

BOARDWALK WINTER

Written by

D. Jonathan Fox

djonathanfox@gmail.com  
540-958-8767

EXT. BOARDWALK - DAY

The sun shines in the cloudless sky, glittering on the ocean.

The beach is nearly empty, with only a few dog walkers and hopeful souls with metal detectors scanning the sand.

The wide cement walkway along the beach is sparsely populated by joggers and cyclists, bundled in coats, gloves and hats.

Large hotels tower over the boardwalk, with shops and restaurants occupying storefronts on the first floor.

EXT. THE OCEAN'S 24 HOTEL - CONTINUOUS

The Ocean's 24 Hotel is a small, two-story building that seems miniaturized by the tall hotels on either side.

An ice cream shop protrudes from the first floor, with a large sign that reads: "TASTY SWIRLZ." A smaller sign hanging in a serving window reads: "CLOSED."

INT. FERN'S BEDROOM - DAY

FERN (28) a beautiful, very thin woman sits at a mirror, carefully painting on cat-eye style eyeliner with precision.

She sits alone in her robe in a plainly furnished hotel room.

She completes her eye makeup, smiles into the mirror with great satisfaction, stands up and unties her robe.

EXT. FERN'S BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

Fern exits her second floor room onto the balcony above the ice cream shop in a sleeveless sundress, holding a laptop.

She looks out at the ocean, takes in a slow breath of air, then sits in a plastic chair and opens her computer.

She watches an ELDERLY COUPLE walking their dog, and a SURFER (30s) in a black wetsuit catching waves in the distance.

She becomes entranced as she watches the surfer paddle over incoming waves, then is snapped out of it by a cold breeze.

She rubs her arms, shivers and springs to her feet with a disappointed glare and looks into the sky.

FERN  
You lied to me, Sun.

Fern sets her laptop down and goes back inside.

TIFFANY (28), in jeans, jacket and winter hat, enters the balcony from the stairs and knocks on Fern's door.

Fern opens the door, now wearing a hoodie over her sundress.

TIFFANY  
(excitedly)  
Your new dress!

Fern fakes a small smile and sits down in the plastic chair.

FERN  
Half of it, anyway.

Tiffany sits in a chair next to Fern and studies her face.

TIFFANY  
I love your eyeliner that way.

Fern looks out at the ocean with a saddened stare and watches the surfer wipe out. Tiffany's smile fades as she turns away.

Fern's eyes follow a group of fit, MIDDLE-AGED WOMEN in spandex running along the boardwalk in a tight group.

She watches another group of OVERWEIGHT MEN in sweatsuits approach the women, running in the opposite direction.

As the two groups meet, the women cheer on the men and they slap each other high-fives. Fern's smile returns.

FERN  
Good for them.

TIFFANY  
So, Guinevere, how is your new winter hangout?

FERN  
It's Fern now.

TIFFANY  
Ok, Fern it is.

FERN  
Working from home is certainly better when home is on the beach, but it hasn't made my spreadsheets any more enlightening.

TIFFANY

I don't know how you stare at those without your brain disintegrating.

FERN

That does concern me on occasion.

TIFFANY

Sometimes if I stare too long into one of my client's bald spots, my mind enters a very twisted Wonderland. And I like cutting hair, even comb-overs.

FERN

When I die, I want you to bury me in the creepiest graveyard you can find.

TIFFANY

Fern is much darker than Guinevere.

FERN

Next to an old tree with a gaping hole where throngs of bats live.

TIFFANY

You know I'm here to support you now, too, not just when...

FERN

I want the gravedigger to leave a mound of dirt over me with no grass and put the gravestone in crooked. And the stone should already have a crack spidering from the corner.

TIFFANY

That's very vivid.

FERN

I want everyone who visits to be terrified that my hands are going to reach out of the dirt at any moment and grab their ankles.

The two women sit in silence for a moment.

FERN (CONT'D)

Are you taking notes?

TIFFANY

Yeah. Even when you're dead, you want to be able to grab ankles.

The surfer rides a small wave to shore on his stomach, casually rolls off his board and walks onto the beach.

FERN

Exactly.

The surfer, a handsome, fit, tall man in his thirties looks up at the women and smiles.

Tiffany smiles back flirtatiously and waves. He returns her gesture with a quick one-fingered salute and walks away.

TIFFANY

Aw, our entertainment's gone.

FERN

I rented out my half-bath.

TIFFANY

You what?

FERN

To a professional gamer. You want to meet him?

TIFFANY

Immediately.

INT. FERN'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

The living room is fitted with cheap paintings and furniture.

The suite opens into the kitchen and small dining area.

The only personal item is a journal on the table.

Fern walks to the hallway and Tiffany picks up the journal.

TIFFANY

You're journaling?

Fern spins around and pauses before responding.

FERN

I think an only child of deceased parents ought to leave some sort of record of her existence behind.

Tiffany shrugs and sets the journal back down.

FERN (CONT'D)

Come on.

INT. FERN'S HALF-BATH - DAY

Tiffany leans on the doorframe with curiosity as Fern pushes the door inward.

The bathroom is dimly lit by a TV mounted on the wall. Energy drinks and snacks cover every surface.

The GAMER (20s), a disheveled man with long scraggly hair and beard, dressed in a hoodie and sweatpants sits on the toilet.

He is wearing headphones with an attached microphone and holding a video game controller while completely focused on the screen. He does not acknowledge the women at the door.

TIFFANY

Is he taking a...umm...while playing a...?

FERN

No. His pants are up. I'll introduce you.  
(shouts)  
Hello!

The gamer takes one side of his headphones off of one ear, but doesn't stop playing his game. He speaks in monotone.

GAMER

Howdy, Fern.

Tiffany cracks a large grin and mouths "Howdy?" to Fern.

FERN

This is my best friend Tiffany.

GAMER

Howdy, Tiffany.

TIFFANY

And you are?

GAMER

The Spec-Ops-Tea-Bagger.

TIFFANY

What?

FERN

After he kills one of his little opponents, he likes to make his character squat on top of the enemy's carcass over and over. I've seen him do it. He's talented.

GAMER

The best.

TIFFANY

A bit juvenile, but OK.

GAMER

It's a statement. It says: "Not only can I kill you, but I have time to humiliate you, too."

TIFFANY

Dark. What's your actual name?

GAMER

Skip.

TIFFANY

(giggles)

Skip? That's a puppy's name.

FERN

Rude, Tiff.

TIFFANY

Sorry, but your murdering and humping isn't very puppy-like.

SKIP

Not puppy-like at all.

TIFFANY

So why play games in a bathroom?

SKIP

Solitude and dedication.

FERN

He has all his food delivered and literally never leaves.

TIFFANY

This is what you live for, Skip? Virtual tea-bagging day and night?

SKIP

A professional gamer's career peaks at a young age and steeply declines as reflexes fail. I could wake up as an old man without notice.

TIFFANY

An old man named Skip. That will be a sad day, indeed.

FERN

We better go. I promised him I would only say 'hi' once per day and we said way more than 'hi.'

EXT. FERN'S BALCONY - DAY

Fern and Tiffany walk out onto the balcony to see MRS. KELLOGG (70s) standing by the door of her neighboring room, speaking with ERIC (28) a handsome man in a polo and khakis.

ERIC

I am not a salesman. I mean, I am...but I'm not here soliciting. I'm here to see-

MRS. KELLOGG

Not Fern. I won't allow it.

Eric turns to Fern in confusion.

ERIC

Fern?

FERN

Eric is Tiffany's boyfriend, Mrs. Kellogg.

MRS. KELLOGG

Well that's fine, then.

ERIC AND TIFFANY

Hey!

Fern stifles a giggle.

MRS. KELLOGG

(to Fern)

He gives me corporate pimp vibes. You need someone more wholesome.

FERN

I'll be sure to set my sights higher than corporate pimp.

Mrs. Kellogg walks toward the stairs with a bit of a hunch.

MRS. KELLOGG

Good. I've got to smother my hunger pangs with some pancakes that are smothered in chocolate. Any of you are welcome to join me across the street...even the shill.



ERIC  
(offended)

I-

Fern covers Eric's mouth with one hand and grabs the back of his neck with the other, pulling him in close.

FERN  
I'd love to, Mrs. Kellogg, but I've got a doctor's appointment soon.

MRS. KELLOGG  
That's the next best thing to cheap breakfast.

Fern releases Eric after Mrs. Kellogg disappears downstairs.

ERIC  
Shill?! Lady! You're a b--

Fern punches Eric in the stomach and he drops to his knees.

ERIC (CONT'D)  
Ooo! Too hard.

TIFFANY  
Fern's a little more defensive than Guinevere was.  
(to Fern)  
You ready to go?

FERN  
I'd like to go alone this time.  
I'll update you if the doctor has anything new to say.

TIFFANY  
You sure? What if he...?

FERN  
He hasn't said anything since the diagnosis. It's been nothing but test after test. I'll be fine.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Fern sits alone in a small examining room looking contemplatively at a poster on the wall with a cartoon cat scaling a cliff wearing mountain climbing gear that reads:

"NO NEED TO HANG ON FOR DEAR LIFE WHEN YOU HAVE A GOOD ROPE."

DR. SCHWAZER (40s) a short, thin man with glasses and a dark tan enters in a lab coat, carrying a computer tablet.

He maintains a straight face and professional demeanor, but is extremely nervous and socially awkward.

FERN

Hey, Dr. Swaaaayze. What's the verdict?

The doctor sits near Fern and clears his throat.

DR. SCHWAZER

It's Schwazer, not...actually, Swayze's fine.

FERN

I'm just a big 'Point Break' fan.

DR. SCHWAZER

Not 'Dirty Dancing?'

FERN

Nah. I need surf, sand, sun and some Keanu with my Swayze. Yum.

Dr. Schwazer flusters up and clears his throat again.

FERN (CONT'D)

Looks like you get a bit of sun.

DR. SCHWAZER

(perks up)

Yes. I believe the sun unlocks incredible healing powers in us.

(professionalism returns)

I mean, it has the potential to contribute to our better health.

FERN

Well, you look great. Your tan really makes your lab-coat pop.

DR. SCHWAZER

(relaxes and chuckles)

Yes, well...I, um. Thank you.

The doctor types away at his tablet, nervousness returning.

DR. SCHWAZER (CONT'D)

So, we...umm, we got your tests back, and...there is no need for...for further tests, umm, at this time.

(MORE)

DR. SCHWAZER (CONT'D)

The, uh...diagnosis is still accurate, and we now have a...umm...a prognosis, sort of.

FERN

(playfully)

'A prognosis, sort of.' Oh. You've been hard at work there, doc.

DR. SCHWAZER

I'm sorry...I'm just not good-

FERN

(sympathetically)

It's ok, Dr. Schwazer. You can just hit me with it. I know you're just the messenger and...I know the tests aren't going to show that I'm cured, so you can just be straight with me. I can handle it.

Dr. Schwazer looks Fern in the eye with a sad stare.

DR. SCHWAZER

You're right. You're not cured. And unfortunately, healing isn't possible at this point, only limited treatment to prolong life.

Fern looks back into the doctor's eyes as tears well in hers.

FERN

Sheesh, doc. Couldn't you have at least put on a red clown nose and do some Patch Adams bit to break the news a little easier?

DR. SCHWAZER

I told you I'm not good at this, but we do offer very good consultation here and you can-

Fern wipes her eyes dry and smiles as she interrupts him.

FERN

I'm just teasing, doc. You did great. You have a tough job. So...umm, how long do I have?

DR. SCHWAZER

It's impossible to know for sure. In cases like yours it could be years, or it could be months. We just never know for sure.

FERN

But I should prepare for the worst.

DR. SCHWAZER

I know it's a cliché, but it's really true. A patient's outlook, attitude and fight determine a lot.

Fern fights to keep a grin and hold back tears.

FERN

I guess it's too late to just get more sun, huh?

DR. SCHWAZER

When we talk about an 'outlook' ...it's important not to lose perspective. Keep setting goals for yourself. Long-term goals, as if I never delivered this news today.

