

(Name of Project)

by  
(Name of First Writer)

(Based on, If Any)

Revisions by  
(Names of Subsequent Writers,  
in Order of Work Performed)

Current Revisions by  
(Current Writer, date)

Name (of company, if applicable)  
Address  
Phone Number

# "Not Easily Broken"

## Film Treatment

Adapted from the Novel by T.D. Jakes

Brian Bird 3/6/06

### PREMISE

An ensemble drama in the tradition of *Grand Canyon* and *Soul Food* about five conflicted 30-somethings on a collision course with love, lust, temptation, betrayal and tragedy who learn that the secret of surviving life is to forge deep, unbreakable relationships based on trust, forgiveness and faith.

Or as Solomon once wrote, "A cord of three strands is not easily broken."

### MAIN CHARACTERS

DAVE and CLARICE JOHNSON have been happily married for a dozen years - at least that's the way it looks on the outside. But their lives and values are beginning to unravel in ways they never dreamed possible. They had been college sweethearts, he the handsome football player and she the beautiful business major. But in the years since, they have grown apart. If Dave had his dream job, he would be coaching high school ball, so he has to get his sports fix coaching inner-city little league and playing midnight basketball with some of the knuckleheads he used to run the streets with. And he would love nothing more than to cherish his wife. But Clarice is focused on other things. She has built herself a successful real estate business while pressuring Dave into a running a business he hates instead of encouraging him to follow his dreams.

BROCK HOUSEMAN was Dave's college roommate and remains his best friend, coaching partner and midnight basketball teammate. A successful lawyer, Brock has all the makings a lily-white yuppie, only Dave doesn't think of him that way because Brock didn't grow up with silver spoons. He was also from the other side of the tracks. And although on his best day he had more opportunity than most black kids trying to break out of the ghetto, Brock knows how to bust his ass to get things done. He's also a three-time loser at love and still looking for his soul mate. And the dude listens to Eminem and can speak in Ebonics, so he knows how to bring it in trash-talk department.

JULIE SAWYER has been a divorced, single mom for several years. And 12-year-old BRYSON is her pride and joy. She realizes now that she was married far-too-young out of Caucasian suburbia to a man too immature to be a stable husband and father. So now she works hard at her physical therapy job to make ends meet and to raise Bryson not to make the same mistakes she made. And so far, so good - Bryson is a gem a kid and swimmer with a bright future. Only for Julie, it gets lonely sometimes. If she could just find a man she could cherish and who would cherish her in return.

DARNELL GOODEN is one of those knuckleheads from the streets. In high school, he was a player - scholarship material - and a "playuh" with his choice of the ladies. But then he blew it. He ran with the wrong boyz and got busted with chronic, and college ball was soon replaced by prison ball. And in prison he became a bitter two-striker who came to believe that the American Pie doesn't slice up equally for the black man. Now, he's running the streets again, estranged from his lady and his son MARCUS whom he watches through a fence at the little league field with no clue how to be a real daddy.

For MARY CLARK, Clarice's overbearing, strong-willed mother, all men have suspect characters and roving eyes. And she learned to kick them to the curb rather than let herself get hurt. Even in her 60s, she still carries that same attitude toward the male species. She raised Clarice to rely on herself rather than being emotionally dependent on men. But by the end of the story, "Mama" may learn that's the very reason she's a bitter, lonely old woman.

CARMEN MCATEE is a different kind of marriage counselor. Thoroughly afro-centric, with a painting of a black Jesus on her wall and colorful dashikis for every day of the week, she is a straight-shooter who teaches that honesty is the best medicine, and that relationships can't survive the secrets and lies fostered by our permissive culture.

## ACT ONE

### INT. EMMANUEL FELLOWSHIP CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY - 1994

We'll FADE IN a dozen years ago on the beautiful wedding of DAVE JOHNSON and CLARICE CLARK at Dave's childhood church. And there, they will pledge themselves to each other in front of a small gathering of family and friends, including Clarice's very independent-minded mother, MARY CLARK and Dave's best friend and best man, BROCK HOUSEMAN. And Dave's pastor, REVEREND WILKES (who looks very much like Bishop T.D. Jakes) concludes the ceremony with a special ritual.

He joins together this new husband and wife with a gold-braided, three-stranded cord around their shoulders. And he cites a very important passage of Ecclesiastes: "Two are better than one... because if either one falls the other one is there to lift him up... but even better is a cord of three strands because it is not easily broken. He explains that Dave and Clarice represent two strands of the cord, and that God represents the third strand, and that if they will keep God at the center of their marriage, it will be a marriage not easily broken. And as Dave and Clarice are pronounced as husband and wife, Dave catches a glimpse of Clarice's mother watching him somewhat skeptically from the front row. Her looks says "I'm gonna be watching you, boy."

INT. EMMANUEL FELLOWSHIP CHURCH - RECEPTION HALL - DAY - 1994

And a little later, Dave is doing the customary dance with his new mother-in-law on dance floor as his lovely bride and the gathered guests watch happily. And as they dance, through her manufactured smiles, Mama makes no bones about what she expects of her new son-in-law. There is never an excuse for missing Sunday dinner at her house, and he best learn to keep a job and stay away from all his street hustler friends because her daughter will not go wanting, and lastly, if his male eye ever wanders, she will personally pluck it out like Jesus said to do in the good book. As long as he's got all that, they will get along just fine. Dave says he's got it, and Clarice breaks in on them, saying it's her turn. And soon Dave is lost in the arms of his brand new wife as a DJ puts on their song, the Lionel Richie ballad "Three Times a Lady." And Dave's REMEMBERING VOICE will take us through a PHOTO ALBUM MONTAGE of the highlights of their honeymoon and the dozen years to come. Shots of romance, Sunday dinner at Mama's house, buying their first house together. And his sentimental journey will reflect the joy of young married love, of staying in bed until noon, of dreaming about the future and making plans together, of finding those soft places within each other, of wanting to care and protect one another, of taking on the world, just the two of them, until somehow the world finds a way of messing it all up. And the MONTAGE we'll transition us forward in time to:

INT. DAVE'S TRUCK - TRAVELING - NIGHT - PRESENT DAY

Now many years later, that same Lionel Richie song plays on a car radio. And we'll WIDEN to see present-day Dave, looking a decade older and a little more life-worn than on his wedding day. He wears the blue-collar uniform of a janitor and seems to be driving home from what apparently has been a long day at work. But Dave is too preoccupied with his day to remember the meaning the song holds for him. And he inadvertently flips the dial to a sports station.

