They stop. Tom catches his breath, oddly enough.

TOM (CONT'D)
Okay. Let's do some homework and
we can watch TV afterwards.

DAVID
Before.

TOM
No, afterwards—

DON JR
Before.

TOM
No. Afterwards. Your mom—

They start screaming again.

DON JR & DAVID
BEFORE! BEFORE! BEFORE!

TOM
Okay, okay, okay! Stop screaming!

They stop.

TOM (CONT'D)
Fifteen minutes.

DAVID
One hour.

TOM
Thirty minutes.

DON JR
One hour.

He stares at the kids.

TOM
But you have to give me the remote.

They think about it and look at each other.

DON JR & DAVID

Okay.

Tom steps forward and sticks out his hand to the boys and Dora hands him the remote.

INT. MIKE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Mike walks in from his kitchen with a baby bottle that he's testing on his wrist. Not only is the temperature right, it tastes good too. He sits down on the couch next to Tom.

MIKE

You underestimated the enemy.
Didn't you? Basic military
strategy: Probe for weaknesses,
exploit them quickly. You assumed
they were "just kids."

Tom is slouched on Mike's couch holding a sleeping baby. The TV is on with the sound down low.

TOM

I'm so pathetic.

Mike puts the bottle on the coffee table away from Tom. Tom hands the baby to Mike.

MIKE

It can't be that bad.

Tom sits up with renewed energy and emotion.

TOM

I did their homework for them! You
know how humiliating it is to know
that you tried your best to make
your handwriting look like it was
written by three different kids
under ten years of age?

Mike snorts as he sits back and starts to feed the baby.

MIKE

You didn't bother to get to know
them, did you?

Tom drops his head in shame.

TOM

I know them now... they're little
hellions.

MIKE

Now you know who you're dealing with. Start over and don't take any of their shit.

INT. DIPWHIPPLE HOUSE - MORNING

Tom walks into the living room where the kids are already watching TV and eating snacks from individual bags and such in their laps; their parents gone to work.

TOM

Alright, you little hellions! I'm not going to take any of your sh... of your stuff! You hear me?!?

They look at him apparently with fear in their eyes, and then they bust up laughing and pointing at him. Tom loses his resolve.

TOM (CONT'D)

No. Really! I'm not kidding...

DORA

Don'tcha' have homework to do?

LATER

Tom is full-blown moping, arms crossed, slouching in the middle of the couch, between Don Jr and David. Periodically he glares at Dora, sitting in a recliner, who he used to think was the good one.

Tom shakes his head in abject humiliation and defeat. He looks at his watch: 11:47 am.

TOM

It's been over three hours, guys.

Don Jr looks at him and hands a bag to him.

DON JR

Cheese Nips?

Tom snarls at him and snatches some and eats them.

INT. MIKE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Mike walks in from his kitchen with two beers, one of which he hands to Tom.

MIKE

Again?

Tom again is slouched on Mike's couch.

TOM
Well, I drew the line on the homework. I just refused to do it.

MIKE
And?

TOM
So did they.

Mike nods.

MIKE
You just have to put your foot down.

TOM
On what, their little heads?!?

Mike looks at him.

TOM (CONT'D)
I thought I did.

MIKE
Nah, you're still afraid of them. You need to just brave the enemy fire, head-on- they can't hurt you!
(pause)
What is it you're most afraid of?

Tom ponders the question while drinking his beer.

INT. DIPWHIPPLE HOUSE

Tom faces the kids in the kitchen; their parents have just left. Their smiles disappear. This is a different Tom than yesterday's.

Tom immediately goes to the living room, turns on the TV and starts fiddling with the remote. Satisfied, he turns it off and tosses the remote on the couch, in plain view.

He goes into the kitchen and the kids start to get up from the table, leaving their dishes behind.

DAVID
I'm done.

DON JR
Me too.

DORA

Me too.

TOM

Oh no you don't.

They stop and look at Tom who is pointing at the sink.

TOM (CONT'D)

Wash your dishes.

DON JR

No, thanks.

DORA

We're going to watch TV.

They march into the living room and Tom lets them. They turn on the TV and all they get is static. Every channel is locked.

Dora takes the remote from Don Jr and accesses the special features, trying to override the lock. Tom stays in the kitchen with his arms crossed. Finally, the TV goes off and all three kids reappear at the kitchen door.

DORA (CONT'D)

What'd you do?

TOM

Please take your dishes to the kitchen sink and wash them. I'll help you but I won't do it for you.

He waits. The kids look at each other and simultaneously start SCREAMING at the top of their lungs. It's EARSPLITTING but Tom stands there, controlling both his impulse to run and his impulse to cover his ears.

The kids stop to catch their breaths. They START IN AGAIN. Tom stands by. Incredibly, the kids are LOUDER this time. Tom does allow a tiny grimace and turn of his head away from a PARTICULARLY PAINFUL NOTE, but that's it.

The kids stop and look at each other, out of breath.

TOM (CONT'D)

Please take your dishes to the—

The kids start SCREAMING again, louder still. Tom just waits, and waits, and waits until the kids literally collapse from lack of oxygen. He shifts his weight watching the kids catch their breaths and slowly get to their feet.

They look at Tom with a new respect. Tom waits. Gradually, Dora picks up her dishes and takes them to the sink. Don Jr follows her and then David. Tom joins them.

TOM (CONT'D)

Who wants to wash the dishes, who wants to dry them and who wants to put them away?

The kids stare at him and gradually step up to each task: David wants to wash, Don Jr wants to dry, and Dora accepts putting them away. And Tom helps them.

Tom then takes the red binder and the reading books and sets them on the clean kitchen table.

TOM (CONT'D)

Homework.

The kids frown and slouch, but slowly sit down at the table. Tom spots a radio built into the kitchen counter. He moves over to it and turns it on.

TOM (CONT'D)

What kind of music do you guys like?

The kids are surprised by that. He turns to look at them.

TOM (CONT'D)

Well? David?

DAVID

Rap.