Fern's smile fades as she fixes her eyes on the cat poster:

"NO NEED TO HANG ON FOR DEAR LIFE WHEN YOU HAVE A GOOD ROPE."

EXT. FERN'S BALCONY - DAY

Fern and Tiffany lean on the metal rails at the edge of the balcony, watching the ocean as the sun begins to set.

TIFFANY

(disgusted)

So, the doctor basically said it's up to you how much longer you have?

FERN

I guess modern medicine has yet to reach the capability of willpower.

TIFFANY

He should give you better advice.

FERN

He seemed pretty wise. And adorably nervous. With an oddly perfect tan.

TIFFANY

Are you going to marry the guy or get his medical help?

FERN

He said to set long-term goals.

TIFFANY  
But he doesn't know how-

FERN  
I'm going to do it.

Fern dials on her cellphone.

TIFFANY  
Who are you calling?

FERN  
My boss. Shush.  
(on the phone)  
You got a minute?

Fern listens.

FERN (CONT'D)  
Good, cuz I don't have many left.  
Literally. I'm dying.

Fern listens, then exaggerates being offended.

FERN (CONT'D)  
It's not a joke! Death is no joke.

Fern listens, then calms down, giving a conciliatory reply.

FERN (CONT'D)  
I guess that's true. I have joked  
about death before.

Fern listens, then acts slightly surprised.

FERN (CONT'D)  
Really? Often? Well, I'm deeply  
sorry for being the girl who cried  
wolf, but this time it's for real,  
and now we need to talk.

Fern listens.

FERN (CONT'D)  
Good. I know when you gave me your  
annual review that you told me I  
needed experience and leadership  
skills before I would be ready for  
a promotion, but I disagree.

Fern listens, then clearly interrupts her boss.

FERN (CONT'D)

No, I'm being assertive, which I believe is an ideal quality in a leader. And I need the promotion now...because I'm dying.

Fern listens, then is truly offended.

FERN (CONT'D)

What do you mean this isn't the 'Make a Wish Foundation?!' You're being inappropriate.

Fern listens a bit longer and remains annoyed.

FERN (CONT'D)

Alright. If that's the way you feel, then I quit.

Fern listens and then holds the phone in front of her.

FERN (CONT'D)

No! No two weeks notice! I'm dying!

Fern hangs up and Tiffany stares at her in disbelief.

FERN (CONT'D)

There goes that long-term goal.

TIFFANY

That was more of a kamikaze demand.

Fern sees a four-wheel-four-seat bike cruising along the bike path with a family pedaling together and she perks up.

FERN

We have to do one of those car-bike thingies! I've wanted to do that since I was a kid. Come on.

Fern takes off down the stairs in a hurry and Tiffany reluctantly follows, rolling her eyes.

TIFFANY

Ok, Fern, dear.

EXT. BOARDWALK - BIKE PATH - DAY

Fern and Tiffany pedal a car-bike thingy together in the front seat, sweating profusely as they struggle.

FERN

This is way harder than I expected.

TIFFANY

I hate you right now.

FERN

I hate me right now, too.

Fern collapses at the wheel in exhaustion, breathing heavily and looking sadly up at Tiffany, who puts a hand on her back.

TIFFANY

I don't think the doctor meant for you to be wildly impulsive.

FERN

I know, but it's kinda fun.

Fern giggles uncontrollably, then chokes up and fights to hold in her tears with the top of her sweatshirt.

TIFFANY

You quit your job, hun.

Tiffany rubs Ferns back and then pulls her closer.

FERN

I don't care about that. I just don't know where to go from here.

TIFFANY

Me neither, but you need a better bucket list than ride a car-bike thingy and tell off your boss.

FERN

You're right. And I barely even told him off.

Fern snuffles and wipes the remaining moisture from her eyes, and Tiffany squeezes her in a one-arm hug.

TIFFANY

You totally should have yelled more. And called him something worse than 'inappropriate.'

A CYCLIST (40s) in spandex whizzes by, yelling angrily.

CYCLIST

Pull over for serious bikers!

Tiffany jumps out of the car-bike and screams back.

TIFFANY  
Serious?! You want serious?! My  
friend is dying and having a  
moment! How dare you?!

Tiffany gets back in the car-bike and starts pedaling.

TIFFANY (CONT'D)  
Come on. Let's catch that turd.

The friends pedal hard and travel about twenty feet, then  
collapse in exhaustion again.

TIFFANY (CONT'D)  
Forget it. He's not worth it.

Tiffany and Fern look at each other with tired but wide eyes.

TIFFANY (CONT'D)  
We can just leave this here, right?

FERN  
Absolutely.

The two abandon the car-bike and walk down the path.

Tiffany puts her arm around Fern and she reciprocates.

FERN (CONT'D)  
Maybe don't yell out to the whole  
world that I'm dying, though.

TIFFANY  
Sorry. It slipped out.

EXT. BOARDWALK - OCEAN'S 24 HOTEL - DAY

Fern and Tiffany slowly walk along the boardwalk in front of  
the Ocean's 24 Hotel as the sun is close to setting.

Tiffany walks toward the hotel, but Fern stops.

FERN  
I'm not ready to go inside, yet.

TIFFANY  
Ok, but I gotta pee. Don't wander  
off with a stranger. Unless he's  
super hot, then just text me.

FERN  
Sure. And don't say hi to Skip.  
Unless you think he's super hot.



TIFFANY

Ha!

Tiffany disappears up the stairs and Fern turns to the beach.

She sees the same surfer from that morning standing on the beach unstrapping the surfboard leash from his ankle.

Fern smiles, slips off her shoes and walks onto the sand.

EXT. BEACH - CONTINUOUS

The surfer is preoccupied as Fern approaches him.

FERN

What are you, some sort of addict?

He looks up at her quizzically.

SURFER

Excuse me?

FERN

You were out here this morning.

SURFER

(jokingly)

What are you, some sort of stalker?

FERN

Yes.

SURFER

I've always said that the best stalkers come in sundresses.

FERN

A solid observation.

The surfer peels off his wet gloves and squeezes them out.

SURFER

So what's up, Sundress?

FERN

You didn't answer my question.

SURFER

I'm an addict when the surf's up and low tide hits twice during daylight.

FERN  
Three times if the moon is full?

SURFER  
That's more of a fishing thing.

FERN  
Yes, please take me seriously. I can see you know your stuff. Can you teach me?

SURFER  
To fish?

FERN  
Gross. No. To surf.

SURFER  
Surfing takes a lifetime to learn.

FERN  
I've got to spend it on something.

SURFER  
Alright. Let's do it.

The surfer steps back and points to his board in the sand.

SURFER (CONT'D)  
Lay down on your stomach like you're about to do a push-up.

FERN  
I should change into something-

SURFER  
If you can pop up in a sundress, then you'll have no problem out there.

FERN  
Really?

SURFER  
No. It's extremely difficult.

Fern hesitates and looks around to see no one watching, then slowly lays down on the board. The surfer squats next to her.

SURFER (CONT'D)  
The first thing you do is a girl push-up.

FERN

Rude.

SURFER

Ok, let me see your best push-up.

Fern struggles and pushes her upper body up with her back in an arch with her knees still down on the board.

SURFER (CONT'D)

Perfect form. Hold that position.

FERN

I admit I don't exercise much.

SURFER

Now kick your left foot underneath your chest and-

EXT. BOARDWALK - OCEAN 24 HOTEL - SAME

Tiffany walks onto the path and throws her hands up in the air as she looks for Fern.

She notices Fern's shoes by the sand and then sees her popping up on the surfboard. She smiles and approaches.

EXT. BEACH - SAME

Fern pops up onto the board but struggles to stay balanced.

SURFER

You're stiffer than the board. Bend your knees and-

TIFFANY

So you're a surfer now, Fern?

Fern is startled and trips backward off the board. The surfer reaches out and helps her keep her feet.

FERN

Nope. I have no knack for this.

SURFER

Not true. Your girly push-up was perfect.

The surfer stands Fern back up and she walks to Tiffany.

FERN

Thanks. I'm sure I'll see you out here again, unless you enter surfer's rehab.

The women walk away as the surfer smiles.

SURFER

Goodnight, Sundress.

EXT. BOARDWALK - OCEAN 24 HOTEL - NIGHT

Fern and Tiffany slip into their shoes and walk to the hotel.

TIFFANY

He was certainly a hot enough stranger. I just wanted to see him up close, not steal you away.

FERN

That's ok. We have to break into the ice cream shop, anyway.

Tiffany, mouth agape, watches Fern charge the ice cream shop.

TIFFANY

We need to get impulsive Fern to bed, not sugared up.

FERN

This isn't impulsive. I've wanted to try this ice cream since I moved in, but it's closed for the winter.

ICE CREAM SHOP STOREFRONT

Fern peaks in a window and tries to open it, unsuccessfully.

FERN (CONT'D)

Help me find a window that'll open.

TIFFANY

You could get evicted for this.

FERN

Then help before we get caught.

Tiffany sighs, looks over her shoulder, then pulls on a window, forcing it open a crack.

TIFFANY

This one is a little broken, but...

Tiffany slips her hand through the crack and pops the lock.

TIFFANY (CONT'D)

There we go. Let's hurry through.

FERN

Well done.

Tiffany slides the window open and Fern immediately pulls her head and shoulders through.

INT. ICE CREAM SHOP - NIGHT

Fern climbs down from the window, looks around the shop in awe, then turns around to help Tiffany through.

TIFFANY

I'm only doing this because you're dying, you know.

Fern eyes a soft serve machine and toys with the levers.

FERN

I appreciate your assistance in my dying wishes.

Tiffany leans over the showcase cooler where tubs of solid ice cream should be and looks through the glass.

TIFFANY

I'm sure the soft serve is disconnected and winterized.

FERN

Maybe there's a freezer in the back where they store everything.

TIFFANY

Fern, any ice cream left here over the winter would expire.

Fern stops in her tracks but doesn't turn around.

TIFFANY (CONT'D)

We can still have some crazy fun, but we need a better plan.

Fern turns around with disappointment in her eyes.

FERN

I hate planning! It's miserable. And I don't have some silly bucket list to work from. I have nothing!

Tiffany rushes over to hug Fern as she burst into tears.

TIFFANY

No worries, ok. I'll make a plan  
for tomorrow and we'll live it up.

INT. FERN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Fern sits up in her bed writing in her journal.

FERN (V.O.)

It's official. I'm on my way out.  
And apparently I get to choose how  
long I stay. I suppose that's  
always sort of our own choice, but  
now I kinda feel like I do when I'm  
checking my email at work and I get  
a meeting invite. I'm ready to  
accept it, but I should probably  
wait a little bit so no one thinks  
I'm anxious.

She looks up, chews on her pen, then continues writing.

FERN (V.O.)

I just gotta find something else  
worth being anxious over.

EXT. INDOOR SKYDIVING PLACE - DAY

Fern, Tiffany and Eric stand on a city sidewalk in front of a  
modern-style building with a round, glass façade, staring up  
at the sign above the door that reads: "INDOOR SKYDIVING."

FERN

This is a pretty half-assed bucket  
list adventure, Tiffany.

TIFFANY

What do you mean? It'll be fun!

FERN

But we don't even get a plane ride.

ERIC

They say you get the same feeling,  
but without, you know, the sheer  
terror of staring out the open door  
of an unstable prop-plane.

TIFFANY

And without the turbulence.

FERN

I want turbulence! And sheer  
terror. My journal depends on it.

TIFFANY

Just give it a try. It could be  
more rewarding than you think.

INT. INDOOR SKYDIVING PLACE - DAY

MONTAGE - FERN, TIFFANY, AND ERIC SKYDIVING IN A TUBE

-- Fern screams as her face distorts in the high-pressure  
winds that keep her floating in mid-air.

-- Fern floats up and down in the tube, waving her arms  
around while an INSTRUCTOR holds her from the side.