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

A nicely appointed, but modest suburban tract home. Clarice, still looking as youthful and girlishly trim as she did on her wedding day, is noshing on a salad with lite dressing. She's also dressed smartly in one of those colorful real-estate sports coats and sexy skirt to match. Dave enters from his work day. She greets him with a peck on the cheek, which is not as nice as the smooch on the lips he was clearly hoping for, but he shrugs it off. He tells her it was a helluva day. He had two of his employees not show up to clean their buildings and ended up having to do the work himself. She tells him he must not be hiring the right kind of employees, and reminds him about that being a good ten-percenter means having to crack the whip on slackers and lazy asses. He says he thinks he knows that already. Plus, he doesn't want to talk about work. He'd rather jump in the shower and get cleaned up. He was hoping they could have a little "us time" tonight. He would love nothing more than to rub her feet, her back... and anywhere else she might need rubbing. He goes in for another smooch, but she gently rebuffs him, reminding him she has to show houses tonight, and that she didn't become the top producer in the office by "crawling all up under her man every night." He seems a little hurt by this, and she promises him that maybe they can get some face-time this weekend. Dave says okay, how about Friday night? She reminds him that they are going to her real estate awards dinner with "Mama" and to make sure he gets his suit back from the dry cleaner. But she promises to keep Saturday night open for him. In fact, she'll even sweeten the pot with a bubble bath for two. He likes the sound of that, and it makes up for having to spend time with her mama on Friday night. She rolls her eyes at this, and suggests he get some exercise while she's out. He's been putting on a few pounds lately.

INT. BROCK'S DOWNTOWN CONDO - NIGHT

Meanwhile, BROCK HOUSEMAN, looking as fit and handsome as he did a dozen years ago, is changing into a tank top, sweats and basketball hi-tops out of an expensive business suit (one of many hanging neatly in a large walk-in closet). And we'll FOLLOW him through his large, well-decorated bedroom into a living room decked out with everything the Bang & Olufsen Store has to offer. Plasma screen and all the digital trappings. This is as sweet a high-rise bachelor crib as any guy has ever dreamed of. He goes into his designer kitchen and chugs a protein smoothie from his blender, and checks voice-mail messages on the speaker-phone.

Two of the messages are from young ladies, Candace and Heather, and each sound a little desperate, saying it has been awhile since he called and they were hoping maybe they could get together soon. And another message is from his mother, telling him she's not trying to interfere, but that she met this absolutely wonderful single young lady at church... actually the daughter of her Bunko partner... and thought Brock might like to try a blind date. Brock shudders at the thought, erasing the messages. His sigh says singlehood bites the big one.

INT. ALL SAINTS HOSPITAL - PHYSICAL THERAPY CLINIC - NIGHT

In another part of town, we'll meet JULIE SAWYER who has just finished up a physical therapy session with one of her ELDERLY CLIENTS, when her SUPERVISOR asks her into his office. He has some bad news for her. He knows she is one of his top therapists, but because of cash crunch, the hospital's CEO has made a decision to cut everybody in the clinic back to part-time for the next several months. Julie's stunned. It's not like she's living on easy street right now. How's she supposed to raise a son on part-time wages? Her supervisor says he's sorry, but there's nothing he can do. He'll keep his ears open for some freelance work for her in the meantime. Julie sarcastically tells him not to worry about it. Maybe she can sell one of her organs. Who needs two kidneys anyway?

INT. BROCK'S BMW - NIGHT - TRAVELING - MOMENTS LATER

Brock pulls into Dave's driveway in his black 730i, and Dave opens the door and slides into the passenger seat, dressed in his gym clothes. And they greet each other with a little best-friend "dapping" and "snapping" in their very best Ebonics -- which we'll establish as something they always do. Dave says he's glad Brock could come out and play because it was either go to the Y to shoot some hoops or a cold shower, if Brock gets his drift. Brock says that's way too much information for him, thanks.

INT. HASTINGS PROPERTIES REAL ESTATE OFFICE - NIGHT

Meanwhile, Clarice arrives at her office where a handsome, black professional COUPLE is waiting. MICHELLE, Clarice's brash, outspoken, street-smart assistant, grabs her on her way in, handing her a file folder with all the pertinent details: "This is a live one, girlfriend. Husband's a judge. Wife runs an art gallery. They want something bigger so they can do more entertaining. Price is no object." Clarice licks her chops as she enters her office.

INT. DOWNTOWN YMCA - GYMNASIUM - NIGHT - LATER

By now Dave and Brock are engaged in an intense pick-up basketball game with a group of inner-city BLACK GUYS who play hard and foul even harder. And it's all shirts and skins and sweat and bodies slamming the board. And when one of the guys -- a tatted-up thug we'll come to know as DARNELL GOODEN whom it's clear Dave has some history with -- doesn't like the way Brock keeps sinking three-pointers, he hammers him with an intentional foul. Brock retaliates by shoving Darnell to the floor, and suddenly Dave and a couple of the other players find themselves pulling them apart. The humiliated Darnell walks out on the game, but not before leveling epithets at "Uncle Tom" Dave and his "white bitch" Brock. A ticked-off Dave shouts after him, "Come on, brother, why you got to make it like that?" But the guy doesn't turn around. Dave wants to go after him, but Brock tells him to let it go.

INT. SUBURBAN EXECUTIVE HOUSE - NIGHT - A LITTLE LATER

Clarice is showing the couple through an expensive home for sale. As they tour the house, impressed with Clarice's tastes, the wife strikes up a friendly conversation with her, asking about where she lives and what her husband does for a living. Clarice hesitates, before finally saying that they live in a neighborhood like this one on the other side of town and that her husband runs his own successful "building management" firm. The couple is impressed and also feels good about the house. They tell Clarice they want to make an offer -- which for Clarice clearly takes away some of the shame of having fudged her credentials.

INT. DOWNTOWN AQUATICS CLUB - NIGHT

A SWIMMING COACH'S WHISTLE signals that a race is on as 12-year-old BRYSON SAWYER hits the pool for a two-length 50-meter freestyle and he is clearly cleaning up on the four other boys swimming against him. And Julie is just walking up to the pool edge as he makes his turn, a full body length ahead of the competition, and she watches as he goes down the final stretch for an easy victory. And as he gets out of the pool she is there to congratulate him and wrap him in his towel. And we now realize he has been swimming against boys who are clearly older than him. As the coach calls an end to practice, he comes over to pat Bryson on the back. The coach tells Julie that he's really proud of how Bryson's coming along and is looking forward to start of the league meets.

One of the other team MOMS comes over to them with a clipboard just to remind Julie that she needs a check for the new sweat-suits the team is getting. Julie thanks her for the reminder, says she doesn't have her checkbook with her, but will have a check by Saturday's practice.