TOM

Don?

DON JR

Techno.

TOM

Dora?

Dora takes her time.

DORA

I have an eclectic musical taste.

TOM

Good. Rap for the first hour, techno for the second, and we'll see after that.

Tom dials the radio and finds a rap station and sets the volume. David is happy, and Don Jr is intrigued. But most importantly, Dora is impressed. Tom sits down at the fourth side of the kitchen table and opens one of their books.

LATER

David is reading slowly, but enthusiastically.

DAVID
HOW WILL BILLY BEAR GET OUT OF THIS
ONE?

He looks at Tom, excited and giggling.

TOM
Very good. What did you think?

David giggles and nods.

TOM (CONT'D)
That was much better, wasn't it?

DAVID
Yeah.

Tom turns to Dora and Don Jr. They nod.

TOM
From now on when you read, read
each word with emphasis. Make the
most of each one. If you make it
sound exciting you'll have much
more fun, especially when you read
to each other.

He digs into a pocket and dramatically takes something out. He shows it to Dora, Don Jr and then David and each in turn is pleasantly surprised. It's a paperback western, of the ZANE GREY kind.

DAVID
Fly!

Tom nods at him, uncertainly. He opens the book and starts reading. He uses a dramatic, western voice as he reads each sentence, emphasizing the visuals described by the author, accompanying that with exaggerated expressions.

TOM
RINGO'S REVENGE, CHAPTER ONE.
(pause)
(MORE)

TOM (CONT'D)
RANCHO SECO WAS A SAD, DREARY, ONE
HORSE TOWN...

LATER

Mr. Dipwhipple comes home. He finds Tom and the kids at the kitchen table with the music playing on the radio. The kids are reading more from their individual books. Tom turns around to look at Mr. Dipwhipple.

TOM (CONT'D)
Hi!

Mr. Dipwhipple is dumbfounded, staring at the kids reading. Tom gets up and steps over to him, concerned.

TOM (CONT'D)
Is there a problem?

MR. DIPWHIPPLE
We didn't think you'd actually get
them to read, particularly after
yesterday...

Tom slumps, the butt of a joke apparently. But now the joke's on them... Tom looks at his watch.

TOM
Well, I better be going.

MR. DIPWHIPPLE
So, we're not going to see you
tomorrow?

THE KIDS
Come back! Come back!

Mr. Dipwhipple looks at Tom plaintively. Tom turns around, surprised. The kids are cheering him and hooting and hollering. He laughs and placates them.

TOM
Sorry, guys. I'm scheduled
elsewhere.

THE KIDS
But, who will read to us?

Tom looks at their dad and them.

TOM
You will!

They razz him and moan but seem to like the idea. Mr. Dipwhipple sticks out his hand to shake hands.

MR. DIPWHIPPLE
Thanks, Tom. You really know what
you're doing.

Tom doesn't think so...

TOM
...thank you.

MR. DIPWHIPPLE
I hope our permanent assignment is
as good as you.

TOM
Thank you, Mr. Dipwhipple. That's
very nice of you.

Tom smiles at him, pleasantly surprised. He makes his way to the door and opens it.

TOM (CONT'D)
Say goodbye to your wife for me.

MR. DIPWHIPPLE
I will, thanks.

Tom turns to the kids.

TOM
Dora, Don Jr, David? It was nice
meeting you. Be good.

THE KIDS
Bye!!

Tom steps out the front door and stops and doubles back. He leans into Mr. Dipwhipple and whispered.

TOM
Oh, I locked all the TV channels!
I used a password.

Mr. Dipwhipple again is surprised and impressed.

TOM (CONT'D)
Patience!

INT. MALL

Tom, Mike and Peter are strolling through a mall having eaten a late lunch.

MIKE
Why are you so shocked?

Tom shakes his head, searching...

MIKE (CONT'D)
Don't you remember being a kid?

Tom looks at him.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Didn't you hate it whenever grown-ups presumed things about you?

TOM
I suppose. The dad even said that he hoped their permanent assignment was as good as me.

PETER
Congratulations! You're learning how to relate.

Tom smirks at him about to say something when he bumps into someone and looks up.

It's a 15 year-old, black kid and the teenager, ghetto-wannabe, from the picnic and his 15 year-old nephew, Jake. Apparently they're all friends.

TOM
Whoa!

BLACK KID
Oops! Sorry, sir.

Tom starts to take offense but does a double-take instead at the polite kid. Then he does a triple-take as he recognizes his nephew and the kid from the picnic.

JAKE
Uncle Thomas!?!

TOM
Jake?

JAKE
Sorry about that.

TOM
That's fine.

He looks at the three kids and notices that Jake no longer looks like an Eminem wannabe and neither do his friends.

Instead they're dressed distinctly from each other. Jake is dressed like an Australian bush pilot and his friend is dressed in Punk stuff and the black kid actually looks like a college kid.

TOM (CONT'D)
What are you doing here?

JAKE
Oh, we're just hangin' out- I'm sorry, have you guys met?

Tom looks at his friends uncertainly.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Uncle Thomas, Tony and Ed. Tony, Ed, my uncle.

TONY, the former ghetto wannabe, and ED, the collegiate, reach out to shake hands completely without any bored attitude or "frontin'." Tom is shocked and finally shakes hands with them.

TOM
Call me Tom.

He looks at Mike and Peter to see if they're witnessing this. He looks back at the teenagers.

TOM (CONT'D)
Oh, these are my friends Mike and Peter.

The kids shake hands with them, introducing themselves like perfect gentlemen.

TOM (CONT'D)
So, you guys "cruisin' for bitches?"

All of them are horrified by Tom's comment.

JAKE
Uh, well, no. Actually we're supposed to meet our girlfriends for a movie in a bit.

TOM
Your parents know you're here or
did you sneak out again?

JAKE
Uh, no. My dad just dropped us off
a second ago.

Tom is terribly embarrassed by his faux pas and tries to play
it off.

TOM
Cool... You kids have fun.

Jake looks at him uncertainly.