-- Tiffany forces a smile to cover up her fear,

-- Tiffany flies in circles, looking around to find Fern and  
gives her a clumsy thumbs-up.

-- Eric laughs enthusiastically and wiggles around, trying to  
perform a spinning trick.

EXT. INDOOR SKYDIVING PLACE - DAY

Fern stares with disappointment at a certificate of  
completion for her skydiving experience.

FERN

(sarcastically)

This is incredibly rewarding, Tiff.

TIFFANY

We didn't do it for a trophy.

ERIC

I'm totally pinning this to my  
cubicle wall.

Fern drops the certificate on the ground and walks quickly  
down the sidewalk breathing heavily with anxiety.

She stops in front of a jungle-themed mini-golf course and  
turns around to face Tiffany and Eric.

FERN

I appreciate the effort, but indoor  
skydiving is not the answer to my  
problems.

TIFFANY

I wasn't trying to solve your...we  
just needed to have some fun.

Fern points at the jungle mini-golf course wildly with both hands and her voice borders on hysteria.

FERN

OK, then next we'll do this jungle  
golf course.

She points across the street at a pirate-themed course.

FERN (CONT'D)

And there's a pirate one, too!

She spins frantically, then points in a vague direction.

FERN (CONT'D)

I know a haunted house next to a  
body-piercing place that's next to  
an old-timey photo shop, just down  
the street. We can have a Spring  
Break-themed going-away party.

Fern crosses the street towards the oceanfront while Tiffany and Eric watch with sad stares.

FERN (CONT'D)

I'm not...I'm not mad at you!

Eric looks down at his certificate and smiles.

Tiffany shoots him a look of disgust.

EXT. BOARDWALK - OCEAN'S 24 HOTEL - DAY

Fern sits on the beach-side edge of the cement path, near the steps that lead into the sand, with her legs dangling off the side, staring into the ocean. She's in jeans and a jacket.

A wedding procession, led by a BRIDE in a short dress and a GROOM in a tan tuxedo, walks past her and onto the beach.

The BRIDESMAIDS are in flowery sundresses and white sweaters, and the GROOMSMEN have matching white Hawaiian shirts and khaki pants with the legs partially rolled up.

The last GROOMSMAN in the line walks without a bridesmaid, followed by a PASTOR in a black suit.



FERN (V.O.)

I don't know what swept me up in it  
so much, but I was in a fog.

The lone groomsman extends his hand to Fern and mouths "come on" and gestures her to follow. She looks up with doe-eyes.

FERN (V.O.)

Of course I went with him. He was  
cute and I was vulnerable.

Fern walks with her hand holding the groomsman's arm as the line forms a half-circle around the pastor, bride and groom.

Fern stares at the couple in a daze, with eyes wide.

FERN (V.O.)

I have no idea what the pastor said  
or what vows were made, but  
everything became clear to me.

The bride and groom kiss and the bridesmaids toss flower pedals into the air around them. Fern smiles with glee.

A groomsman puts a speaker on the sand and everyone dances.

FERN (V.O.)

I felt like I did as a little girl  
playing 'wedding day' with my  
friends. It was so...pure.

Fern dances with a big smile and stares into the groomsman's eyes with infatuation.

INT. FERN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Fern sits in bed, writing in her journal.

FERN (V.O.)

No. I didn't go home with the guy.  
He was from out of town and he  
didn't push it. He was a gentleman.

She looks up in a daydream, and then returns to writing.

FERN (V.O.)

But now I know what to put on my  
bucket list. Just one item.

She sets her journal on her nightstand, turns her lamp off and settles her head into her pillow with a contented smile.

FERN (V.O.)  
I want to get married.

EXT. OCEAN'S 24 HOTEL - DAY

The sun is rising on the empty boardwalk.

INT. FERN'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Fern nibbles sleepily on a strip of bacon as she walks from the living room down the hallway.

HALLWAY

Fern stops in front of the bathroom door as she hears an aluminum can fall to the floor, then pushes the door open.

BATHROOM

Skip is slumped over on the toilet seat, sleeping, but startles awake as light from the hallway hits his face.

SKIP  
Just a quick catnap! Back at it.

He lifts the controller off his lap and starts playing. His eyes struggle to adjust to the flashing lights on the screen.

FERN  
Good morning, Skip. I've been thinking about what you said about not wasting your youth and getting old and...

Fern watches Skip for a moment with sadness.

FERN (CONT'D)  
Wait, a catnap? Are you trying not to sleep?

SKIP  
There is no try, only do, so...I guess I failed there for a minute.

FERN  
That's insane, Skip. Who's even online this time of the morning for you to...battle?

SKIP  
I've got to be the best, so I can't sleep like the rest.

FERN

Maybe we need to install those electric paddle thingies in here in case your heart gives out.

SKIP

A defibrillator.

FERN

So you two know each other.

After a moment, Fern closes the door, but Skip speaks up.

SKIP

You were saying something about getting old?

FERN

Yes. I'm going to get married before it's too late.

SKIP

Congratulations. When's the date?

FERN

I have to get a fiancée first.

SKIP

That is recommended.

FERN

(jokingly)  
You busy next weekend?

SKIP

I will only marry a woman who can best me at the game of my choice.

FERN

Picky, picky, picky, Skip.

SKIP

We all need standards.

FERN

Absolutely.  
(nibbles her bacon)  
You want some bacon?

SKIP

Always.

Skip snatches the bacon from Fern's hand without looking and pops it in his mouth.

SKIP (CONT'D)

Delicious.

FERN

Stay alive, Skip.

Fern shuts the door and chuckles to herself.

EXT. FERN'S BALCONY - DAY

Fern and Tiffany lounge in deck chairs on the balcony.

TIFFANY

So how are you going to find this dream husband of yours?

FERN

I've been out of the game for a while. How do people do it now?

TIFFANY

I have been begging you to meet a man for years, Ms. "Powerful-Career-Woman-Who-Never-Needed-A-Man-To-Complete-Me."

FERN

No you haven't.

TIFFANY

Well, I gave up begging when I knew it was futile. I had no idea you just needed your life threatened.

FERN

Be nice.

TIFFANY

I'm about to be real nice and set you up with a really great guy.

FERN

If he's so great, why aren't you with him?

TIFFANY

I have Eric.

FERN

This guy isn't even better than Eric? Pass.

TIFFANY

Rude!

FERN

Yup.

TIFFANY

Fine. How do you want to meet a man?

FERN

I feel like I should go out there, aggressively and hunt. And even if I don't bring home a trophy, I'll get a good story out of it.

TIFFANY

I think you start online, girl.

FERN

Yuck. Online?

TIFFANY

You gotta start slow before you go out into the wild.

FERN

Online dating is starting slow?

TIFFANY

You need a sure thing to start with. Just point and click.

FERN

I'll try it, but we gotta move on if it's a dud.

Tiffany pulls out her smartphone with a big grin.

TIFFANY

Awesome. You can use my profile. I'll just swap my photo for yours.

FERN

You have a profile?

TIFFANY

What do you want in a man?

Fern looks at Tiffany with panic, then looks up in the air in contemplation, and after a moment she perks with inspiration.

FERN

I literally want a long walk on the beach.

TIFFANY

Only the cheesiest guys are going to put that on their profile.

FERN

Perfect.

TIFFANY

Or creeps.

FERN

At least we'll be out in public.

TIFFANY

One long walk on the beach coming up.

EXT. BOARDWALK - NIGHT

Fern is standing nervously on the sidewalk outside a restaurant under a streetlight, in a jacket and winter hat.

NICK (20s) enters the boardwalk from an alley, sees Fern, perks up with a smile, waves and approaches.

FERN

Nick?

NICK

Tiffany!

FERN

Umm, I actually go by Fern, but hello. Glad you could make it.

NICK

It's a chilly night. You want to hurry inside and get some food?

FERN

I was really hoping for that long walk on the beach.

NICK

The what?

FERN

On your profile, you said you...

NICK  
Oh, yeah. Right. Of course. Sure.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

Fern slips her shoes off, walks barefoot into the sand and Nick catches up, leaving his shoes on.

NICK  
Won't the sand freeze your feet?

FERN  
It's good to directly connect with the earth. There's a special kind of energy transfer. It's relaxing.

NICK  
Ok. Just let me know if you get too cold and we'll hit the restaurant.

FERN  
I'll be fine. This is a good way to get to know each other.

NICK  
I suppose so.

They walk in awkward silence for a moment.

FERN  
So...are you an animal person?

NICK  
Umm...sort of. You?

FERN  
I love animals, but hate pets. Does that make me sound like a monster?

NICK  
Not at all. I'm the same way.

FERN  
Really? Cuz the zoo is one of my favorite places and I love nature films, but touching animals grosses me out.

NICK  
I'm totally with you.

FERN  
Are you an outdoorsman?

NICK

Sure. I like hiking, camping, all that stuff.

FERN

I'll hike, climb, canoe, just about anything, but no camping. When it's time to sleep, I prefer the great indoors, far from mosquitos.

NICK

Ah, I agree. Sleeping without bugs is the best.

FERN

(skeptical)

But you just said...?

NICK

It's uh...getting pretty chilly.

Nick gestures toward the boardwalk.

FERN

This hasn't qualified as a long walk, yet.

Nick looks longingly at a restaurant, then nods at Fern.

NICK

You're right, totally.

EXT. BOARDWALK - NIGHT

Waiters clear dishes in empty outdoor dining areas.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

As they walk, Fern maintains a positive energy as Nick suffers along, looking at the ground.

FERN

And I'm thinking of taking up surfing. Have you ever tried?

NICK

No. But I bet it's fun.

FERN

Would you ever try?



NICK  
Maybe, I guess.

Fern stops and looks at Nick with concern.

FERN  
You could totally disagree with me.  
You could say it's dangerous and  
crazy, especially in the winter,  
and I won't hold it against you.

NICK  
Oh, no. I don't want to disagree.

FERN  
Ok. Umm...should we head back?

NICK  
What about dinner? We could go to  
any of the places right here.

FERN  
I actually think I'd rather turn in  
a bit early tonight. This, uh...  
(nervously laughs)  
...long walk kinda exhausted me.

NICK  
Wait, you're ending our date early?

FERN  
Yeah, but I had a good time, you-

NICK  
(with wild rage)  
This is what happens to nice guys  
like me! I walk and I walk and I  
walk. I listen and listen and  
listen. I'm perfectly pleasant even  
through your absolutely nonsensical  
ramblings about meaningless things.  
I bet you're going to call some  
total jerk now so he can spend the  
fun part of the night with you  
after sending me away. That's not  
going to happen. You're going to  
have dinner with the nice guy you  
started the night with!

FERN  
The fun part of the night?

Fern stares in shock, then calmly dials on her phone.

FERN (CONT'D)  
 (on the phone)  
 Oh, yeah, hi, police?

Nick's angry face turns pale with fear. He turns and runs frantically, slipping in the sand until he gets his footing on the cement path and disappears into a dark alley.

FERN (CONT'D)  
 No, Tiffany, I don't need you to call the police, but we are not doing the online thing again.

Fern looks back down the beach to see a gym in the sand a short distance away that includes pull-up bars, rope climbing, and other jungle-gym-type equipment.

Her face lights up with an idea.

FERN (CONT'D)  
 Tiff, meet me at sunrise tomorrow.

EXT. BEACH - GYM - DAY

Fern and Tiffany stand on the beach in awe as the sun rises. They are both dressed stylishly, with hair and makeup done.

Several MUSCULAR MEN climb on the beach-gym equipment.

TIFFANY  
 This is the best idea you've ever had, about anything, ever.

FERN  
 I didn't think this through.

TIFFANY  
 What's to think about? It's a meathead buffet. You could marry any of them and I would approve.

FERN  
 How do we approach them?

TIFFANY  
 They're all on testosterone highs. I imagine your pheromones will hit their radar with any approach.

FERN  
 Well...ok. Let's dive in.

TIFFANY

Yes, let's.