INT. BROCK'S BMW - NIGHT - TRAVELING

Driving back from the Y, Brock has gotten past his basketball run in with the thug, but Dave is still fuming. He used to hang with Darnell when they were in high school. And even though Darnell was the better athlete, Dave got the college scholarship because Darnell messed up and got caught slinging chronic and went to jail. And he's been a knucklehead ever since. Brock tells Dave he ought to cut the guy some slack. He probably acts like an idiot because he just feels shitty about himself. Yeah, but Dave wonders why life opens its doors to some people, and kicks others to the curb. Brock tells him he's over-thinking it. Nobody ever said life was fair. For instance, how did an ugly dude like Dave get a fine lady like Clarice when a handsome rich white yuppie lawyer like him is still looking for his soul mate all these years later? Dave just laughs and says he feels like playing the world's smallest violin right now. Married life ain't all it's cracked up to be either. Clarice is so driven with her career she doesn't even have time to think about starting a family, which is something Dave has always wanted. Brock tells him to give her time, she'll come around. But Dave is starting to lose hope. No matter how successful Clarice gets, it's never enough. Dave's never felt that way about his career. He'd be happy making fifty-grand a year running a youth center or coaching high school ball. Instead, Clarice expects him to become this big, black entrepreneurial "ten-percenter." Brock says now who needs the violin, and any time Dave would like to trade him Clarice for his lousy bachelor existence just say the word. Dave thinks he's joking until he sees that Brock is only half-kidding. And as they drive on, Brock's BMW passes a beat-up looking, late-model Toyota Sentra going in the opposite direction.

INT. JULIE'S TOYOTA - NIGHT - TRAVELING - LATER

In that car, Julie and Bryson are driving home as some n.d. classic rock song plays on the radio. Bryson notices how preoccupied Julie is and asks her if everything is okay. Julie says of course. But Bryson's smarter than this, and reminds her of their "no secrets" rule since "Dad left" and the divorce. Julie sighs. She knows he's right. She tells him she doesn't want him to worry, but the HMO cut her hours back and she's going to need to find some extra work to make ends meet. Without missing a beat, Bryson says he's dropping out of the swim club until things get better.



It's too expensive. But Julie won't hear of it. That's the last thing they are going to cut back on. Bryson tries the hopeful approach: "Maybe Dad will come through with his child support money like's been promising." Julie says she doesn't want to burst his bubble about his Dad, but as she pulls into a fast food joint, she thinks that is about as likely as the Burger Cabana serving up healthy food. Bryson smiles at his mom's pluck.

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT - LATER

When Dave arrives home, Clarice is already asleep in bed. Dave slides in next to her and tries to cuddle up against her, but she's wearing those one of the beauty-sleep-masks which for Dave is like a "do not disturb sign." And he turns over and faces his side of the bed.

EXT. URBAN PARK - DAY

A few days later, Dave and his assistant coach Brock are in the middle of baseball practice with a motley-looking crew of 12-year-old BLACK BOYS on a rundown inner-city baseball field more dirt than grass. Dave wants them all to run wind sprints, which is greeted by a chorus of groans and whining. As the boys begin running and go through a series of drills, we'll HEAR some appropriate HIP HOP or RAP SONG. And then as they continue, Dave tells Brock that despite all the challenges and discipline problems, he loves coaching these boys because out here is where they can forget about all the crap they go through at home. He remembers what it was like for him as a kid and sports is what saved him. Brock teases him and says Dave acts like he's taking Brock on a walking tour of the ghetto. In case Dave forgot, Brock grew up on the other side of the tracks, too. He had to eat macaroni and cheese in the trailer park every night. Dave teases him right back: "Oh, Please, you don't even know what poverty is. In the projects, we had to eat macaroni and cheese boxes every night." And it's then that Dave notice Darnell approaching the field with a rather promiscuous looking lady at his side and a forty-ounce malt liquor in his hand. He points him out to Brock. "Look who came to see his kid play ball." He crosses over and asks Darnell if there's something he can do for him. Darnell has already had too much to drink and says he ought to be the one coaching his boy, MARCUS, how to play ball instead of some white ass-kisser like Dave. Dave would like to knock the black off Darnell, but chooses the high road. He tells him he's welcome on the field anytime -- but not with the forty. Being intoxicated near the boys is against league rules. Plus it's just damn stupid to embarrass himself this way. Darnell curses Dave under his breath, yells to Marcus that he will catch him later, and walks off with his lady.

Brock, who is now running the boys through some calisthenics, notices the embarrassment on Marcus' face as the other boys tease him about his bail-jumper daddy.

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY - LATER

When Dave arrives home, Clarice and Mama, now looking a dozen years more seasoned, are both dressed to the nines and glaring at him. Clarice wonders if he knows what time it is, and if he forgot about something? The color drains from Dave's face. Oh, damn -- the dinner. He babbles something about little league practice running late, before rushing down the hall saying he will be ready in two minutes. Mama tells Clarice, "That man is about to step on my last nerve."

INT. CLARICE'S SUV - DAY - TRAVELING - MOMENTS LATER

With the light fading outside, Mama brooding in the back seat, and an irritated Clarice checking her watch in the passenger seat, Dave, now in his best suit, is putting pedal to the medal. He tries to make nice by telling them how fantastic they both look. But the bottom line for Clarice is that he forgot about her important night -- plain and simple. Does he realize what an honor it is for her to be named the office's salesperson of the year? Dave apologizes, saying he didn't mean to forget. He just had some trouble with one of the boys' fathers. From the back seat, Mama, grouses about why Dave would want to waste his time with those little gang-bangers anyway? Bunch of young hoodlums in training to become crackheads like their daddies. Dave bristles, saying maybe some of them, but not if he can help it. Mama reiterates something she has said many times and meant as a shot against Dave. The only reason black men make it out of the ghetto is if they have strong women in their lives. Dave clenches his teeth and says he appreciates the reminder, but thinks maybe his own ambitions had something to do with it, too. Clarice just wishes Dave could be a little more focused. If he put the time in on his business that he spends on sports and coaching, he might build it into something more than a mom-and-pop operation. Coaching little league isn't going to get him to the executive suite anytime soon. As Dave goes through an intersection, he is about to reply that maybe he isn't cut out for the executive suite, when suddenly, everything goes into SURREAL SLOW-MOTION. Out of nowhere, a pick up truck SLAMS into the passenger side of their car. It's all glass flying and metal grinding and women screaming and Dave's head bouncing into a deployed airbag, and he turns to see Clarice lurch forward as the front end of the truck is right in her ear. And then the car spins several times before jolting to a stop. And all FADES TO BLACK.

ACT TWOINT. CLARICE'S SUV - DAY - SECONDS LATER

We FADE UP as Dave comes to in the car and gathers his wits. Clarice is still unconscious and Mama is moaning "Oh, sweet Jesus, have mercy," in the back seat. He checks Clarice's pulse... which is strong and tries to rouse her, but with no response. He checks on Mama, who is holding her head and still moaning, but says she thinks she's okay. Dave tells her to try to remain calm, and he kicks his door open and staggers out of the car.