JAKE
Well, Uncle Thomas. We better be
going. We don't want to be late
for the girls.

Tom stares at him and then snaps out of it.

TOM
Of course. Yeah, sure.

Jake, Tony and Ed shake hands with them again and leave.
Tom's jaw drops. Mike and Peter check with each other and
then stare at Tom.

MIKE
Potty mouth!

PETER
"Cruisin' bitches?"

MIKE
What are you, a merchant marine?

Tom looks at them, chagrined and further embarrassed.

TOM
I was just trying to...relate.

MIKE
To what, the gutter?

TOM
I've never seen such polite kids,
teenagers even!

He studies them for confirmation.

PETER

Whattaya' mean?

TOM

Didn't you see them? They bumped into me and actually apologized! They shook hands with us like...men!

Peter and Mike stare blankly at him.

TOM (CONT'D)

I figured they'd...I dunno.

He badly mimics some gang/rapper gestures.

TOM (CONT'D)

I was just tryin' to be down. Ya' know? I mean at first, I thought they'd, you know...

He pantomimes some belligerence as if they know. They don't.

TOM (CONT'D)

Oh, come on! When have you seen teenagers that polite?

Mike and Peter look at each other and then look at Tom as if he's blind or insane and then they both point out all of the kids in the mall with matching, expansive gestures of their arms.

Tom gapes at them and then looks around, as if for the first time. Indeed, the entire teenage population in the mall is strikingly different than what he's used to.

It's very ethnically diverse and almost completely lacking any of the usual petulance, belligerence, and annoying traits common to teenagers.

They're all apparently having fun and the noise level is naturally high, but there isn't that forced fun usually found in a crowd of teenagers.

But, most importantly there seems to be a calmness to the mood. A basic politeness and courtesy apparent in every interaction.

Tom stares at the whole scene in shock.

INT. EXTRICORE - MORNING

Tom slams the phone down at his desk. He gets up and steps outside looking for Roxanne. She comes back from some errand.

TOM

I can't make heads or tails of what's going on with Brooke. Can you help me?

ROXANNE

What do you want me to do?

TOM

I dunno. Find out where she is?

ROXANNE

What do I look like, a gumshoe?

TOM

What's a gumshoe?

EXT. PARKING LOT

Tom is walking away from work, studying his schedule. He seems confronted by what he reads. He gets in his car and drives off.

EXT. APARTMENT - DAY

Tom knocks on the door. It's opened by SUZANNE THOMPSON, 27, who is holding JENNIFER, a one year-old baby, and African American....

TOM

Hi. Tom McAlester.

SUZANNE

Hi, Tom. Thanks for coming.

She produces the same contraption and flashes Tom. The screen okays him. He blinks and rubs his eyes.

TOM

No problem.

SUZANNE

I need to go to work. I just changed her, and she just ate, so she should sleep for a bit.

TOM
That's good—

SUZANNE
(interrupting)
You're level 2, right?

TOM
Yeah...

SUZANNE
She's a good baby. Everything's in
the red binder, by the phone.

She hands Jennifer over to Tom who takes her very
uncertainly.

TOM
Did she eat the green stuff or the
red stuff?

Suzanne stares at Tom.

TOM (CONT'D)
Never mind.

SUZANNE
Do you have a carrier and a car
seat?

TOM
In the car.

SUZANNE
Good. That way I won't have to
give you mine. Do you have any
questions?

TOM
I don't think so.

SUZANNE
Come in and I'll introduce you to
the rest.

TOM
The rest?

INT. APARTMENT

LATONYA THOMPSON, 30, appears from another room holding
another one year-old.

SUZANNE

This is my sister LaTonya and her baby, Marcus.

LATONYA

Hi. Say Hi, Marcus.

She holds up the baby's hand to make him wave. Tom smiles uncertainly at them. The two women lead him further inside.

In the living room is CHARISSE THOMPSON, 28, holding another baby. Tom digs up his assignment sheet and re-reads it.

SUZANNE

This is my cousin Charisse and her baby Sylvia.

Tom is very nervous now.

TOM

What happened to Jennifer Sylvia Marcus?

Suzanne stares at Tom as she points out the three babies, Jennifer, Marcus and Sylvia.

CHARISSE

What kind of diaper accident would wipe out three baby-sitters all at once?

SUZANNE

Thanks so much for doing this. We all have to work and this will help so much. I was surprised they found someone so quickly. Usually it takes weeks to schedule this stuff. It's crazy.

TOM

It is crazy!

The women start to leave, after leaving the two babies, Marcus and Sylvia, in their baby seats safely on the floor, on a blanket in the living room. The three women walk out the front door.

SUZANNE

LaTonya's and Charisse's carriers are in the living room. Their car seats are in the guest bedroom. Thanks a lot.

LATONYA

Thanks.

CHARISSE

Thanks.

They walk to a car, waving at him and blowing him kisses.

SUZANNE

Call, if you have an emergency!

TOM

If?

The women drive off, waving at him as he holds, Marcus...or Sylvia, or no... Jennifer! He turns Jennifer around and looks at her. She is a good baby, smiling and drooling.

LATER

Tom has all three babies in their baby seats, on the blanket, in the living room.

He's found some labels and made name-tags for each baby and placed them on their foreheads. He thinks he's got it right as he places the last name-tag. He stops.

TOM (CONT'D)

What am I doing? Sorry.

He peels the labels off their foreheads, one by one, and places them somewhere more appropriate, like on the logos on their baby jumpers. Tom shakes his head at himself.

LATER

He's opening a diaper, apprehensively. It's not that bad. But he stops short.

TOM (CONT'D)

Oops. You're not Marcus.

He peels off the label.

LATER

Tom is in the kitchen, preparing a bottle. He's wearing two baby carriers, one in front and one in back. Somehow he's managed to make them work that way.

He has sleeping Jennifer in the back and Sylvia in the front and he has Marcus in his baby seat on the kitchen table.