They stroll down the beach staring at the men as they walk.

TIFFANY (CONT'D)

We can't look like we're on the hunt. Look at me and laugh.

FERN

Like, a giggle or a burst?

TIFFANY

Choose some sort of middle-ground.

Fern lets out a fake laugh that's too much like a burst.

TIFFANY (CONT'D)

Ok, that's enough. Just pretend we didn't plan to be here.

Fern approaches a man doing pull-ups.

FERN

So...are all your muscles made on this beach?

Tiffany puts her hand over her face to hide her shame.

PULL-UP GUY

(breathing heavily)

They say all your muscle is made in the kitchen.

FERN

Then what are we doing here? Let's go get some breakfast.

The man switches to leg-ups on the pull-up bar.

PULL-UP GUY

I have a very strict routine and my breakfast is heavily supplemented-

FERN

Boring.

TIFFANY

Harsh, girl.

Fern approaches a man who just dropped down from a rope.

FERN

Training to be a caped-crusader?

ROPE-CLIMBER  
(very confused)  
What?

FERN  
Like Batman. He's big on ropes.

ROPE-CLIMBER  
Oh. I think he does more grappling  
hooks than ropes.

He gestures as if shooting a grappling gun into the air.

ROPE-CLIMBER (CONT'D)  
Like with a gun-thing that-

FERN  
Yeah, take me seriously.

Fern walks away from the gym in frustration and Tiffany hurries to catch up to her.

FERN (CONT'D)  
These guys are losers.

TIFFANY  
You only tried two. We got up early  
and came a long way. Try one more.

Fern stops and looks at Tiffany skeptically.

TIFFANY (CONT'D)  
Third time's the charm?

FERN  
Fine. You pick this time. Then when  
he's a dud, it's all your fault.

TIFFANY  
Alright...how about that one on the  
swingy-chain-things?

Tiffany points to a long-haired, muscular man who is swinging along metal rings that are hanging from long chains.

FERN  
Tarzan? Sure, why not?

Fern approaches him with an exaggerated flutter of eyelashes.

FERN (CONT'D)  
Hey, there. Could you do that a  
hundred feet in the air?

TARZAN-GUY

Uuuuh...what do you mean?

FERN

You'd want a safety net at the bottom, of course, but could you do it when it counts, with the crowd roaring around you?

TARZAN-GUY

I really don't...this is just-

FERN

Don't work your brain so hard.

Fern storms away again with Tiffany hustling after.

FERN (CONT'D)

I made a mistake. This isn't how I'm going to find love.

TIFFANY

Love? I thought you were just trying to get married as quickly as possible?

FERN

Is that what you think?

TIFFANY

Those guys were plenty hot enough to take a chance on.

FERN

Says the girl who wouldn't take a chance on actual skydiving.

TIFFANY

There's zero chance of splattering on the pavement if you let one of those guys take you to dinner.

FERN

You don't know that! I could end up as a cautionary tale for women everywhere!

Tiffany stops and lets Fern walk away.

TIFFANY

Consider me cautioned! Call me when they put you in a padded cell!

EXT. BEACH - OCEAN'S 24 HOTEL - DAY

Fern walks alone near her hotel with her head hanging low.

She paces and kicks sand, then looks up to see her surfer friend walking up the beach near the water.

The surfer drops his board removes the leash from his ankle as Fern sprints towards him.

He looks up with surprise and smiles as he watches her run.

SURFER

Good morning, Sundress!

Fern grabs the surfboard from the sand and keeps running toward the water, yelling back at him.

FERN

My name is Fern!

The surfer is puzzled for a short moment, but then chases after her with a worried face.

SURFER

Wait, you shouldn't do that!

Fern slows down as her feet splash into the water, then she tosses the board into the water and prepares to leap onto it.

He grabs her from behind, wrapping his arms around her waist and picking her up out of the water while she squirms.

FERN

I can do it! I'm ready to try!

SURFER

I'm sure you are, but the water is freezing right now.

Fern wiggles free and throws herself to her knees.

The surfer drags his board out of the water and kneels down next to Fern, then sympathetically extends her a hand.

SURFER (CONT'D)

I'm Cole, by the way. And you can borrow my wetsuit if you really want to head out there. But I have to warn you that I'm not wearing anything underneath.

Fern looks back at him with a sheepish stare, then slowly cracks a smile and grabs his hand.

FERN  
I don't do all black.

Cole helps her to her feet.

COLE  
I'm sure we can find you something  
with better color coordination.

Cole picks up his board and starts walking towards the boardwalk, and gestures for Fern to follow.

COLE (CONT'D)  
So, it's Fern, huh? I kinda liked  
'Sundress,' but that's good, too.

FERN  
It used to be Guinevere.

COLE  
Used to be?

FERN  
I'll probably change it again.

COLE  
You don't like it?

FERN  
I was thinking about my mom a lot  
when I changed it. I didn't like,  
legally change it. But she loved  
ferns. Had them all over the house.

COLE  
Seems like a keeper to me.

FERN  
Maybe.

COLE  
'Sundress' should be next.

FERN  
(laughs)  
Probably not.

EXT. BOARDWALK - OCEAN 24 HOTEL - DAY

Fern and Cole climb up the steps from the sand onto the cement sidewalk, then stop and face each other.

COLE

Listen, I think you're absolutely fascinating and incredibly beautiful. I would not forgive myself if I didn't ask you to dinner. Are you free tonight?

FERN

Umm, well...

COLE

I basically just saved your life, so really, you should be taking me to dinner.

FERN

Sure. I'm free tonight.

COLE

Great. Seven o'clock?

Fern nods in approval. Cole smiles and turns to walk away.

COLE (CONT'D)

Perfect. Just try to stay out of the water until we can find you that Gucci wetsuit, okay?

FERN

I'm more of a Prada girl, but okay.

Fern smiles as she watches Cole disappear into the alley.

EXT. FERN'S BALCONY - DAY

Fern smiles, smitten by love as she unlocks her door.

Eric reaches the top of the stairs and scans the balcony.

ERIC

Where's Tiffany?

Fern is startled and drops her keys.

FERN

Yikes, Eric.  
(picks up keys)  
Somewhere else.

ERIC

She told me to meet her here after she took you manhunting. How was that, anyway?



FERN  
Unsuccessful.

ERIC  
That's too bad, but it's good that  
you're being picky.

FERN  
Picky? I'm not exactly a child who  
won't eat her peas. I just want-

ERIC  
Maybe selective is a better word.

FERN  
Yeah. I guess so.

Eric turns to leave.

ERIC  
Keep up the search, though. I'll  
catch you later.

Fern reaches for her doorknob and Eric turns back to her.

ERIC (CONT'D)  
Actually, while I'm here...I had an  
idea I wanted to run by you.

FERN  
Sure, what's up?

ERIC  
I think you're a really cool girl  
and you deserve a great guy who  
will treat you right.

FERN  
Ooo, I love flattery. Do go on.

ERIC  
I'm serious. The sad thing is that  
there aren't many good guys out  
there, and I wish I knew someone...

FERN  
You don't have to set me up with  
any of your friends, I have a date-

ERIC  
Have you ever heard of a throuple?

Fern shows her surprise, but stifles her laughter by turning  
away, then lets out a silent laugh.

FERN  
 (slightly patronizing)  
 No, Eric. What does that mean?

ERIC  
 Well...not to oversimplify it, but  
 it's like a couple, but with three  
 people...ya know, instead of two.

FERN  
 That sounds like the proper way to  
 simplify it.

ERIC  
 I know how close you and Tiffany  
 are and I'd like to get closer to  
 you, too. Especially considering  
 you don't have much time left.

Fern spins around with loving eyes and feigns affection.

FERN  
 Oh, Eric, are you saying what I  
 think you're saying?

ERIC  
 Umm, yeah. What do you think?

FERN  
 Oh, I need to hear you say it to  
 believe it could be true.

ERIC  
 Uh, okay. Ummm...do you, uh, do you  
 want to...have a...I mean, do you  
 want to be in a throuple with us?

FERN  
 Eric, dear! That's so...that's so-  
 (breaks character, laughs)  
 Disgusting, you pig.

She playfully hits his shoulder and pushes him to the stairs.

ERIC  
 What? I just thought-

FERN  
 You were thinking with the wrong  
 head, you perv. Go home.

Eric cowers with his hands up to block her advance, then  
 starts down the stairs as Mrs. Kellogg exits her room.

ERIC  
Alright. Forget I said anything.

Eric disappears down the stairway and calls back.

ERIC (CONT'D)  
Let's both forget, OK?

Mrs. Kellogg looks at Fern with concern.

MRS. KELLOGG  
What was that about? Forget what?

FERN  
(laughs)  
Nothing, Mrs. Kellogg. How's your morning going?

MRS. KELLOGG  
Fine, dear. I'm on my way to breakfast. Would you-?

FERN  
I'd love to have pancakes with you.

Fern takes her by the arm and they walk to the stairs.

MRS. KELLOGG  
Wonderful, dear. And you can tell me all about that creepy throuple thing.

Fern looks at her with shock and then laughs as they walk.

EXT. PANCAKE HOUSE - DAY

A small mom-and-pop style pancake restaurant sits among a line of shops that have a tourist vibe.

INT. PANCAKE HOUSE - DAY

Fern and Mrs. Kellogg sit across from each other in a booth by the window eating large stacks of chocolate pancakes.

FERN  
Eating chocolate cake disguised as breakfast is genius.

Mrs. Kellogg smiles as she nibbles a piece of bacon.

MRS. KELLOGG  
Don't grow up to be me, Fern.

Fern freezes before taking a bite and sets her fork down.

FERN

You're amazing and I love you.

MRS. KELLOGG

I'm enjoying the time I have left, especially moments like this, but I've been very lonely for most of my life, and my destinations are my only true companions now.

FERN

A lot of widows find themselves-

MRS. KELLOGG

I'm not a widow. I have three ex-husbands and each of them was right to leave me.

FERN

I'm sorry, I just thought that since you had children, that...

MRS. KELLOGG

Being a widow might have been easier. Then maybe they would call me instead of their fathers.

Mrs. Kellogg laughs at herself as if she just told a joke. Fern quickly takes a drink of water to hide her discomfort.

MRS. KELLOGG (CONT'D)

There were good times, but I caused a lot of our problems by letting all kinds of silly distractions take priority over my marriages.

FERN

I can't imagine you causing problems.

MRS. KELLOGG

That's sweet, but you haven't known me for very long.

FERN

I'm a pretty good judge of character.

MRS. KELLOGG

Better than your friend Tiffany, that's for sure.

FERN

Maybe.

MRS. KELLOGG

Are you seeing anyone?

FERN

No, but for the first time in years, I have a date that I'm actually excited for.

MRS. KELLOGG

Ooo! Do you have butterflies?

FERN

Swaths of them.

MRS. KELLOGG

That's wonderful. At my age I'm lucky to have dying moths.

INT. FERN'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Fern sits on her couch writing in her journal. She is in a sundress with leggings and a sweater, with her hair curled.

FERN (V.O.)

If you could answer, I'd say 'Dear Diary' and ask what men are like on dates these days. Do they still bring flowers and hold the door? It feels like society is moving at light speed, and I can't keep up.

She smiles as she hears a knock, drops her journal, and walks to the door while smoothing wrinkles from her dress.

She breathes deeply and opens the door.

Fern's eyes widen as she sees Cole standing in the doorway with a bouquet of flowers. She fixates on the flowers.

FERN

Well, holy shit.

Cole reacts with puzzlement and lowers the flowers.

COLE

What? What's the matter?

FERN

You brought flowers.

COLE  
Is that okay?

Fern grabs the flowers from his hand with slight aggression.

FERN  
It's a relief.

She smells the flowers, then walks to the kitchen.

COLE  
Umm...I'm glad...and you're even  
more beautiful than the first time  
you spied on me from your balcony.

FERN  
You were out in the public eye,  
buddy. It was fair game.

COLE  
It's OK. I spied right back.