EXT. INTERSECTION - DAY - CONTINUOUS

As Dave stumbles around to the other side of the SUV, other cars are stopping and ONLOOKERS are rushing over, and a TEENAGER is emerging dazed from the pick up truck that slammed into them. He keeps saying, "Oh, man, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I was reaching for my cell phone and didn't see the red." Dave just yells at him, at anyone, to call 9-1-1. Dave opens Mama's door and helps her out, and one of the onlookers helps her over to his car to sit her in the back seat. Now Dave tries to pry open Clarice's door, but can't get it open. He yells again. "Please. She's pinned in. Someone, get us some help." One of the other onlookers tells him that the paramedics have been called and are on the way."

INT. CLARICE'S SUV - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Dave climbs back into the driver's seat and tries to rouse her again. "Clarice, baby, can you hear me? Reesie, can you wake up?" Suddenly her eyes flit open and she looks panicky. "David, Lord Jesus, my leg, my leg... I can't feel my leg and my side hurts so bad." She claws against her smashed-in door to no avail and Dave tries to comfort her. "Shush now baby girl. Help is on the way. Everything's going to be okay." And Clarice buries her head in his shoulder and sobs. And we'll PRELAP the sounds of hydraulics and crunching steel.

EXT. INTERSECTION - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

It's now officially night and the PARAMEDICS have arrived and are cutting open Clarice's side of the mangled car with the Jaws of Life. As then they quickly unpin her legs and lift her carefully onto a gurney, as Dave whispers encouragement to her. They immobilize her and rush her into an ambulance where Mama is already being treated for her bumps and bruises and eyes Dave with disdain when she sees him.

INT. ALL SAINTS HOSPITAL - TRAUMA UNIT - NIGHT - LATER

The doors fly open and Clarice is rushed into the trauma unit and Dave and Mama have to stay back, but the TRAUMA DOCTOR assures them he will let them know as soon as he knows the extent of Clarice's injuries. Meanwhile, Dave and Mama need to be thoroughly checked out, too.

INT. ALL SAINTS HOSPITAL - E.R. - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Dave and Mama are sitting in side by side, curtained-off E.R. beds as Dave is getting a nasty cut on his head stitched up by another one of the DOCTORS and Mama is having her heart monitored. The Trauma Doctor enters and tells Dave that Clarice is going to need immediate surgery. She has a ruptured spleen which is causing internal bleeding and her leg has been badly broken in three places. She's is going to need all the king's orthopedists to put it back together again. Dave fights back tears and tells him to do whatever it takes, whatever it costs. After the doctor goes, it is awkwardly quiet for a long moment. Finally Mama breaks the silence from the other side of the curtain and says if Dave hadn't been in such a damn hurry because he was late, maybe this wouldn't have happened. Dave just says nothing.

INT. ALL SAINTS HOSPITAL - PRIVATE ROOM - NIGHT - HOURS LATER

And it's now the wee hours of the next morning. Clarice has made it through surgery. She is still under anesthesia and her leg is elevated in one of those terminator-looking casts with metal rods and pins holding her rebuilt leg together. Mama is snoring softly in a recliner chair, but Dave, with his bandaged head, is hovering over his wife. The Trauma Doctor enters and tells him the surgery went well. He was able to repair Clarice's spleen and it should heal within a week. But the leg is something else. Once it mends, she is going to need physical therapy to get full mobility back, and that could take several months. Dave thanks him and the doctor exits. As Dave kisses Clarice's forehead and gently brushes her hair with his fingers, even though she can't hear him, he whispers to her how much he loves her and promises to be by her side and nurse her back to health.

INT. ALL SAINTS HOSPITAL - PRIVATE ROOM - DAY

The following morning, Mama has taken a taxi home to get more rest, but a bleary-eyed Dave is still hovering over his wife when Brock enters carrying the largest bouquet of flowers we've ever scene and a huge teddy-bear.

He greets Dave with a huge embrace, which Dave holds for a long time, trying hard not to sob on his friend's shoulder.

We'll CUT TO a few moments later. Dave has brought Brock up to speed and is telling him that he feels like such a selfish bastard for ever complaining about Clarice. Brock agrees that events like this really help you figure out which things matter and which don't. Dave is sad to say it, but Brock is going to have to manage the team on his own for awhile. Brock says it could cut into his active social life, but no biggie. Besides, he teases, the kids like him better anyway.

INT. ALL SAINTS HOSPITAL - PRIVATE ROOM - DAY - LATER

The room is now filled with flowers and Get Well gifts. Clarice is awake and weeping softly as she takes in her situation. Dave tells her that the young man who broad-sided them walked away without a scratch but that her beautiful SUV is total loss. But the good news is she'll be up and out of this hospital in about a week. But Clarice looks at her leg and says cynically that she knows "that ain't gonna be fixed in a week." Dave says he can't lie. The leg is going to take awhile, but with the right therapy, she should get full use back of her leg. Clarice looks at her Real Estate Salesperson of the Year award which has been sent with a big bouquet of flowers on the cart near her bed, and breaks into sobs again. Making that dinner was so important to her. It's what tells everybody that she has made something of herself. Dave holds her he knows how important it was and that he's so sorry this all has happened. Just then, there is a knock at the door and a warm, friendly woman in an African Kaftan, holding a bible, enters. This is CARMEN MCATEER. Clarice quickly wipes her eyes, and apologizes for her appearance. Carmen introduces herself and tells them Reverend Wilkes from their church asked her to pay them a visit. She heads up the church's spiritual counseling program and she thought they might be in need of a little encouragement. Dave is moved by her presence, but Clarice has suddenly regained her composure and is covering her situation with smiles. Clarice says she appreciates Carmen's visit, but is sure there are other members of the church more in need of her time than she is. Carmen smiles at this, and pulls up a chair anyway. That may be, but she's not in any rush. Clarice trades a flabbergasted look with Dave.

INT. DOWNTOWN AQUATICS CLUB - DAY

The bleachers are full of cheering parents as a race is under way. Julie is standing off to the side with Bryson who is doing some stretching, and keeps looking over his shoulder. He asks Julie if she thinks he's coming. Julie looks at him with a pained expression. "I'm sorry, pal.

When I called him about the child support check, he said he and his new... girlfriend... would try to come see your race, but I don't think it's gonna happen." Bryson covers with a brave smile. "No big deal. He'll come next week." But it breaks Julie's heart. And we'll DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ALL SAINTS HOSPITAL - DAY - SOME DAYS LATER

Accompanied by Mama, a NURSE pushes Clarice in a wheelchair with her encased leg elevated toward a rented SUV as Dave follows behind loaded to the hilt with flowers and presents. When they get to the car, Mama orders him to hurry and put all that stuff down so he can help transfer her into the car. And Dave races to comply.