Tom checks the table to make sure it's sound. He tests the bottle and it seems fine. He holds it for Marcus and feeds him. Tom takes this moment to look around and roll his eyes.

LATER

Tom is opening another diaper, apprehensively. This one's worse, but not too bad.

LATER

All three babies, two in the carriers, front and back, and one in his arm, are crying full force as Tom dances around trying to placate them.

TOM (CONT'D)
Don't cry, don't cry, babies...

They catch their breaths.

TOM (CONT'D)
Please... don't...cry....

LATER

Tom is opening another diaper, apprehensively, while the babies cry. This one's the worst, by far.

TOM (CONT'D)
(pleading)
Jennifer!

Tom gags and then holds his breath as he removes the diaper and seals it in an orange plastic bag he produces, clearly labeled BIOHAZARD.

LATER

Tom is trying to massage his shoulders, even pushing against a corner of two walls, with little luck.

Somehow, all three babies are asleep, lying face down on the blanket in the living room. They form a cute little star pattern. Tom studies them and after a while actually smiles.

His cellphone rings and he jumps to keep it from waking the babies. He moves away from earshot, hopefully.

TOM (CONT'D)
(whispering)
Hello?

ROXANNE (O.S.)

Tom?

TOM

Yes.

ROXANNE (O.S.)

What's wrong with your voice?

TOM

Nothing. I've got three babies sleeping here.

ROXANNE (O.S.)

Oh. I found her. It took some doing. You won't believe how much I had to go through just to find her. You owe me—

TOM

(interrupting)

WHERE IS SHE?!

(whispering)

Where is she?

ROXANNE (O.S.)

She's in jail!

TOM

JAIL?!?

(whispering)

Jail...?

He checks to see if the babies were disturbed by his outburst but they keep sleeping.

TOM (CONT'D)

How is that possible?

ROXANNE (O.S.)

Well, I guess they arrested her first, then they probably put her in their car, covering her head, you know, so she doesn't hit her head on the car, then they drove her down to the jail and then they—

TOM

(hissing)

I mean, why is she in jail?

ROXANNE (O.S.)

Oh. That I don't know.

Tom snaps out of it.

TOM

Which jail?

He finds a pen and paper and writes down whatever Roxanne tells him.

THEN:

Tom is trying to call the phone numbers in the red binder, while taking the other car seats to his car.

The numbers are busy for some reason. Tom is carrying the two car seats out the door when he sees a stray dog in the street.

It doesn't seem like a bad pooch, but Tom is paranoid as he does a double-take and looks back inside the apartment.

He goes inside for a moment, leaving the car seats at the threshold and returns much later with all three babies, two in the carriers and one in his arms.

EXT. APARTMENT

He's walking very carefully so as not to wake the babies. He picks up one car seat and carries it to the car, which he opens. He goes back and carries the other seat to the car. The dog looks at him woefully and quizzically.

TOM

(whispering)

Shoo, shoo.

The dog just stares. Tom tries to figure out how to accomplish this task. He even shifts the one baby, from one arm to the other arm, to scratch his head, in a futile gesture.

He puts Jennifer in his car seat and then installs the other two seats.

Then he disengages from the baby carrier holding Marcus and puts Marcus in the car seat. He stuffs the baby carrier on the floor and takes Sylvia, in the baby carrier, off his back and places her in the third car seat.

And then he takes a breath.

INT. CAR

He gets in the car and tries the phone numbers again. As he drives off he makes some progress and jumps.

TOM

Hello? This is Tom McAlester leaving a message for Suzanne Thompson. Something's come up and I've had to leave the house. It's an emergency. I have the kids with me and they're...sleeping. Call my cellphone as soon as you can.

He hangs up and fiddles with the cellphone looking for another phone number.

TOM (CONT'D)

Brooke,...what did you do?

EXT. COUNTY JAIL

Tom finds a parking space in a parking lot. He hurries around getting the babies back in their carriers and mobile.

INT. COUNTY JAIL

Tom walks into the County Jail, burdened with the three babies. Police officers and arrestees look at Tom. He stands out.

He walks up to the reception desk manned by no nonsense POLICE SERGEANT FLYNN, 50s. The sergeant has been watching Tom since he walked in.

SGT. FLYNN

Can I help you?

TOM

I believe my...wife is being held here, as ridiculous as that may sound.

Sergeant Flynn gives Tom and the babies another look.

SGT. FLYNN

Name?

The sergeant nonchalantly grabs a clipboard, the arrest log, about to scan it.

TOM
McAlester, Brooke McAlester-Clark.
M-C-A—

SGT. FLYNN
(interrupting)
Clark, Brooke?!

He doesn't even look at the clipboard even though Tom is staring at it expectantly. Tom looks at the sergeant. Sergeant Flynn now looks very apprehensive. He gives Tom and the babies another once-over.

SGT. FLYNN (CONT'D)
You say she's your wife?

TOM
Is she here?

He alerts some officers nearby.

SGT. FLYNN
Gave the boys quite a lot of trouble a couple of days ago.

TOM
You're joking..., right?

Sergeant Flynn doesn't joke.

SGT. FLYNN
What is it you want with her?

TOM
To talk to her, of course. I need to see her. I've been going nuts trying to locate her.

Sergeant Flynn checks the clock on the wall.

SGT. FLYNN
Alright. But you can't touch her or pass anything to her. Understand?

TOM
Wha...no...!

SGT. FLYNN
She's in maximum security because she's dangerous! Now do you understand?

Tom's eyes nearly pop out of his head.

SGT. FLYNN (CONT'D)
Sign in here. What's your name?

The sergeant scowls and hands Tom a clipboard.

SGT. FLYNN (CONT'D)
Officer Yablonski?

A female officer looks up and walks over.

TOM
Tom McAlester...?

SGT. FLYNN
Visitor, Max wing!

She seems to study Tom as if figuring out how to take him down. She gestures for him to follow.

INT. MAXIMUM SECURITY

Tom is ushered inside, by Officer Yablonski, to other officers who immediately pat him down.