FERN  
I know just where to put these.

She takes a vase out of a cupboard and fills it with water.

FERN (CONT'D)  
You can come in a minute.

Cole takes a step inside but freezes in fear as Fern shouts.

FERN (CONT'D)  
Wait! Not, yet. I don't think I'm  
supposed to.

COLE  
Supposed to what?

FERN  
Let you in on the first date.

COLE  
Of course. I'll wait here, then.

Fern puts the flowers in the vase and walks to the hallway.

HALLWAY

Fern knocks loudly on the bathroom door.

FERN  
Skip?

SKIP (O.S.)

Come in.

Fern opens the door with glee, holding the flowers up.

FERN

I thought I'd freshen up your-

She cringes with disgust and buries her face in her elbow.

FERN (CONT'D)

No! Nothing can freshen that up.

SKIP (O.S.)

Hey!

FERN

How are you still alive in there?

Fern flees into the living room as Skip slams the door shut.

LIVING ROOM

Fern sets the flowers on her coffee table and walks toward the surprised Cole, still standing just outside the door.

COLE

Is there a man in your bathroom?

FERN

Oh, you heard that?

A DELIVERY MAN (20) carrying bags of take-out food casually squeezes his way into the doorway and Cole steps aside.

DELIVERY MAN

Hey, Fern.

FERN

Hey, Chuck, come on in.

The delivery man saunters toward the bathroom.

COLE

I thought we were...

FERN

It's not for us.

DELIVERY MAN

Skip! Food's here.

The delivery man opens the door and cringes.

DELIVERY MAN (CONT'D)  
How are you even alive in there?

He quickly slips the food in the door and scurries away.

DELIVERY MAN (CONT'D)  
Have a nice night, Fern.

FERN  
You, too, Chuck.

Cole watches in awe as the delivery man leaves, then looks back at a smiling and innocent Fern.

FERN (CONT'D)  
Should we head out?

EXT. OCEANFRONT RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Cole and Fern sit close to each other at a table on the patio of a seafood restaurant, lit by a fire-pit, on the boardwalk.

FERN  
Life's too short for small talk.

COLE  
What do you consider too small?

FERN  
Anything that stays too snugly in the comfort zone.

COLE  
Then let's get uncomfortable.

Fern pauses, reflecting, then smirks with self-satisfaction.

FERN  
Do you believe in God?

COLE  
Yes. He's been very good to me.

FERN  
What makes you think God is a man?

COLE  
Hmmm...

Cole studies Fern's confident expression.



COLE (CONT'D)

Well, if God were a woman, why did she make man so dominant for thousands of years?

Fern sits back in her chair with disappointment.

FERN

I'll have to think on that. Maybe we should start with a middle-ground topic.

COLE

In-between 'what's your favorite color?' and 'is God a woman?'

FERN

That's probably wise.

COLE

What do you do for work?

FERN

Currently unemployed.

COLE

And we're back out of the comfort zone.

FERN

It's fine. I quit voluntarily.

COLE

I'm guessing from the little I know about you that you burned the place down on your way out.

FERN

I might have...if I hadn't quit over the phone.

COLE

Wow, you didn't even have the courage to quit face-to-face.

FERN

Hey, go easy.

The waiter approaches the table with pad and pen out.

WAITER #1

Any questions about the menu?

FERN  
I haven't actually looked, yet.

COLE  
Do you like fish?

Fern nods in approval.

COLE (CONT'D)  
(to the waiter)  
We'll have the stuffed flounder  
with rice and mixed veggies.

WAITER #1  
Excellent. I'll be back shortly.

The waiter walks away and Fern looks at Cole, impressed.

FERN  
You totally just ordered for me.

COLE  
A lot of women order something  
cheap like a salad or chicken and  
it breaks my heart to see that  
happen at a seafood place.

FERN  
So you date a lot of women?

COLE  
I've had a lot of awkward first  
dates but few serious ones since...

FERN  
Since?

COLE  
Sorry, I really try not to bring it  
up on the first date, but since  
we're already uncomfortable...I was  
married very briefly, years ago.

FERN  
Ooo, we're getting deeper.

COLE  
A divorcée and the unemployed.

FERN  
I won't dig into that just yet.  
Tell me what you do for work. And  
I'm outta here if you're also  
unemployed.

COLE

You know those car commercials where they just show thirty seconds of trucks sliding through dirt and climbing snowy mountains?

FERN

Of course.

COLE

I'm the stunt driver you don't see.

FERN

Really? That's amazing.

COLE

Not really, but it's my dream job.

FERN

(laughs)

Is that the ice breaker that leads into your actual, more boring job?

COLE

I never know how people will react when they find out I'm a cop.

FERN

A cop with a sense of humor is good.

COLE

Evolutionary biologists say that men are forced to develop a sense of humor to become attractive.

FERN

And women?

COLE

It's entirely optional.

FERN

OK, I opt to tell you a joke, then.

COLE

Bracing myself.

FERN

A vegan and a crossfitter walk into a bar, but neither of them can get a word in because I'm already in there telling everyone I'm dying.

Cole opens his mouth to force a laugh, but stops himself.

COLE  
Are you serious?

FERN  
No.

COLE  
Phew!

FERN  
I don't really tell many people.

Cole stares in shock as the waiter drops off their meals.

WAITER #1  
Enjoy. Flag me down if you need  
anything at all.

Fern and Cole stare at each other in silence. The waiter notices the awkwardness and walks away quietly.

FERN  
I'm sorry. I genuinely don't know  
where that came from, but I guess I  
thought I should be upfront.

Cole looks away, lost in thought as Fern picks at her food.

COLE  
Well, I think you have a future in  
dark comedy.

FERN  
Thanks. I'm working on some  
material for open mic night.

COLE  
How much time do you have?

FERN  
I think quite a lot, but I don't  
have a countdown, yet.

COLE  
So you're just living life like  
it's no big deal?

FERN  
Sort of.

COLE  
I think that's awesome.

INT. FERN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Fern throws herself onto her bed with a big smile, still dressed up, and dials her cellphone.

ON FERN'S PHONE

Tiffany's name appears at the top as the phone calls her.

The call is rejected by a text from Tiffany:

"I'm still mad at you."

BACK TO FERN - WITH TEXT CHYRONS

Fern's smile is replaced by saddened surprise. She texts:

"You can't be mad. I'm dying."

Tiffany responds:

"How many times are you going to use that on me?"

Fern grins and texts:

"Until it stops working."

Fern's phone rings and she immediately answers.

FERN

Don't you wish everyone was dying?

TIFFANY (V.O.)

That's dark, even for you.

FERN

Then everyone could stop wasting so much time being mad at each other and just talk.

TIFFANY (V.O.)

So, is he the one?

FERN

It's too early to tell, but it's looking good.

TIFFANY (V.O.)

I thought you were in a hurry.

FERN

I know, I just...

Fern suddenly appears nauseated, gasps for breath and holds her forehead.

FERN (CONT'D)

Tiff...I'm feeling...I'm blacking out. Call...

Fern attempts to focus and remain conscious, but fails.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Fern struggles to open her eyes in the bright hospital room.

Dr. Schwazer sits at her side, closely observing her movements, with great concern.

DR. SCHWAZER

Welcome back, Ms.--

FERN

Fern is fine.

DR. SCHWAZER

Well, Fern, as far as I can tell, the blackout had nothing to do with your illness in any apparent way.

FERN

Any apparent way?

DR. SCHWAZER

Based on what you've told me, I'd say that-

FERN

I haven't told you anything.

DR. SCHWAZER

This is not the first time you've woken up, surprised to see me.

FERN

Oh.

DR. SCHWAZER

I'd say you experienced a sudden and intense onset of anxiety.

FERN

That can't be it. I felt like I was dying.

DR. SCHWAZER

Your body thought it was dying, so it systematically shut down all physiological functions that are not absolutely critical to your survival.

FERN

That sounds terrible!

DR. SCHWAZER

In simple terms...you had a debilitating panic attack.

FERN

Is that all?

DR. SCHWAZER

It's really quite serious. While it doesn't have any direct effect on your current medical condition, it can cause other kinds of problems. Problems that I can't fix.

FERN

Who can fix it?

DR. SCHWAZER

Ultimately...

Dr. Schwazer looks away from Fern, squinting in deep thought and answers in a philosophical tone.

DR. SCHWAZER (CONT'D)

Only you can fix it.

FERN

But you'll still bill my insurance anyway, right?

DR. SCHWAZER

I won't, but I'm sure your psychotherapist will.

FERN

Psychotherapist? I'm not psycho!

DR. SCHWAZER

Analyst, counselor, head shrink. It's just the proper term.

FERN

Is that like how janitors prefer to be called custodians?

DR. SCHWAZER

I guess.

FERN

But notice how they didn't call themselves psycho-janitors.

DR. SCHWAZER

I do suggest you see someone to help you control your anxiety, or you could experience an attack in places less safe than your bedroom.

EXT. FERN'S BALCONY - DAY

Fern and Tiffany sit sullenly, watching the ocean.

TIFFANY

I can call my therapist for you. I guess he's not really my therapist anymore, but he's pretty good.

Fern just stares, as if she didn't hear Tiffany at all.

FERN

Eric asked me if I wanted to be in a throuple with you guys.

TIFFANY

He did not.

FERN

I told him, of course I would, since we've been so close for years and that it made perfect sense.

TIFFANY

Stop.

FERN

We made plans for the three of us to get away this weekend. A romantic cabin, candlelight dinners. The whole deal.

TIFFANY

He did not say that, did he?

Fern continues to stare forward, with a slight smile.

TIFFANY (CONT'D)

Of course he said that. Perv.



FERN

He sure doesn't disappoint.

Fern grins as Tiffany processes the information.

FERN (CONT'D)

He said he just wanted to run an idea by me.

They turn their heads to each other and break into laughter.

TIFFANY

Just a passing thought, huh?

FERN

His one allotment for the day.

Cole enters from the stairway and casually leans on the rail.

COLE

Ladies. You're both looking very beautiful this morning.

TIFFANY

(infatuated)

Thanks, I-

COLE

(to Fern)

Wait, I meant, you're looking very beautiful this morning, Fern.

TIFFANY

Hey!

COLE

(to Fern)

I'm sorry, I've never really gotten the whole best-friend thing down. Am I supposed to find her attractive, too?

TIFFANY

Yes.

FERN

No.

COLE

Got it.

FERN

You're delightfully awkward this morning, what's up?

COLE

Tiffany said you needed to relax...  
after...your thing, so I'm here to  
help.

FERN

Tiffany wasn't supposed to tell you  
that.

TIFFANY

(to Cole)

Tiffany told you not to tell Fern  
that she told you that.

COLE

Right, sorry. Well, it's no big  
deal. I called in sick and I'm here  
to take you skateboarding.

FERN

How is taking off work for me not a  
big deal? And how is breaking my  
head open skateboarding relaxing?

COLE

I have a helmet for you, so you  
won't break your head.

FERN

Do you have a helmet for the rest  
of my body? Cuz it's all very  
breakable.

COLE

I do not.

Fern stares at him with apprehension and he grins back.

FERN

I like you, Cole, but I'm not sure  
I'm at the break my bones for you,  
level, yet.

Cole opens his mouth to rebut, but Tiffany speaks up.

TIFFANY

(to Fern)

Yes you are.

EXT. BOARDWALK - DAY

Fern nervously fidgets with her helmet, while Cole watches in  
amusement, with two long skateboards under his arms.

FERN

Do I look stupid in this thing?

COLE

I don't think helmets are the IQ test people think they are. But it's a good gauge of cuteness.

FERN

Smooth.

Cole holds the skateboards out in each hand. One board is comically larger than the other.

COLE

Eventually, I hope to skate alongside you, but for now, I'll just help you take it slow.

FERN

Ooo, that small one is cute.

Cole tosses the small one aside and hands Fern the other.

COLE

The bigger the board, the sturdier it is. You should have a hard time crashing this boat.