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

As Dave pushes Clarice's wheelchair into their bedroom, Clarice takes in the place with a sigh. She tells him if this is going to be her prison for the next several weeks she is going to have to make some changes because she is not about to let this damn leg stop her from living her life. Dave was hoping just being home would boost her spirits. But Clarice wants her cell phone. She needs to call Michelle.

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

A few days later, Clarice is sitting in bed in a silk robe with her leg up in traction. A little desk has been set up with a telephone beside the bed. Dave escorts Michelle into the room. She's carrying a box of file folders. As soon as Clarice sees her, she puts on a big, hopeful smile and thanks her for coming. She knows it's a tad inconvenient, but there should be no reason why she can't work her business from home. Dave and Michelle exchange a slightly concerned look about this, and Dave exits. And we'll DISSOLVE TO:

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY - SOMETIME LATER

Clarice has turned her away disconsolately from Dave and Michelle, who is standing at the door with her file box. She calls to Clarice that she's sorry it didn't work out, but that she's sure Clarice will be back in the office in no time, and that she will call her every day with updates on her listings. Clarice doesn't respond. Dave indicates with a nod that perhaps it's best for Michelle to just go. She does and he enters and room and sits down on the side of the bed next to Clarice. She breaks into tears. She doesn't know what she was thinking.

How in the world is she supposed sell real estate if she can't get out to schmooze clients, deliver bids and show properties? There's nothing she can do by phone except to string people along. So much for being top salesperson. By the time she gets out of this bed, she'll be lucky if they even want her back. She's never felt so powerless in her life. Dave tries to comfort her, but she just tells him to leave. She wants to be alone right now.

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

That evening, Dave opens the front door and Mama is there, suitcases in hand. She drops them at his feet and says she came the minute she heard her daughter's voice on the phone. She just knew she needed her Mama, and she announces that she will take the guest room and be here as long as Clarice needs her. Taken aback, Dave says he appreciates this, but he has arranged for his assistants to cover for him at work, and he is perfectly capable of taking care of Clarice himself. Mama won't hear of it. There's not a man alive who could do what needs to be done in a situation like this. And as she shoves past Dave to go to Clarice, he's feeling pretty useless.

INT. DOWNTOWN YMCA - GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

Brock arrives to mix it up on the court with the regular players, and he's stunned to see Dave is already there, warming up. When he asks Dave why in the world he's here and not home with Clarice, Dave just glares and says "don't ask." Brock presumes the answer: "Don't tell me... Mama." Dave just grunts the affirmative and goes up for a lay up. Brock shrugs it off and takes a shot of his own.

INT. ALL SAINTS HOSPITAL - PHYSICAL THERAPY CLINIC - DAY

A few days later, Julie is working with the same elderly client she was working with earlier, when her supervisor comes by her station. He asks her if she's still looking for some freelance hours. She replies with an obvious question of her own: Is the hospital's CEO a penny-pinching jerkwad? The comment makes him a little nervous to hear, especially in front of the patients. He shakes it off, and tells her they got a referral from the orthopedist for somebody who needs in-home P.T. Julie says it could be on Mars for all she cares... as long as they are paying customers. And we'll  
PRELAP the sound of a DOORBELL RINGING.

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

The following day, Dave answers the door and Julie is there bearing her equipment bag and a congenial smile. She introduces herself and Dave looks a little surprised. She's seen this reaction before: "I know you were expecting 'Hans and Franz' instead of little old me, but what they have in brawn I make up for in brains." Dave smiles at her pluck and invites her in.

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

As Dave escorts Julie into the bedroom, Clarice sits up a little, but does not try to cover her declining spirits like we've seen her do before. Mama is there, too, and watches Julie and her curvaceous little self like a hawk as she unpacks her gear and tries to break the ice and make Clarice feel more comfortable. Julie asks Clarice to talk about what it's been like to go through the accident and surgery and having to haul this cast around. Clarice looks at her a little skeptically. She thought Julie was here to do physical therapy, not to counsel her. Julie smiles. She's heard this question before. She says P.T. is not just about working with people's arms and legs. Clarice's mental and emotional state is just as important as her physical progress because she is going to heal up a lot more quickly and get her life back if she has her heart in. Clarice begins to tear up a little and she turns her head away from all of them. Mama says maybe this is all a little too much too soon for Clarice. But Julie thinks maybe the best thing is for her to spend some time alone with Clarice, at least for this first session, so they can get to know one another. Dave agrees and escorts a reluctant Mama out of the room.

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY - AN HOUR LATER

Julie has her gear bag in hand and Dave is showing her out. She tells him that Clarice is in a very vulnerable place right now, and that post-traumatic depression is a very normal thing in this situation. The best thing he can do is not try to judge her or expect too much progress too quickly. If he'll just provide Clarice with his own TLC, Julie will do the rest. Dave thanks her for her tremendous bedside manner and for understanding their situation. But Julie thanks him doubly for hiring her. This job came as a real God-send in her life. As she exits to her little Sentra, Dave cannot help but be deeply impressed with her. But from the living room, Mama is watching and isn't impressed one bit. And we'll DISSOLVE INTO:



A MONTAGE OF SCENES

That take place in the weeks that follow, OVER some appropriate HIP HOP or R & B SONG, as Julie's visits see Clarice making slow, painful, but beneficial progress. Lots of painful lowering and raising of her legs to keep her hips strong as Mama watches with skeptical eyes. Meanwhile, Dave does his best to cope with Clarice's continuing depression and distance from him: The rebuffed attempts to kiss her on the cheek or cuddle with her in bed at night. And he'll return to work, and to Little League practice where all the boys crowd around him, happily giving him "bash brother" high-fives, including one from Brock. And then the ORTHOPEDIC DOCTOR cuts off Clarice's cast and removes the exterior rods, and we see the wicked scars and how withered her leg has gotten. And then there are several more P.T. sessions with Julie, this time more painful than before because now she is manipulating the injured leg. We'll END the MONTAGE with a victory smile from Clarice as Julie helps her stand up with the aid of a cane out of her wheelchair. The moment brings a tear to Dave's eye as much for Clarice's smile as for her ability to stand. Even Mama's face lights up.

EXT. JOHNSON HOUSE - DAY

In the wake of Clarice's most successful therapy session, Dave is carrying Julie's equipment bag for her to her car, deeply grateful for everything she has done. Julie tells him he is more than welcome. They have a lot more work to do, but she credits Dave's loving patience with his wife as a big reason for their success so far. But as Julie gets into her car and tries to start it -- nothing. Dave takes a look under the hood and sees that her problem is probably something more than a jump-start will solve. She says she'll call someone for a ride and apologizes for having to leave her car in their driveway until she can have it towed. But Dave says nonsense, and tells her to wait right here.