TOM
Don't wake the babies.

OFFICER WHITE, 40s, steps up to Tom with another clipboard.

OFFICER WHITE
Sign this waiver releasing the department in case the inmate kills you and yours.

TOM
Excuse me?

OFFICER WHITE
We have very strict rules here. You must follow them completely otherwise you'll be ejected, or worse.
(pause)
Do not step over the yellow line clearly painted on the floor. Do not touch the inmate. Do not accept anything from the inmate. Do not turn your back on the inmate. Do not pass anything to the inmate. Anything!

TOM
(whispered)
Brooke?

OFFICER WHITE
If you have any problems,
whatsoever, call a correctional
officer immediately. And, whatever
you do, do not let the inmate touch
those babies.

Tom considers the babies and is about to object but stops.

OFFICER WHITE (CONT'D)
Understand?

TOM
Yes....

The officers then turn and lead Tom through several steel gates with bars and around corners and down corridors until they get to an imposing looking steel door with a cross bar labeled: SOLITARY CONFINEMENT.

The babies complain about the clanging steel.

TOM (CONT'D)
The babies!

He shushes the correctional officers. Officer White unlocks the door and raises the bar. Another officer opens the door and steps inside, letting Tom in.

INT. SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

Tom steps inside and nods at the officers who leave and close, bar and lock, the door behind him. He bounces and coos as the babies fidget.

He turns and faces the yellow line on the floor and sees a thick wall of Plexiglas with breathing holes strategically drilled throughout.

Immediately behind the Plexiglas are steel bars. And behind that is an antiseptic cell and inside that...Brooke. Tom stares at her, dumbfounded, as she stares back.

BROOKE
That's the same atrocious
aftershave you wore in court.

TOM
What?

BROOKE

Nothing.

Brooke is in an orange jumpsuit that is two sizes too big for her. She's made it fashionable by rolling up the legs and sleeves and zipped it up just enough to still show a bright white "wife beater" she's wearing underneath.

She has her hair up with a scrunchi and couldn't look more innocent and incongruous to her surroundings.

TOM

What are you doing here?

She throws her hands up and rolls her eyes.

BROOKE

I dunno. I was baby-sitting my assignment and all of a sudden they break down the doors and the parents are pointing at me and all sorts of chaos. I guess they didn't like that I was bleaching the kids' hair blonde.

Tom gapes at her.

TOM

Bleaching...? Why would you do that?

BROOKE

Don't you like blonde hair?

She flips her own hair. Tom blinks at her.

BROOKE (CONT'D)

That was the Nakamura kids. But, I think they're more mad about Cindy Lauer.

(pause)

I guess her parents really don't want her to enter the Little Miss Beauty Pageant. Cindy and I were rehearsing her evening gown routine and her talent portion. She could win, hands down! They say it's not fair. It's just me forcing my own "twisted" views and ambitions on her instead of letting her be a little girl. Isn't that crazy?

She looks at him for confirmation with a wide-eyed, insane look. He nods agreement, but not quite the way she intended.

BROOKE (CONT'D)

I mean, what little girl wouldn't want to be a beauty pageant queen?

She steps forward, actually startling Tom with her ferocity.

BROOKE (CONT'D)

With my guidance, I KNOW she could beat all those little trailer park TRAMPS. My little girl has CLASS, and she can PROVE it!

Tom stares at her. She kind of hears her use of the term "my little girl" and snaps out of it.

BROOKE (CONT'D)

Well, Cindy has class, you know what I mean... Anyway, after all that money I invested in little evening gowns and tiaras, and— Oh, you should see this little cowgirl outfit I had made for her! I taught her how to use a lasso, and how to walk in her cowgirl boots. I told her, she has to practice walking in those boots. We don't want those judges thinking she's some low-life tramp because she's clomping around on stage in those boots. She says the boots pinch her feet. But, I know she's lying, she just doesn't want to practice. She's got to learn how to walk in those things. I did, when I was a little girl. Now it's her turn. Heel to toe, heel to toe, heel to toe.

Tom rubs his temples with one hand.

BROOKE (CONT'D)

But, I guess that's not the worst of it. I think they were really upset about her stagename.

Tom again waits for her to continue.

BROOKE (CONT'D)

Lil' Babbling Brooke.

Tom tries to comprehend.

BROOKE (CONT'D)

They said I'm a menace to society, that I just try to "impose my own ideas and ambitions" on all these kids. That I'm not trying to "nurture their own personalities and dreams." Puhlease... I mean, look at me. I turned out pretty darn good, didn't I? What's so horrible about them following in my footsteps, huh? It's a lot better than what they'd do on their own, I'll tell you that!

It looks like Tom and all three babies are just flabbergasted by Brooke's babbling.

BROOKE (CONT'D)

I mean, they're just kids. What do they know about it? You know what I really think?

Tom is afraid of what she "really" thinks.

BROOKE (CONT'D)

I think they're just JEALOUS! They all wish they were more like me and it burns them to see that I'm helping these kids become something. That's what's really going on! That's why they have me here, locked up like some common criminal.

She gestures at the cell. Tom looks at the decidedly uncommon cell.

TOM

I...need...to get back.

BROOKE

Okay. Sorry, I couldn't call you. They say you get one phone call, so I called the registration office to see if we could get an extension on Cindy's entry fees.

Tom just stares at her as he knocks on the steel door. The correction officers open the door again, letting him out.

BROOKE (CONT'D)

Okay.

INT. CAR - EVENING

Tom has managed to get the babies back into the car and drives out of the jail's parking lot. He's got a splitting headache and a swarm of conflicting emotions. All he can do is just shake his head.

He winces from the headache and groans. He sees a convenience store and pulls into the parking lot.

EXT. CONVENIENCE STORE

Tom gets out of the car and looks at the kids in their three car seats. He contemplates lugging them out of the car again and groans. Instead, he hurries into the convenience store.