Fern lays the board down and steps on, feet close together, squatting for balance. She wobbles but it doesn't roll.

FERN

I used to goof around on a friend's board when I was a kid.

COLE

Adorable.

Fern lifts her front foot off the board and pushes lightly along the ground, just once, and puts it back on the board.

She rolls slowly for a few seconds until the board stops.

COLE (CONT'D)

That's a great first try, but I can't be seen with anyone who pushes mingo.

FERN

That sounds insulting.

COLE

A little. Just push with your back foot, not your front. That's all.

FERN

That's it? Mongo sounds just fine.

COLE

Rule number one in skating is looking cool at all costs. And mongo is the anti-cool.

FERN

And yet I'm in this ugly helmet.

COLE

Bleeding all over the boardwalk is even lamer than mongo.

MONTAGE - COLE TEACHES FERN TO SKATE

-- Cole shows her how to position her feet and push properly. Fern gives flirtatious pushback as she makes mistakes.

-- Cole models how to bend at the waste and knees, then pushes her along while she copies his form.

-- Fern slips off the board and into Cole's arms.

-- Cole holds her hands as she pushes and rolls along.

-- Fern pushes a bit on her own, but can only do it mongo.

-- Cole pushes alongside her, shaking his head at her mongo style, then pushes mongo, too.

EXT. BOARDWALK STEPS - DAY

Cole and Fern sit on a small flight of steps that lead to the beach, with skateboards on the ground behind them.

Fern is still wearing her helmet and pads.

COLE

More relaxed, now?

FERN

There is something oddly comforting about fearing for my life in a totally new way.

COLE

Awesome. You can take your helmet off now, unless you're planning on falling down these steps.

FERN

Only if I black out again.

Fern affectionately smiles at Cole, but the smile fades.

She removes her helmet and holding it in her hands, she rotates it as she hangs her head.

COLE

Are you going to see Tiffany's guy?

FERN

I already know why I panicked.

COLE

Because of your...future?

FERN

Sort of. Not because of my sickness, but because I...

Fern hesitates and looks up at Cole, fondly.

FERN (CONT'D)

I panicked because I had one of the best dates of my life that night.

COLE

I can honestly say I've never panicked over a good thing.

FERN

Good things can have their own finality. Maybe more uncertainty.

The two sit in silence for a moment. Fern looks down at her helmet and Cole steals glances out of the corner of his eye.

COLE

Have you ever seen *Annie Hall*?

FERN

Yeah.

COLE

You know how Woody Allen tells Diane Keaton that they should get their first kiss out of the way before dinner on their first date?

FERN  
You totally missed that chance.

COLE  
It's before dinner now.

Fern lets him stew for a moment, then smiles at him.

FERN  
I guess we could get it out of the way so we can eat in peace.

Fern smiles and Cole leans in for a slightly prudish kiss, but with clear passion and affection.

When Cole pulls away, Fern keeps her eyes closed, savoring the experience, then opens her eyes and smiles back at him.

FERN (CONT'D)  
Lobster would seem appropriate now.

Cole laughs, abruptly stands, then looks up with closed eyes.

COLE  
Maybe after we get some basketball in. The wind is picking up.

Fern shows genuine shock, bordering on disgust.

FERN  
Who do you think I am?

EXT. STREET BASKETBALL COURT - DAY

The sun sets over a run-down basketball court a block from the beach. The ocean is seen through gaps in the buildings.

Fern's hair blows in the wind as she stares blankly at Cole. He dribbles a basketball and stares back with a smile.

FERN  
Shouldn't we fly a kite instead?

COLE  
That's way too easy.

She rolls her eyes and approaches him with her arms up, ready to play defense.

FERN  
Fine, let's get this over with.

COLE  
We're not playing one-on-one. We're  
playing CRAB.

She relaxes.

FERN  
What's that?

COLE  
It's like HORSE or PIG, but since  
we're at the beach, we play CRAB.  
With wind rules.

Fern stares back, unamused, waiting for the explanation.

COLE (CONT'D)  
Wind rules are: if you wait for the  
wind to die down, it's only worth  
one letter. If you shoot with the  
wind, it's worth two letters.

FERN  
Let's do it. I'm hungry.

He passes her the ball.

COLE  
Ladies first. Winner picks the  
restaurant. Loser pays for the  
appetizers...and has to order in  
the accent of the winner's choice.

FERN  
High stakes.

COLE  
You're up. You got a good gust.

Fern walks closer to the hoop, sets up to shoot, but waits  
for the wind to die down.

COLE (CONT'D)  
Oh, playing it safe.

FERN  
Hush.

She waits another moment, then sinks her first shot.

COLE  
Impressive.

Fern shoots him a cocky look and passes the ball.

FERN

I've shot a few baskets in my day.

COLE

'In my day?' Are you secretly an eighty-year-old man?

FERN

Quiet and put it up.

Cole gestures her aside with a wave of his hand.

COLE

No pretty girls in my line of sight. It's distracting.

She cracks a flattered smile and backs up.

Cole readies for his shot. The wind picks up and blows Fern's hair. She clears it from her face as he shoots.

The ball arches in the air and moves with the wind, but swishes perfectly through the net.

Cole picks up the ball and spins around with a big smile.

COLE (CONT'D)

Alright. You're a 'C' and it's my ball.

FERN

You're supposed to match my shot and it's my turn until I miss.

COLE

Not with wind rules. I shot with a gust and gained two letters, matching and one-upping you.

Fern puts her hands on her hips and gives him a stern look.

FERN

You're making this up as we go.

COLE

It's your fault for procrastinating your shot.

He sets up and takes another shot, sinking it with the help of the wind again, then turns to Fern to gloat.

COLE (CONT'D)

You're facing C-R-A if you don't sink this shot with the wind.



Fern shakes her head and walks away.

FERN

I concede. I'll do the stupid  
accent if we can just go eat.

Cole smiles affectionately as he watches her leave.

INT. SEAFOOD RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Cole and Fern sit at a table by the window, looking at menus.

The boardwalk can be seen through the window, lit up by lamp posts. The restaurant is upscale and decorated with black and white photos of people fishing.

FERN

So what appetizers do you-?

COLE

Crab dip and calamari.

FERN

And the accent?

COLE

Third reich.

FERN

That's not an accent.

COLE

Sure it is. It's German, but you  
have to yell everything.

FERN

I'm not doing that.

COLE

It'll help if you pound the table a  
few times while you order.

FERN

That's childish.

COLE

Fine. Jamaican, then.

FERN

No! I thought you'd pick something  
sexy, like French.

COLE

Oh, no. This is all about humor,  
not sex appeal.

FERN

You just want to embarrass me?

Cole glares back, then tosses his arms up in concession.

COLE

Alright. You can do French, but it  
better be incredibly sexy.

The waiter approaches the table with a pad and pen drawn.

WAITER #2

Hey guys, can I start you with an  
appetizer?

Cole looks at Fern with eyebrows raised. She hesitates, but  
after a moment, she clears her throat, looks up at the waiter  
and orders in a French accent with an air of distinction.

FERN

Oui. We would like ze crab dip and  
ze calamari, s'il vous plaît and  
merci.

The waiter is visibly impressed and jots her order down.

WAITER #2

Ooo, are you French or French-  
Canadian?

FERN

I am from ze South of Fr--

COLE

She's neither. She's just messing  
with you.

Fern's jaw drops and she stares at Cole in disbelief.

WAITER #2

(laughs)

Well, you had me convinced. I'll be  
back with your appetizers in a few.

The waiter walks away, smiling.

FERN

What was that for?

COLE  
You quit in the middle of the game.

FERN  
I had no chance.

COLE  
Bet you won't quit next time.

Fern finally breaks into a laugh and shakes her head.

EXT. SEAFOOD RESTAURANT - NIGHT

The boardwalk is nearly deserted, with only a jogger and someone walking a dog passing by the restaurant.

INT. SEAFOOD RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Fern and Cole eat their main courses and chat.

FERN  
So, it's selfless service and the common good, huh? I didn't peg you for an altruist, at least at first.

COLE  
I think a lot of boys grow up wanting to be superheroes and save the world.

FERN  
Adorable.

COLE  
Eventually we realize we can't shoot lasers from our eyes and nuclear accidents won't make us invincible.

FERN  
Aww.

COLE  
Then some of us figure maybe a badge and a gun is the closest we'll get. But I'm also not an altruist any more than I'm Superman.

FERN  
I would hope that all our public servants were selfless.

COLE

Would you rather have someone come to your aid who is compelled by duty or compelled by desire?

FERN

(jokingly)

Who doesn't want to be desired?

COLE

(chuckles)

Exactly. And I'm the kind of guy who desires to help, rather than helps out of obligation.

FERN

It's rare to feel that kind of drive in a career.

COLE

What drives you at work?

FERN

A painful question.

COLE

We all have our reasons for the jobs we take, or quit. There's no shame in a day's work.

FERN

I think it was hope. Hope that the next job would be better than the one I was doing.

COLE

Ambition is good.

FERN

But hope...it only lasts as long as the future looks bright.

COLE

I see.

FERN

Oh...no, it wasn't my health that crushed my hopes. It gave me the courage to pull the plug. I think my hopes had been misplaced.

COLE

How so?

FERN

I hoped I could find fulfillment in my career, but with each promotion I was just making more money for my boss and my boss's bosses, who didn't care at all about me.

Fern sighs with relief as though a weight was lifted from her shoulders, then she winces in pain and hunches over.

COLE

What's the matter?

Fern clenches her fists on the table but doesn't answer for a moment, then slowly releases the tension and looks back up at Cole, slightly dazed from the pain.

FERN

I'm fine.

She stands, holding back the painful aftershock.

FERN (CONT'D)

Excuse me just a minute. I just need to use the ladies room.

COLE

Are you sure you're OK?

FERN

Really. It's nothing.

She walks to the far corner of the restaurant and Cole settles uneasily into his chair.

He takes a sip of water and smiles at a black and white photo on the wall of a young, loving couple, boating.

INT. FERN'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Fern's front door is unlocked from the outside and opened. She enters her living room but Cole stays in the doorway.

FERN

I feel like we were all over town today, but we never even left the boardwalk.

Fern turns to see Cole still outside and shoots him a perplexed glare.

FERN (CONT'D)

Aren't you coming in?

COLE

Well, we got our goodnight kiss out of the way earlier, so I should probably head home.

FERN

And that was good enough for the rest of the night?

COLE

I guess if you needed one more, that would be fine with me.

Fern walks slowly to him with narrowed eyes locked on his.

FERN

If...I? If I needed one more?

She places a hand behind Cole's neck and pulls him in, while rising up on her toes to give him a long, passionate kiss.

Fern ends the kiss and smiles at Cole, who takes a second longer to open his eyes and snap out of the moment.

COLE

That was better than the first one.

Fern takes a couple steps into her living room and beckons Cole inside with a nod.

COLE (CONT'D)

Don't make any plans tomorrow. I have an idea.

FERN

You're seriously going home now?

Cole bites his lip and stares at her as if still contemplating his next move, but he remains stoic.

Fern walks back, stopping inches from him.

FERN (CONT'D)

You need to at least make a move and give me the chance to turn you down. Otherwise, I'm going to bed tonight feeling quite offended.

Cole raises one eyebrow and grins.

COLE

Alright. Let's go back to your bedroom and get naked.

Fern perks up, grabs his arm and pulls him in.

FERN  
Let's do it.

Coles steals his arm back and laughs.

COLE  
You Siren.

FERN  
I thought all men needed to  
(does air quotes)  
'Go for a test-drive' to make sure  
we're compatible, ya know, before  
you drive me off the lot.

COLE  
Do you have lady parts down there?

Fern bursts into embarrassed laughter and nods 'yes.'

COLE (CONT'D)  
Then I'm sure we're compatible.

FERN  
Maybe I need to take you for a test  
drive. I don't have a lot of time  
to waste, you know.

COLE  
That's a great reason why we need  
to make sure we do this right. And  
I don't want you to think that I'm  
only in this for one thing.