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Mama and Clarice are sitting down to some tea in the kitchen when Dave rushes in and grabs his keys. He tells them about Julie's car situation and says he's going to call her a tow truck and give her a lift home. Mama says that's not necessary. The girl is perfectly capable of getting her own ride home. But Clarice countermands her mother, saying she owes Julie more than she's probably getting paid by their insurance company, and thinks it's a lovely idea for Dave to make sure she gets home. In her best passive-aggressive voice, Mama says fine, whatever Clarice thinks is best. Dave smiles and gives Clarice a kiss, which this time she accepts.

INT. DAVE'S TRUCK - TRAVELING - DAY

The sun is fading over the horizon as Dave drives Julie home. She apologizes again for the inconvenience, and is embarrassed to ask, but wonders if he might be able to swing by the Aquatics Club on the way so she can pick up her son. Dave says it's no trouble at all, but is a little taken aback. He guesses he didn't expect her to have a son. She smiles: No wedding ring, right? Dave nods, a little embarrassed. Julie says she can assure him she did family all in the proper order, but that ex-husband Ted had other plans, specifically the Ashleys. Dave says, "There were more than one?" Julie: "Oh yes, with several Ambers in between." Dave laughs and says, anyway, he didn't mean to pry. An awkward silence passes and Dave can feel her eyes on him. She finally says that she hopes he won't think her forward for saying this, but that as a single mother who's in a position to judge these things... Clarice is one lucky woman to have such a supportive and loving husband. Dave thanks her. He's just trying to uphold his end of "to love and cherish." Julie says that what every woman should hope for... a man who'll cherish her. Another silence passes before she tells him "to turn here."

And a moment later, they are stopped out front of the Aquatics Club and a confused Bryson is sliding in next to Julie, which means she has to squeeze up next to Dave, which is a little awkward for a second, but then not so much. Julie makes the introductions between Dave and Bryson, who then wonders what's up with their legendary Sentra. Julie says it's an ugly story she hopes doesn't get any uglier. Dave soon learns from Julie about Bryson's swimming prowess and admits that he knows everything about all sports utilizing balls, but doesn't know diddly about competitive swimming. Bryson says he pretty much can relate, but the other way around. Dave thinks it might be cool sometime for Bryson to come out and work out with his Little League team. Maybe learn a little about the game of baseball. To Dave's surprise, Bryson jumps at the chance. "Can I, Mom? Can I?" Julie says she guesses so, if it's not too much trouble for Dave, who says not if Bryson doesn't mind standing out a little. The league is an all "Eastside" league, if they know what he means. Bryson says maybe he'll work on his tan first, which makes them all laugh.

Dave pulls up in front of Julie's modest little house. They both thank him, and against her protests, Dave tells Julie not to worry about her car. He knows a guy who knows a guy who he thinks can fix it quickly for a pretty good price. And they trade cell phone numbers so he can let her know. And as Dave drives off, there is a spark in his eyes we haven't seen before.

EXT. JOHNSON HOUSE - GARAGE - NIGHT

And that night, Julie's car has been pushed into Dave's garage and is up on jacks. And Dave is working by work-light under the hood.

EXT. JULIE AND BRYSON'S BUNGLAOW - NIGHT - A LITTLE LATER

Dave places Julie's car keys and a handwritten note in a mailbox near her front door, before turning and crossing to Brock's Beamer which is waiting out front. And as he does, we now see Julie's Sentra parked in her driveway. As Dave gets into the car, Brock, who is dressed like he was already in bed, tells Dave "that must be some physical therapist." Dave just nods and thanks him for the ride. A beat later, the porch light comes on, and the door opens and Julie has the note in her hand. And we get to read it: "Didn't want to wake you. You just needed a new solenoid. Was able to fix it myself. Thanks... Dave Johnson." As she watches the Beamer drive off, Julie just smiles a smile that says "wow."

INT. EMMANUEL FELLOWSHIP CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY

The following Sunday, Mama and Clarice are dressed in their Sunday finery and Dave escorts them into the sanctuary. Clarice makes her way in slowly with the aid of her cane. It's a great lift for Clarice as she is greeted by several PARISHIONERS who say they've been praying for her. Pastor Wilkes, who looks a little older than when we first saw him, also greets her warmly. And then we'll transition into:

A SERIES OF SHOTS

Of the service as it unfolds OVER some BEAUTIFUL PRAISE or GOSPEL SONG: The wonderful Gospel choir in all its glory, the preaching of the charismatic Pastor Wilkes, and the nods of affirmation and call-and-response of the congregation -- including Dave, Clarice and Mama who join in on the worship. Then we'll DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. EMMANUEL FELLOWSHIP CHURCH - DAY - LATER

And now, as services are letting out, Dave helps Clarice out into the sunshine where even more parishioners greet them. And suddenly Dave's attention is drawn to a curvy Caucasian WOMAN with her back turned to him. From behind she looks an awful lot like Julie. He taps her on the shoulder, calling her name, and then is surprised when she turns around and it's not Julie.

He apologizes, saying he thought she was someone else. The woman shrugs it off, but the little *faux pas* does not go unnoticed by Clarice or Mama, who exchange the briefest of looks, before Clarice puts on a smile for the colorfully Afrocentric Carmen who is so happy to see her.

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATER

It's one of Mama's traditional Sunday Dinners with all the fixings -- turkey, stuffing and sweet potato pie -- for the three of them. Only there's not much conversation happening as they eat in silence. Clarice tries to start up a discussion about how fine the service was, but Dave's reply isn't much more than a preoccupied "amen." Clarice can feel Mama's eyes on her, but when she looks at her, Mama is already up and clearing the dishes.

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

That night, as Dave and Clarice are getting ready for bed, Clarice screws up her courage and says something's been troubling her. She says she knows she's been depressed and distant from him since the accident, but now he's starting to pull away from her and that scares her. Dave agrees that it scares him, too, but that he doesn't know what to do about it. She goes out on an emotional limb and suggests that maybe they could see somebody to talk about it. Dave puts his arms around her and says he thinks it's a good idea, but the look in his eyes says he's not so sure.

INT. EMMANUEL FELLOWSHIP CHURCH - COUNSELING CENTER - DAY

And a few days later, Clarice and an apprehensive Dave are in Carmen's office. On her wall is a framed portrait of a black Jesus, as well diplomas and certificates verifying that she is an expert in marriage and family counseling. Carmen begins by asking them each to give their view of what is going on in their marriage. Clarice goes first and by the time she is done with her list of things that are troubling her, it's clear that Dave has shut down. When Carmen asks him for his side the equation, Dave figures what's the use of going through his list, since there's never going to be any pleasing Clarice and her Mama. Carmen encourages him to give it a try anyway -- and then it all comes out. How, the one thing that gives him the most fulfillment in life "is beneath what a black man should want to make of himself." And then the big one: How Clarice is afraid that having children will keep her from being somebody. And that triggers Clarice's ire. If Dave had his way, it would be all fun and games with children running every which way.