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE

Tom finds some WHOLE LOT'A EXTRA STRENGTH PAIN RELIEVER and snatches the package. He hurries to another aisle and snatches a bottle of water. He hurries to the checkout stand and gets in line behind a customer. The CUSTOMER steps up.

CUSTOMER

Do you have Pall Malls, Menthols?

The clerk looks behind himself at the cigarettes stacked there.

CLERK

Uh, sorry.

CUSTOMER

What about...Kools?

CLERK

Yeah, Kools, Menthols?

CUSTOMER

No. Just regular Kools...

CLERK

Oh, no.

CUSTOMER

How about...Winstons.

CLERK

Menthols or regular?

Tom is going crazy. He looks at his bracelet. It reads: ON-DUTY.

TOM
Guys? Can you hurry up please?

They hear some bell start ringing outside, like a bank alarm.

CUSTOMER
What's that?

CLERK
Sounds like an alarm.

TOM
Guys?

They scowl at him.

CLERK
Menthols or...

CUSTOMER
Does Winston make menthols?

CLERK
Yeah! Winstons?

CUSTOMER
No. I'll just take the Kools.

CLERK
We're out.

CUSTOMER
Right. Then I'll take the menthols.

The clerk hands him a box.

CUSTOMER (CONT'D)
No, just a pack, please.

The clerk rips the box open and takes out one pack and hands it to the customer. He rings him up and exchanges money.

CUSTOMER (CONT'D)
Thanks.

CLERK
Thank you. Come again.

The customer leaves. Tom steps up and hands over a bill. The clerk starts to ring him up. Tom takes the pain reliever, opens it quickly, pops four pills and opens the water and guzzles it down on his way out, leaving the change.

CLERK (CONT'D)

Thanks. Come again.

EXT. CONVENIENCE STORE

Tom walks over to his car and finds it....missing. He looks around, rubbing his temples. He stops rubbing. That alarm is still ringing. The car, with the babies, is gone. Tom reflexively cringes and hops about frantically.

TOM

Oh, my God! No! No! Where'd they go? Where'd they go?

(pause)

The keys!

He searches his pockets for his keys. He has them. He runs back into the convenience store.

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE

TOM

Someone stole my car!

CLERK

What's it look like?

The clerk slowly reaches for the phone.

TOM

It's got three babies in it!

The clerk dials 911 immediately and looks at Tom scornfully.

CLERK

You left them in the car while you came in here?!?

TOM

It was only a second. I've got this splitting headache—

The clerk turns his attention to the phone.

CLERK

Yeah. This guy left his kids in the car, three babies!

(MORE)

CLERK (CONT'D)

Someone stole the car out front of
my store.

(pause)

White, thirties, not quite six
feet.

Tom looks at himself.

TOM

What're you describing me for?

CLERK

Yeah! I'll keep him here until you
get here.

(to Tom)

What's your name?

TOM

Tom? McAlester?

CLERK

Tom McAlester! Hurry!

The clerk hangs up and produces a blunderbuss from behind the
counter and aims it at Tom.

TOM

Whoa! What's that for?

CLERK

The cops are coming for you. Don't
move!

Tom points at himself, incredulously.

CLERK (CONT'D)

You left three babies in your car,
like they was laundry or something!
How could you?

TOM

If you hadn't taken so long, with
Mr. Menthols—

CLERK

(interrupting)

You should have brought them in!

TOM

They were sleeping. I didn't want
to disturb them again. You have no
idea the day I've had.

CLERK

You should have honked your horn,
like everyone else does. I would
have brought you whatever you
wanted.

Tom stops and GAWKS INCREDULOUSLY AT THE CLERK holding the
shotgun. He then WINCES and grabs his temples.

CLERK (CONT'D)

DON'T MOVE!

Police cars arrive outside, lights flashing, sirens wailing.
The clerk maneuvers from behind the counter, with the
shotgun, and points Tom outside.

EXT. CONVENIENCE STORE

Tom walks out with his hands up. There are three police cars
in the parking lot. Three POLICE OFFICERS hurry up to Tom.

POLICE OFFICER 1

This the guy?

CLERK

Yeah, that's him.

TOM

Officers. My car was— Wait a
second.

Two police officers handcuff Tom roughly.

POLICE OFFICER 2

Did you leave three babies in your
car while you went inside?

TOM

It was only a second. I've got
this splitting headache— Ouch!

They cinch the handcuffs.

TOM (CONT'D)

You don't understand. Someone—

POLICE OFFICER 1

(interrupting)

Who leaves three kids in their
car?!?

INT. CAR

The THIEF who stole Tom's car is driving with a bag of bank money in his lap. He HEARS one of the BABIES and jumps.

He looks at the passenger seat and then the backseat and realizes for the first time, as he races away from the scene of the crime, that there are THREE BABIES in the car he's stolen. Jennifer looks at him from her car seat.

THIEF

Who leaves three kids in their car?!?

EXT. CONVENIENCE STORE

The police officers lean Tom against one of the police cars. The third police officer points at the clerk's blunderbuss.

POLICE OFFICER 3

You can put that away now, sir.

The clerk nods and lowers the weapon.

TOM

Is anyone looking for my car—

POLICE OFFICER 1

(interrupting)

Quiet, you! You've done enough.

The second police officer checks his walkie-talkie.

POLICE OFFICER 2

Dispatch? Two Baker two. Any sign of blue sedan belonging to McAlester, Tom?

DISPATCHER (O.S.)

Negative, two baker two. All units are looking. Standby.

POLICE OFFICER 2

Ten four.

TOM

Wait! You don't understand!

POLICE OFFICER 1

I said, quiet!

Police officer 1 opens the rear door of their patrol car. They hear some tires squeal as Tom's car turns into the convenience store parking lot and screeches to a halt.

TOM
That's my car!

POLICE OFFICER 2
Dispatch? Two Baker two. We seem to have the car at our location! Standby!

DISPATCHER (O.S.)
Ten four, two Baker two.

The police officers put their hands on their guns, but don't draw yet. The thief carefully places the parking brake and turns off the engine. He gets out with his hands up in the air.