Fern stops laughing and looks at him, impressed.

FERN  
In this?

COLE  
I'll pick you up around ten. And  
eat a good breakfast.

FERN  
A glass of raw eggs, Rocky style?

COLE  
Goodnight.

He pulls the door shut with a smile.

With eyes wide, Fern heads to her couch, picking up her journal from the coffee table on the way, then sinks into the corner of the couch and writes.

INSERT

Fern writes in her journal: "Ridiculous."

BACK TO SCENE

FERN (V.O.)  
 He brought flowers. And didn't want  
 to spend the night. Just  
 ridiculous. And wonderful.

EXT. BOARDWALK - OCEAN 24 HOTEL - NIGHT

The night is dark with only streetlight shining on the emptiness of the boardwalk.

INT. FERN'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Fern is asleep on her couch with her journal by her side.

A crashing noise from the bathroom startles her awake.

She rubs her eyes a bit and looks around the room.

FERN  
 What was...?

She looks toward the bathroom, stands and slowly approaches.

FERN (CONT'D)  
 Skip? You OK in there?

Fern knocks on the door, hears nothing, then opens it.

INT. FERN'S HALF-BATH - CONTINUOUS

Fern gasps as she sees Skip laying on the floor amongst empty cans and snack wrappers.

FERN  
 Skip!

She drops to her knees and turns Skip's face toward her and his eyes crack open.

SKIP  
 Fern? Where am I?



FERN  
Nearly dead on the bathroom floor.

SKIP  
OK, cool.

Skip closes his eyes and turns back over.

Fern cringes as she looks at the mess in the bathroom.

FERN  
We have to get you out of here.

With both hands, she reaches underneath Skip's armpits and struggles to drag him out of the bathroom.

INT. FERN'S LIVING ROOM

HALLWAY

Fern drags Skip through the bathroom doorway and into the hallway bumping his head against the doorframe. He groans but doesn't fully wake up.

SKIP  
What's going on?

She drags him into the living room, panting and grunting with great struggle.

LIVING ROOM

Fern lays Skip flat beside the couch and pauses to take a breath, while looking hopelessly at the surface of the couch.

She breathes in deeply, then crouches, preparing to lift him.

FERN  
You got this, girl. He's not that heavy.

She fully exerts herself but fails to lift him up, then lowers him back to the floor.

FERN (CONT'D)  
Wrong. He is that heavy.

She looks back at the couch and perks up with an idea.

She pushes the coffee table to the side of the room, then removes the cushions from the couch and lays them next to Skip's limp body.

She carefully steps over him, sits down on the edge of the couch and stares sympathetically at Skip's snoring face.

She takes another deep breath, reaches down with both hands, grabs handfuls of his clothing and struggles to turn him over onto the cushions, but only turns him halfway on.

FERN (CONT'D)

I guess I need to do more tire-flipping exercises.

Fern squats low and grabs two handfuls of Skips clothing just under the nearside of his body.

With great effort, she springs forward, successfully flipping Skip onto the cushions, but topples over him, rolling onto her back on the other side and lets out a painful grunt.

FERN (CONT'D)

Not how I wanted my night to end.

She looks over at Skip to see him sleeping and snoring away.

EXT. BOARDWALK - OCEAN 24 HOTEL - DAY

Cole approaches Fern's door wearing a black wetsuit and jacket, holding a flat, gift-wrapped package behind his back.

He rings the bell and waits, nervously.

INT. FERN'S LIVING ROOM - SAME

The doorbell rings as Fern crosses the living room in a sundress and sweater, with her hair and make-up done.

She glances at Skip, who is snoring motionless on the floor where she left him, then opens the door and smiles at Cole.

FERN

Good morning, handsome.

COLE

Good morning, Sundre--

Fern interrupts him with a kiss, then looks him up and down, inquisitively.

FERN

What are you all dressed up for?

COLE

I have something for you.

He reveals the gift from behind his back and Fern takes it.

FERN  
What's the occasion?

COLE  
A northeastern swell with a  
southwestern breeze.

Fern unwraps the gift and giggles, backing up and setting the box on the kitchen table.

COLE (CONT'D)  
(noticing Skip)  
Is that your bathroom tenant?

Fern removes a black wetsuit with pink sleeves and holds it up in front of herself.

FERN  
You found one in pink.

COLE  
I thought it might make you more  
comfortable your first time out.

FERN  
Cute. But if I had known we were  
going to jump in the ocean, I  
wouldn't have curled my hair.

Cole blinks quickly a couple of times.

COLE  
I'm taking a few mental pictures,  
so you're stunning curls and iconic  
sundress won't go to waste.

FERN  
Stunning and iconic. I can live  
with that.

Fern walks over to Skip and gives him a nudging kick. He stirs a bit, cracking his eyes open a hair.

FERN (CONT'D)  
Get up, we're going to the beach.

COLE  
Oh, I thought that just the two of  
us could...

FERN

He nearly died last night and could use some sunshine.

COLE

How about a hospital?

Skip fully opens his eyes, then sits up, freaking out.

SKIP

Why am I out here? I'm losing time!

Skip attempts to stand up, but Fern puts both her hands on his shoulders, sets him back down and lectures him.

FERN

Your time could expired if you don't take a break and get some Vitamin D. And if you refuse to come with us, you are hereby evicted immediately with full loss of property.

SKIP

You can't do that!

COLE

It sounds like he doesn't want to come.

FERN

I was never legally allowed to sublet my bathroom, so I doubt you will have much legal recourse.

Skip stares back at her with mouth agape.

FERN (CONT'D)

Go get showered. You smell like you were just removed from the anus of a rotting, beached whale.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL BEACH ROAD - DAY

Cole cruises his Jeep Wrangler down a two-lane road alongside million-dollar beach houses, with two surfboards strapped to the roof. The top is down and doors are off.

Fern is in the front seat with a euphoric smile as she switches between gazing at the scenery and staring lovingly at Cole. They are both wearing wetsuits.

Skip sits in the back seat with eyes wide, taking everything in as if seeing the outside world for the first time.

EXT. RUSTIC BEACH ROAD - DAY

Cole's Jeep continues down another two-lane road, close to the ocean, with no houses on either side.

Fern watches Cole drive with affection and wonder.

Skip is asleep with mouth hanging open.

EXT. SANDY ROADSIDE - DAY

Cole pulls the Jeep onto a wide, sandy cutout on the side of the road next to an unimproved beach access path.

He exits the vehicle and undoes the straps to the surfboards.

Fern gets out and immediately pesters Skip until he wakes up.

FERN

We're here, buddy. C'mon.

Skip startles awake and shouts.

SKIP

Double kill!

FERN

Give it a rest, you're in the real world now.

She opens his door and beckons him out.

FERN (CONT'D)

Now get out and experience it.

Fern reaches into the trunk as Skip hesitantly steps onto the ground and looks around in confusion.

SKIP

How far did we go?

FERN

Quit acting like you've never been outside, you big weirdo.

SKIP

I haven't spent time on the beach since I was little, what do I--

Fern shoves a plastic shovel and castle-shaped bucket into Skip's arms.

FERN

Your assignment is to get your feet wet, past your ankles, then find thirty-five uniquely beautiful shells and fifteen stunningly fascinating rocks. Then build a sandcastle that is no smaller than five square feet and decorate it with your newfound treasures.

SKIP

Umm...OK.

FERN

While we surf. And probably make out a little, in which case you will face the other direction.

Fern smiles and turns to Cole, who is now holding a surfboard under each arm.

Fern takes a board and happily heads down the path.

Cole pats Skip on the shoulder and catches up to Fern.

Skip looks down at his bucket and shovel, shrugs and follows.

EXT. REMOTE BEACH - DAY

Skip walks down the deserted beach with his bucket, occasionally picking up a shell and inspecting it.

At the water's edge, Cole smiles at Fern, who holds her surfboard under her arm, and stares warily into the water.

COLE

You just gotta commit.

He takes a few big steps into the water and falls backwards into the water, away from Fern. After a quick submersion, he pops back up with a smile and beckons her in.

COLE (CONT'D)

After the initial shock, it's actually quite nice. It really wakes you up.

FERN

I wasn't asleep.

COLE  
Come on, you big baby.

FERN  
Fine.

Fern slowly wades in and reacts to each step with wide eyes.

FERN (CONT'D)  
This is bad, this is bad.

Cole swims over and grabs her free arm, then pulls her gently further into the water.

COLE  
Commit.

FERN  
OK, OK, I can do this.

Fern immerses her entire body except for her head, then lets out a loud whoop.

FERN (CONT'D)  
Wooooo!! That's freezing!

Skip reacts to her squeal and turns to watch, concerned.

Cole pulls Fern in close and kisses her, then releases her, notices Skip watching, then calls out to him.

COLE  
She's doing great, don't worry!

Skip returns to his shell search.

COLE (CONT'D)  
(back to Fern)  
Go ahead and lay on the board. I'll steady you. Just relax.

Fern slides onto the board and stares ahead, nervously.

Cole guides her out past the small, breaking waves, then turns her around to face the shore.

COLE (CONT'D)  
I'll give you some warning, then give you a push. When you feel the energy of the wave pick you up, pop up like we practiced in the sand.

FERN  
Just like that, huh?

COLE

And I'll be right behind you in case you need my help.

FERN

My knight in shining rubber.

COLE

It's neoprene.

FERN

Yeah, take me serious--

COLE

I'm kidding. Focus. A good wave is coming.

Fern braces herself while Cole watches the incoming wave.

COLE (CONT'D)

Alright, ten seconds.

The wave approaches, Cole slowly pushes Fern's board toward the shore and she catches the wave, attempts to stand, but wipes out, with her board flying straight into the air.

Cole swims quickly to Fern as she stands up in the shallow water, brushing wet hair from her eyes.

He grabs the board and looks at her with apprehension, waiting for her reaction. She wipes her eyes and smiles.

FERN

Let's go again.

MONTAGUE - FERN LEARNS TO SURF

-- Cole pushes Fern on her board onto small waves.

-- Fern catches waves and wipes out several times.

-- Fern, while laughing, splashes Cole in his face as she returns to him after a wipeout.

-- Fern finally catches a wave and stands up, coasting straight to the shore. She's a bit wobbly, but successful.

-- Upon return from her first success, she gives Cole a firm kiss, then splashes him again.

-- Fern stands successfully a few more times, smiling and celebrating each time.



EXT. REMOTE BEACH - LATER

Skip works with full concentration on his sandcastle, which is plenty large enough for Fern's standards.

Cole and Fern lay on beach towels in the sand near the dunes.

Fern is flat on her back, staring at the sky, and Cole is propped up on his elbow, looking at her.

FERN

I can't go to libraries or bookstores anymore.

COLE

Why not?

FERN

When I look out at the thousands of books across the sea of shelves, I panic, knowing it's impossible to read them all in my lifetime.

COLE

No one's lifetime is long enough to read every book on Earth.

FERN

Every year of my childhood, my parents brought us to the beach, and I used to love to lay in the sand and read all day. It was almost as much fun to pick out a book as it was to read it. And I would make sure I finished the book before we went home, even if it meant I didn't touch the water on the last day of vacation.

Fern pauses to reflect and Cole watches her in sympathy.

FERN (CONT'D)

But when I moved into the hotel, I didn't bring a single book.

COLE

So you just gave up on books because you don't think you'll finish one?

FERN

I think I panicked after our first date for the same reason.

COLE

But you don't finish a relationship  
like you finish a book.

FERN

It's harder to enjoy either when  
you know you're near the end.

COLE

But you've enjoyed our time  
together, haven't you?

Fern rolls onto her side, props her head up with one hand and holds Cole's with the other.

FERN

Of course. It's been wonderful.

COLE

Just wonderful?

FERN

'Wonderful' isn't good enough?

COLE

I need something better after this  
epic week. And for allowing Skippy  
to come along today.

They look over at Skip to see him meticulously decorating a castle with shells, then turn back and laugh with amusement.