But black folk have to work ten times harder than anybody in this world to succeed and make a difference, and sometimes that means painful trade-offs. Carmen tries to help them understand that they've been through a very traumatic life episode with the accident, and that honesty can be a painful, but beneficial process. But Dave says what's the point? It always ends up in the same place -- with him not measuring up. He tells Clarice he'll be waiting for her in the car and he exits. Clarice is deeply discouraged by this, but Carmen encourages her not to give up. Sometimes old patterns of living need to be purged before new ways can be discovered. Before the flower comes the seed, and the seed has to die before the flower can bloom.

EXT. URBAN PARK - DAY

Some days later, Dave is running their team through some infield-outfield drills, but Marcus is noticeably absent. Brock gets off his cell phone, saying he just called Marcus' mother who said she's not going to send him to practice anymore because Darnell has been harassing the boy around the neighborhood for playing for an Uncle Tom coach. Dave clenches his teeth and says "that fool is bound and determined to make sure his kid turns out just like him." Just then, they notice Julie and Bryson striding toward him and waving. Brock wonders what this is all about, and Dave says he was just being courteous and never thought they would take him up on his offer. But as he checks Julie out, Brock says he can see why Dave was so eager to replace her solenoid. Dave tells him to put his eyes back in his head and then greets them. Bryson says he was hoping he could watch them practice, but Dave says there's no watching in baseball. He tosses him a mitt and points to right field and says "get out there, Sawyer." As Bryson rushes out, Julie thanks Dave for doing this, and Dave brushes it off, saying it will be a snap. But as Julie takes a seat in the bleachers and Dave sees the queer stares his black players are giving the white kid, his eyes betray that he's not so sure about that.

As it's quickly clear that Bryson's pretty raw in the talent department, but he's a quick study and soon he is tracking down fly balls. And the black kids ease up on the hazing because Dave sends them a message by drilling the ball at them a lot harder than normal. And when Bryson takes his turn at bat, the snaps from the black boys resume as he whiffs on a few pitches - until he sends a gapper to the fence. As he rounds the bases, JAYLEN, who's been playing catcher, gives Bryson a huge high-five.

And we'll CUT TO the end of practice. Bryson is sky-high and jawing with several of the black kids. And Julie is almost in tears as she offers Dave her sincerest thanks.

She tells him he has no idea what this means to her. Before Dave can stop him, Brock breaks up this little love fest by volunteering to walk Julie and Bryson to their car "because it's starting to get dark this isn't the safest hood for a bunch of white people." As they say their goodbyes and head off with Brock, Brock turns back and winks at Dave, which irritates the hell out of him.

INT. DOWNTOWN HOUSING PROJECT - HALLWAY NIGHT - LATER

A BLACK HAND is knocking on a beat-up looking door in a trash-strewn corridor. The door opens and a red-eyed Darnell is standing in a grungy apartment, reeking of marijuana. Nasty-sounding RAP plays from a stereo somewhere, and we can see the promiscuous-looking girl we remember from earlier on the couch adjusting her dress so as not to show her goods. Darnell asks "what the hell you want?" And we reverse angles and now see it's Dave at the door. He levels his low voice at Darnell, telling him he can flush his own life down the toilet if he wants to, but not to take his son with him. Darnell's eyes are cold and hard. He tells Dave he has been a white boot-licker since back in high school. It's the only reason Dave got a scholarship and he didn't. Dave says who he chooses for friends is none of Darnell's business. And Darnell better knock that black victim chip off his shoulder, and stop blaming everybody else for his problems. "It wasn't no white man that forced you to get caught selling chronic and lost you your scholarship." Dave adds that from now on, he's going to pick up Marcus for practice and Darnell better make damn well sure he stays out of the way. With that Dave turns and crosses off, but not before Darnell tags him with a threatening epithet and slams his door.

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

That night, when Dave returns home, Mama is knitting and Clarice is doing some of her painful home exercises. Mama asks Dave if he wants her to heat up a plate for him, but he declines. He's not hungry. Just then, his cell phone RINGS. He looks at the caller ID, and says it's one of his accounts. He says he'll take it outside and exits out the front door.

EXT. JOHNSON HOUSE - NIGHT - BEAT LATER

Dave takes the call in the driveway. It's Julie. She tells him she's sorry to bother him at home, but that Bryson wanted to thank him for allowing him to come to baseball practice by inviting Dave to one of his swim meets some Saturday. Julie says she would understand if it's asking too much, but Dave tells her not to be silly. He would like that very much.

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT - SAME TIME

Clarice has come to the kitchen window and is watching Dave outside. And while she can't make out Dave's conversation through the window, she does see him laugh happily once or twice. She then turns and sees Mama watching her from the doorway. Mama says she doesn't know what's up with that man, but having been through this with Clarice's daddy more than once, she can take a wild guess. As Mama turns and goes back into the living room, Clarice doesn't know what to say.

INT. PRIVATE MASSAGE ROOM - NIGHT

Dave is lying on his stomach on a massage table in a small room lit only by candles and accented with soft music. His hind parts are covered by a small towel, and his back is covered with oil as petite, but strong Caucasian female hands are rubbing on him in a very suggestive way, stopping just shy of his towel line. And though we'll shoot it very tightly and discreetly, we'll then be aware that the woman giving him the massage is clad only in a sexy bathrobe as she whispers something in his ear. And then Dave will turn over on his back and look up into the eyes of the woman who is now over him. It's Julie, and as Dave moans with pleasure, something jolts him, and we'll SMASH CUT TO:

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT - SAME TIME

Dave waking up in bed to see that Clarice is shaking him. She asks him if he's okay. He was moaning in his sleep. She thought maybe he was having a bad dream. Trying to hide his embarrassment and the fact that he is aroused, Dave turns on his side and tells her she's right. He was having a bad dream. As he feigns going back to sleep, Clarice looks at him for a long beat. She knows something is amiss. After a beat, she quietly grabs his cell phone off the night stand and looks at the call log. And there it is, an entry for earlier that evening: "JULIE SAWYER." She slowly puts the phone back on the night stand and closes her eyes as if to block out her growing fears.

INT. HASTINGS PROPERTIES AND REAL ESTATE OFFICE - DAY

The following week, Clarice, dressed smartly in her nicest pants suit enters with the aid of her cane. When all her co-workers and agents see her, they spontaneously applaud and surround her with happy hugs and chants of "welcome back." Clarice accepts their gesture with sincere, but modest gratitude, saying all she wants to do is get back to work.