THIEF
I drove here as soon as I realized the car has three babies in it! They're fine! They're okay!

The police officers move over to him and open the doors to check on the babies who are crying. They look at the thief and at Tom.

POLICE OFFICER 1
Good work!

THIEF
Who leaves three kids in their car?!?

All three police officers smirk and point at Tom. The thief shakes his head and snatches the loot from the car. He looks at the cops and they look at him. The officers check with each other.

POLICE OFFICER 2
Given the circumstances, maybe you should find another car.

The thief looks at Tom with contempt.

THIEF
Sicko!

He runs out to the street with the loot.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

BAILIFF

All rise!

The JUDGE walks in and up to her bench. Tom is now in an orange jumpsuit at the defendant's table with his DEFENSE ATTORNEY, who seems none too happy to represent him.

JUDGE

Be seated.

Everyone sits down. The PROSECUTING ATTORNEY remains standing and steps up to a lectern.

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

Good morning, your honor. The state asks to move forward with sentencing given the defendant's guilty plea.

Tom looks at his attorney who's looking at his notes.

TOM

(whispering)

Guilty plea?

His attorney nods at him and returns to his notes.

TOM (CONT'D)

What kind of sentencing?

His attorney looks at him as if he should know.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Sterilization, of course!

He sheepishly smiles at him and returns to his notes. Tom stands up.

TOM

Your Honor? NOT GUILTY! I'm changing my plea to not guilty!

The court murmurs and complains. The judge hammers her gavel.

JUDGE

Mr. McAlester, you've already pleaded guilty to the charges!

TOM

That's a mistake, Judge.

The judge frowns and looks at the attorneys. The prosecuting attorney is caught off guard.

JUDGE

How soon could the state present
its case?

The prosecuting attorney confers with their SECOND CHAIR and then looks at the judge.

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

Right now, your Honor.

JUDGE

Let's do it!

THEN: The first witness is Mr. Cruz who is on the stand. Tom has SLOUCHED in his chair.

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

How many people redo Toddler
Training?

MR. CRUZ

Less than one percent!

The courtroom laughs as the judge gavels them to order.

THEN: Mike is on the stand.

MIKE

Well... He was acting like he'd
never heard of any of this stuff.

THEN: Peter is on the stand.

PETER

He was acting kind of...crazy.

Peter looks at Tom who is astonished by his testimony.

PETER (CONT'D)

Sorry buddy, but, it's true.

THEN: Roxanne is on the stand.

ROXANNE

He didn't seem to know about it.
It's my long-term assignment.

Tom is SLOUCHED down, even more, in his chair.

THEN: Leonard is on the stand.

LEONARD

He thought, for some reason because
I'm gay, that I wouldn't need a
parenting license!

The courtroom laughs. The judge hammers her gavel.

JUDGE

Order!

Tom SLOUCHES even more.

THEN: Mrs. Dipwhipple is on the stand and Tom's defense attorney is questioning her.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

How did he perform his duties?

MRS. DIPWHIPPLE

He was wonderful. Even the kids
learned to like him, after only two
days.

Tom rises in his seat, a little.

THEN: Mr. Dipwhipple is on the stand now.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

So you were impressed by how he
baby-sat your kids?

MR. DIPWHIPPLE

Yes, very much so. He did a
wonderful job.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

But, didn't he actually do more
than help them with their homework?

The courtroom hushes.

MR. DIPWHIPPLE

Yes. He actually did their
homework for them.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

No more questions.

MR. DIPWHIPPLE

That was the first day...

JUDGE

You're dismissed, Mr. Dipwhipple.
Thank you.

Mr. Dipwhipple steps down from the stand as Tom's defense attorney returns to their table. Tom is incensed.

TOM

(whispering)
You're supposed to defend me, not
help them!

The defense attorney looks at him and stops.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Oh, yeah! My bad....

THEN: Ms. Torvaldsen is on the stand.

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

What else did you notice?

Tom is LOWER still in his chair.

MS. TORVALDSEN

He had turned off his Baby-Think-It-Over, thinking we wouldn't notice.

Tom grimaces.

THEN: Baby-Think-It-Over is on the stand. The prosecuting attorney paces in front of the witness stand, more dramatically.

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

How would you say Mr. McAlester
took care of you?

Tom is BARELY LOOKING OVER THE DEFENSE TABLE and his eyes widen in terror. The prosecuting attorney waits, along with the rest of the court, for Baby-Think-It-Over's answer.

Baby-Think-It-Over starts crying very loudly. The prosecuting attorney dramatically and triumphantly turns around.

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY (CONT'D)

No more questions!

TOM

This is a nightmare!

THEN: Tom is the LOWEST HE'S BEEN IN HIS CHAIR and he suddenly sits up, gaping at the witness stand. He grabs his attorney's arm.

TOM (CONT'D)
(hissing)
This is beyond a nightmare! Do something!

The attorney looks at him, empty-handed.

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY (O.S.)
Can you please, for the court, tell us how Mr. McAlester,...

Tom turns to look at the prosecuting attorney.

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY (CONT'D)
...the accused, cared for you?

Tom looks at the witness stand. The bag of flour, with the scorches and duct tape and rips, leaking flour on the witness stand, is propped up on the witness chair.

After a moment, the prosecuting attorney looks at the judge and then turns and looks at Tom.

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY (CONT'D)
No more questions.

THEN: Jennifer, Marcus and Sylvia, the three recovered babies, are all sitting in the witness stand. The prosecuting attorney paces around imperiously.

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY (CONT'D)
Marcus. Tell us how Mr. McAlester cared for you?

Marcus gurgles and chews on his fist.

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY (CONT'D)
Ms. Sylvia? How did the accused take care of you?

Sylvia starts to cry. He frightens the babies.

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY (CONT'D)
Ms. Jennifer, how did the accused, Mr. McAlester, care for you when he was baby-sitting all three of you?

Jennifer starts crying in earnest. Marcus joins in.