FERN

Honestly, all my time with you has  
been the best I've had in years.  
Perfection.

COLE

I'm relieved to hear you say that,  
but I have to disagree. It's not  
perfect, yet.

FERN

No?

COLE

See that conch shell behind you?

Cole nods toward the long grass in the dunes. Fern sits up with curiosity, sees a large, pink conch shell, lights up with joy, and reaches for it.

When she turns back with shell in hand, Cole is on one knee.

COLE (CONT'D)  
Look underneath.

Fern turns the shell over to see a small, black ring box stuck in the opening.

She looks up at Cole with happy tears as he places his hands on hers, around the shell.

COLE (CONT'D)  
I wouldn't consider asking if you were a conventional woman.

Fern releases a short laugh and a tear rolls down her cheek.

COLE (CONT'D)  
I haven't felt love like this in...maybe ever, and I want to lock down every last minute of your life for myself.

Cole opens the box in the shell to reveal a diamond ring.

COLE (CONT'D)  
I love you, Sundress. Will you marry me?

Fern stares at the ring with joy, then back into Cole's eyes.

FERN  
Cole, I...love you, too. But...

Cole's smile disappears and turns to sad surprise.

COLE  
No. No 'but.' This is a ring inside a conch shell.

FERN  
Did you talk to Tiffany?

COLE  
Tiffany? I didn't think I needed her permission.

FERN  
She told you I was trying to get married before I died, didn't she?

COLE  
I didn't talk to Tiffany.

Fern stares for a moment, then shuts the ring box.

FERN

Why else would you ask me so soon?

COLE

I rushed into my first marriage, too. It was fun at first, but then we really struggled to combine our lives. We fought a lot and divorced before our first anniversary.

FERN

That's not comforting.

COLE

It hurt. And after that, I thought I needed to take it slow, but I've watched couples who lived together for years who went through the same problems and divorced anyway.

FERN

We're doomed either way, so why not rush in?

COLE

Not exactly. My wife and I never worked our problems out. We just gave up. After the divorce was final, she joked that it was just our practice marriage and we would get it right next time.

FERN

But I haven't had my practice round, yet.

COLE

No one needs practice. We need commitment. If we're determined enough, we'll make it work.

FERN

My impulse is to shout 'yes' and jump into your arms, but...

COLE

I love your impulsiveness.

FERN

If I say 'yes,' I bring you along for all the pain, and I couldn't do that to you.

Fern pushes the shell into Cole's arms and stands up.

FERN (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

Cole, still kneeling, watches in devastation as Fern turns away and picks up her surfboard.

FERN (CONT'D)

Please take me home.

She walks to the path away from the beach and shouts at Skip.

FERN (CONT'D)

Great castle, Skip. Now kick it over and let's go home.

Skip snaps out of his focused trance and looks up at her, devastated, then looks down at his castle with fondness, shaking his head 'no.'

EXT. RUSTIC BEACH ROAD - DAY

Cole drives his jeep down the road with a straight face. Fern leans her head back and away from him, with a depressed look.

Skip enjoys the scenery with a huge grin.

EXT. OCEAN'S 24 HOTEL - NIGHT

STREET SIDE

Cole pulls up to the street side of the Ocean's 24 Hotel, near a parked ambulance with its lights flashing.

Fern hops out of the jeep, looking at the hotel with great concern. She turns her head back to Cole.

FERN

I'll talk to you tomorrow. I love-

She cuts her declaration of love short and hurries down the alley to the beachside of the hotel. Skip follows.

BEACH SIDE

Tiffany is standing on the boardwalk, watching TWO EMTs on the second story of the hotel, and Fern approaches her.

Tiffany shoots Fern a sympathetic look and wraps her arm around Fern's shoulder, pulling her in.

TIFFANY

I think it's Mrs. Kellogg.

The two women hug and watch the EMTs wheel a black bodybag along the deck on a stretcher.

TIFFANY (CONT'D)

And I dumped Eric.

Skip slowly walks up, wraps his arms around the two women, and lays his head on Fern's shoulder.

Cole emerges from the alley, looks on the three huggers, then up at the balcony with concern.

Fern watches Cole and they connect eyes with sadness, then he descends into the dark alley.

INT. FERN'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Fern and Tiffany sit on the couch at opposite ends.

TIFFANY

You got what you wanted. How could you reject him?

Skip exits the bathroom carrying a cardboard box and walks towards the front door.

FERN

I thought I'd leave you before you left me, roomie. I'll miss you.

SKIP

I'm sure we'll be seeing each other. Especially if you'll let me date your best friend.

Tiffany blushes and raises her eyebrows in shock.

FERN

Wow, Skip. Coming in hot with some serious confidence.

SKIP

I've never lacked confidence.

FERN

You totally have my permission.

TIFFANY

What?

SKIP

How about dinner tomorrow, Tiffany? Seafood, steak. You name it.

TIFFANY

I don't know.

FERN

What's a little dinner?

TIFFANY

Alright, as long as you don't mind being just a rebound date.

SKIP

Cool. I'll get your number from Fern and we'll set it up. See ya.

Skip nods his head 'goodbye' and leaves the hotel room.

TIFFANY

Did he already find a place?

FERN

He has a pretty nice house in town. He was staying here so his friends and family couldn't bother him.

TIFFANY

Huh. Never would have guessed.

The two sit in silence for a moment, reflecting.

FERN

She told me not to grow up to be like her.

TIFFANY

Who?

FERN

Mrs. Kellogg. She was three-times divorced and died alone.

TIFFANY

I don't think three divorces are in your future.

FERN

But I'm already grown up and alone.

TIFFANY

We're always growing up. And you could have Cole if you say 'yes.'

FERN

I have no right to put him through hell, watching me slowly fade.

TIFFANY

I'm sure he considered that before asking you to marry him. So now he's alone too, if you abandon him.

FERN

I was always going to abandon him. At least this way I get to choose when and how.

INT. FERN'S BEDROOM - DAY

Fern wakes up to an alarm on her phone and groggily sits up.

EXT. FERN'S BALCONY - DAY

Fern exits her hotel room in yoga pants, a sweatshirt and running shoes, with her hair tied back.

She stretches and watches the ocean as the sun rises.

EXT. BOARDWALK - OCEAN 24 HOTEL - DAY

Fern walks onto the boardwalk and watches the same group of women runners she has seen before approach from a block away.

She jogs in place until they reach her, then runs alongside the women. A few of them acknowledge her with a smile.

Fern keeps up for a few blocks and then struggles as she becomes winded, then holds her side and stops.

As she crosses her hands behind her head to recover, she watches the group of women pass the group of overweight men in sweats and slap them all with a 'high five.'

The group of men slowly pass Fern, all nodding politely.

She drops her hands down, shakes her head with a smile and jogs close behind them at a slow pace.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Fern sits alone in Dr. Schwazer's office staring at the floor.

Dr. Schwazer enters with his tablet in hand and sits on a stool in front of her.



He talks to Fern but she doesn't hear him. A deafening tone fills the air while the doctor continues to talk to her.

She shuts her eyes and leans back in her chair.

INT. PANCAKE HOUSE - NIGHT

Fern sits alone with a stack of chocolate pancakes, picking at them with her fork.

She looks around at the mostly empty restaurant and takes a small bite.

A waiter approaches her table.

WAITER #3

Can I get you anything else, miss?

FERN

No, thanks. I'm fine.

The waiter turns to go, but Fern quickly summons him back.

FERN (CONT'D)

Actually...

WAITER #3

Yes?

FERN

There was a...an older woman who would come in here every day and order the chocolate pancakes. Do you...do you remember her?

WAITER #3

Oh, yes, I remember her.

FERN

(uplifted)

You do?

WAITER #3

Of course. Sweet lady. And a very good tipper. Did she go home?

FERN

Umm...yeah. She did.

WAITER #3

Awe, I'll miss her. She was becoming part of my routine.

The waiter walks away and Fern picks at her plate a bit.

Cole approaches from behind and sits across from her.

FERN

I didn't think...I'm glad you came.

COLE

Tiffany told me I'd be in trouble  
if I didn't.

FERN

You've been talking to Tiffany?

COLE

It won't be a habit, but did you  
know--

FERN

She's out with Skip tonight!

COLE (CONT'D)

She's out with Skip tonight!

They both smile affectionately, but sit in awkward silence  
for a moment, waiting for the other to continue.

FERN (CONT'D)

When my parents died, they left me  
a pretty good nest egg. I never had  
to worry about money or success,  
but...I still wanted to prove my  
worth...to the world, I guess.

COLE

Uh, huh.

FERN

So, I crashed the white collar  
scene and made my mark. But the  
problem is, that mark is probably  
erased already, since I quit.

COLE

Maybe.

FERN

And I've been journaling, hoping  
that would be something worthwhile  
to leave behind, but I don't know  
who would bother to read it.

COLE

Fern, you're beating yourself up-

FERN

Let me finish. I still want to leave a mark, I just want to make sure it's the right one. And that it isn't a horrible scar.

COLE

What could possibly be scarring about you?

FERN

You're too sweet and optimistic about me. You hardly know me.

COLE

You remember in *'When Harry Met Sally'* how they interview couples who have been together for decades?

FERN

They're all adorable.

COLE

My favorite is the couple who were in an arranged marriage.

FERN

Yes! From the little *'willage.'*

COLE

Right, and the man spied on his bride to see if she was beautiful.

FERN

Cute, if a bit shallow.

COLE

I would think so, too, if they hadn't been happily married so many years later.

FERN

Because they committed.

Cole smiles back at her with approval.

COLE

I know it's sudden, but I'm through procrastinating my happiness.

FERN

It's going to be full of suffering.

COLE  
That's impossible.

FERN  
It will, it-

COLE  
I'm going to have to be a glass  
half empty guy on this one. I think  
it will only be partly full of  
suffering. The rest of the glass  
will be full of...strawberry  
lemonade.

Fern smiles and thinks.

FERN  
If we do this, there's got to be  
some sort of latency period, or  
it's just weird.

COLE  
Naturally there will be some  
planning involved, and I might need  
to learn a few more things about  
you, like what your real name is.

FERN  
Hmm...I might be ready for  
marriage, but I'm not sure I'm  
quite ready for that, yet.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

The beach is empty as the sun rises. The sand is smooth and  
clean. The sky is full of beautiful colors.

FERN (V.O.)  
Dear Journal. We did wait a  
responsible amount of time. About  
two weeks. Ten days to be exact. We  
kept the planning pretty low key.  
And the availability of the venue  
was wide open.

A PRIEST in a black suit and tie stands underneath a flowery,  
wooden arch, behind a small white table, at the end of a path  
made with two rows of flowers on the sand.

Cole, in a light brown tuxedo, walks with Tiffany, in a blue  
sundress and sweater. She leaves him at the alter and steps  
to the side.

A FEW OTHER COUPLES follow behind. The men in light brown suits, and the women in blue sundresses. At the end of the path, they each step to the side and form a semi-circle around the alter.

At the end of the wedding procession, Skip walks with Fern, who is wearing a white wedding sundress and veil.

Joy is on everyone's faces.

Skip gives Fern away at the alter, then stands next to Tiffany.

Tiffany looks Skip in the eye and smiles, then holds his hand with fingers intertwined.

FERN (V.O.)  
I'll have to fill you in on Skip  
and Tiff in the pages to come, but  
I've got a pretty good feeling.

Cole and Fern hold hands across the alter and state their vows, repeating after the priest.

FERN (V.O.)  
And yes, I wore a sundress.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Fern, in a hospital gown, sits with Cole in Dr. Schwazer's office. They are both smiling and holding hands.

Fern looks at the cartoon poster of a cat mountain-climbing.

INSERT - POSTER

The poster reads:

"NO NEED TO HANG ON FOR DEAR LIFE WHEN YOU HAVE A GOOD ROPE."

BACK TO SCENE

Fern turns her head and stares at Cole, then rests her head on his shoulder.

FADE OUT.