THEN: Tom is now on the stand. The prosecuting attorney takes his time to grill Tom. Tom looks around at the hostile courtroom. The babies are still crying in their moms' laps.

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY (CONT'D)

Your Honor, permission to treat the defendant as hostile?

TOM

Hostile? No, wait—

JUDGE

(interrupting)

Granted.

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

Answer the question, Mr. McAlester! Who leaves three kids in their car?!?

TOM

It was only a second. I've got this splitting headache—

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

(interrupting)

Or did you just neglect them because they are BLACK babies!?!?

Tom looks at the three moms, holding the babies as the whole courtroom gasps in horror.

TOM

NO! That had nothing to do with it!

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

Then why did you leave them in your car to be stolen by a common bank robber?

The prosecuting attorney turns dramatically and points out the thief who waves and half stands up, as if he were a guest at a talk show. Some of the jurors actually smile at him.

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY (CONT'D)

Isn't it true that you just think of kids as nuisances, nightmares?

TOM

Not anymore.

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

Isn't it true that you see children
only as a form of validation
because you secretly lack your own
complete sense of self?

TOM

What...?

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

Isn't it true—

TOM

(interrupting)

W...wait! This is ridiculous!

He stands up and looks around the courtroom, at the bag of flour, the prosecuting attorney, his lame attorney, the scowling jury, the gallery, the judge and the three crying babies.

JUDGE

Order!

He looks at the judge, pleading.

TOM

No! Your honor? This is
ridiculous! This isn't a trial,
it's a nightmare! I mean,
seriously, a bag of flour? Baby-
Think-It-Over?

The judge scowls at him but indulges his outburst, gavel at the ready.

TOM (CONT'D)

You're trying me with their
testimony? They, they,...they
can't speak?! Baby-Think-It-Over
is just a doll, a mechanical toy,
with fake eyes and plastic arms
and legs! The bag of flour!?
That's the height of insanity!
It's just a... bag of flour, your
Honor!? It doesn't even have fake
eyes and ears and... Real babies,
real children, at least have real
eyes and ears and mouths and real
arms and legs. AND MINDS! They're
real! The only difference is that
they can't fend for themselves, and
they can't speak for themselves.

(MORE)

TOM (CONT'D)

If they want or need something they have to rely on me, and us. Until they can get bigger and express themselves they're stuck, stranded.... IT'S MY DUTY TO HELP THEM GET TO THAT POINT!—

Tom stops abruptly. He stares at the Judge. He looks around the whole courtroom.

TOM (CONT'D)

Oh my God!

Tom sits down. The prosecuting attorney focuses on him.

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

Isn't it in fact true that you haven't the faintest clue what it takes to be a parent, that you're not fit to be a parent?

The prosecuting attorney leans into him, waiting.

TOM

....yes...

Tom looks at his attorney who signs that Tom is going down. The prosecuting attorney returns to his table.

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

The state rests, your Honor.

He jumps up SCREAMING and looking to the heavens for salvation.

TOM

NOOOO!!!!!!

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - MORNING

Tom wakes up from a nightmare, in his bed, in his house. He finally catches his breath and looks around. There's girl's stuff in the bedroom. He shakes his head.

TOM

Brooke?

He gets up and searches the house.

INT. HOUSE

Tom apprehensively moves about the house in his boxer shorts. He finds the bathroom door closed but hears someone inside.

He approaches it carefully, frightened. He knocks on the door softly.

TOM
Brooke?

BROOKE (O.S.)
Was that you screaming? I thought
it was the TV...

He sighs, but looks around for more trouble.

TOM
Did you escape? Are you free?

The door opens.

TOM (CONT'D)
Are you on the lam?

She's holding a pregnancy test in one hand. Tom is frantic. He holds up his hands.

TOM (CONT'D)
It's gone!

Tom notices his wrists. He has no bracelet on either of them. He grabs his wrists and searches, despite his eyesight, for the bracelet.

BROOKE
What is?

TOM
But, yesterday. The jail?!

BROOKE
I was really pissed off at you,
leaving me at the picnic without
saying anything.

He looks at her.

BROOKE (CONT'D)
But I figure we've both been under
some...stress.

She wags the pregnancy test.

BROOKE (CONT'D)
Wasted a perfectly good pregnancy
test. I got my period.

He looks at her and comes to a new conclusion...

TOM

Oh my god. It was a nightmare.

He hugs her.

TOM (CONT'D)

Oh, God, thank God.

She shrugs.

TOM (CONT'D)

I've been thinking.

BROOKE

Me too.

TOM

I've got a lot to learn, but I think what I want to say is that I'd like it. I'd really like it. This whole week—

This is not what she thought he would say and she attempts to say something but he continues.

TOM (CONT'D)

I mean, last night, whatever, I've learned a lot. I never thought about what kids really are. I realize now that they're...little people, with individual personalities and minds and ideas. They're just small versions of who they'll grow up to be.

She tries to interject.

TOM (CONT'D)

They're not status symbols or claims on the future or heirs to the family traditions or replicas of their parents. They're people. I want to be a father, but the most important thing I learned last night is—

BROOKE

(interrupting)

I'm not ready.

He gapes at her.

BROOKE (CONT'D)

I've been thinking these last two weeks and I've realized that I'm not ready to have kids. I'm not ready to be a parent. I haven't the vaguest clue what that means. But I want to find out and be a good one.

He smiles at her.

TOM

Exactly.

BROOKE

Really?

TOM

I'm definitely not ready!

She thinks and looks at him and nods.

BROOKE

Okay. Great. We're not ready.

TOM

Yeah! We can be "not ready" together.

BROOKE

So what should we do?

He smiles and shrugs with an idea in mind...

INT. CHILDCARE CENTER - DAY

Tom and Brooke are volunteering, helping care for thirty preschoolers, at a local childcare center. Each one has several kids climbing on top of them.

It's sheer mayhem, but they both look up and see each other, for a moment, amidst the little arms and heads and legs, and smile at each other.

FADE OUT:

THE END