INT. CLARICE'S PRIVATE OFFICE - DAY - LATER

From her desk outside Clarice's office, sassy Michelle has been watching Clarice bury herself in work and burn up the phone lines, and she decides it's time to put a stop to that. She enters with two sodas and tells Clarice she needs to pace herself or she's going to burn out. When Clarice says she's doing just fine, but Michelle's girlfriend-radar kicks in and she looks her in the eye. Something is wrong and they need to talk. Clarice tears up and admits to Michelle that she and Dave are having huge communication problems. And she also thinks he is having an affair, and she doesn't know what to do. Michelle says first things first. Until she knows it, don't assume worst. And if it is happening, she needs to do everything in her power to keep her marriage together. There is healing possible after affairs. Trust her, Dave is too good a man to lose. And she tells a little of her personal experience in the marital infidelity department and how it was she who had the roving eye, not her Todd. And how the old lady at her church, MIZ IDA, set her back on the straight and narrow with Jesus. And how she is happier now in her marriage than she has ever been... not to mention the bedroom is pretty good, too. With a tearful smile, Clarice thanks her for her encouragement. Michelle is a great assistant, and an even better friend.

INT. DAVE'S TRUCK - DAY

At the same time, from his vantage point parked on the street out front of the Downtown Aquatics Club, Dave can see families entering the building from a jammed parking lot. He sighs and starts his engine. He's about to shift it into gear when he changes his mind and turns off the key. He screws up his courage and opens his door.

INT. DOWNTOWN AQUATICS CLUB - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Dave weaves his way through a throng of parents and their swimmers before seeing Bryson come out of the locker room in his brightly colored sweats with the rest of team and cross over to where Julie and some of the other team parents are waiting. Dave makes his way over to them, and says he hopes it's not a problem for a baseball coach to crash a swim party. They are both stunned and very pleased to see him there. A few moments later, Julie and Dave are sitting in the bleachers, and Bryson steps up onto the starting blocks along with the rest of his 50-meter competitors. Julie thanks Dave again for coming, and tells him that she's never seen Bryson so nervous about his event. Dave says there's no reason for Bryson to feel like he has to impress Dave.



Julie says maybe not, but try to convince Bryson of that. It comes with the territory of never having had his dad come to one of his meets. And then the STARTER GUN fires and the race is on, and it's all cheering and excitement and whooping it up as Dave and Julie root Bryson on to a very tight victory. And Dave finds himself giving her a congratulatory hug, and then they both race to where Bryson is climbing out of the pool and the hugs start all over again. Dave tells Bryson swimming looks more intense than any sport he ever played. And Bryson happily warns him that he better take his heart medication because it's an all-day invitational meet and that was just his first heat. He still has another heat before lunch, and then comes the gold medal heat later this afternoon if he's still in it. He then puts Dave on the spot by inviting him to go "carbo-loading" in between heats. Julie admonishes Bryson for being too forward. Dave probably has other plans. But Dave tells her not really, and that he's always loved carbo-loading.

INT. DOWNTOWN PIZZA PARLOR - DAY - LATER

While Bryson and a few of the other swimmers are engaged in video games, Dave and Julie are enjoying the last slivers of a pizza together in a quiet booth. And they chat very freely and openly. Dave has never been able to talk to Clarice like this -- without condemnation. Julie shares about how impossible it is being a single, working mother and finding either the time to date, or the kind of guys she would want to date. She's tried those internet match-making websites, one of those speed-dating events where you meet two dozen guys for three minutes each. She even started going to church more often, thinking she might find a decent guy there. But it's always ends up in the same place. All the good guys are taken. It's an awkward moment in the conversation and the subtext hangs in the air. She turns it around by asking Dave about his work. And Dave says "the building maintenance thing" is about as boring as it sounds. He then tells her what he would really be doing if he had his druthers -- fulltime coaching -- but it just has never been in the cards. Julie says that's too bad. She loves her job, and she has always believed people are happiest when they are doing what they were created to do. Dave thanks her for saying that. He has always wanted to believe that, but has two women in his life who think rather differently -- which drops the conversation into another awkward lull. But before either one of them can figure out where to go with it next, the door opens and Brock enters. Dave doesn't exactly wave him down, and when Brock sees them there, he crosses over, slightly confused and having a hard time hiding his concern. He says he was just grabbing something to go and what a surprise to see them there.

Julie jumps up and covers for Dave by saying Dave was kind enough to come to see Bryson's swim meet and the team ordered too many pizzas so they needed an extra empty stomach. She excuses herself to go check on Bryson, and Brock looks at Dave for a long moment, like "what the hell, brother?" But Dave's indignant. What is Brock doing -- following him? Besides, he saw the way Brock was drooling over Julie the other day at practice so don't get all high and mighty. Brock doesn't back down. He says whether he drools is not the point. He's allowed because he's not married and in jeopardy of doing something stupid and ruining his life. Dave tells him that maybe his life isn't so great, that he's a big boy and, best friend or no, just stay out of it. Which hurts Brock so he says "fine" and shuts up. Dave says he has to get back to work and he crosses over to Julie and Bryson, apologizing for having to bug out early, but he'll have to take a rain check on Bryson's other heats, but hopes he gets the gold. Bryson says he'll give it his best shot, and Dave gives both him and his mom a friendly squeeze before exiting the parlor.

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Later that afternoon, as Dave comes home, Clarice is waiting for him in the bedroom. She's curled up seductively on the bed in her sexiest baby-doll. She pats the bed next to her, and tells Dave that she knows one of their problems is that it's been far too long since they had any romance, and she's finally feeling up to it. Dave smiles hesitantly at this, and sits down on the bed with his back to her. She comes up behind him, and puts her arms around his neck and nibbles and whispers in his ear, but no matter how hard she tries, it's clear the magic is not in the air for Dave. And she finally flops down on the bed, discouraged. He says it's not her fault. He just had way too tough of a day with his accounts. It's a deeply painful rejection and Clarice explodes on him. She knows he is having an affair with Julie. At first, Dave denies it, but then as she keeps at him, bringing up all the little looks and him taking calls in private, he finally admits it. "All right, damn it, I think I have feelings for the girl. I've never met anyone like her and she actually appreciates me for who I am. But it ain't no affair -- at least not yet." Clarice looks more wounded than ever. In some ways that's worse because it's an affair of the heart and she can't compete with that. There's a long silence before she asks the dreaded question: "Are we over, David?" Dave looks at her with tears forming in his own eyes. "I don't know, Reesie. I need to do some thinking." And as he exits, we PULL IN and see that he has forgotten his cell phone on the night stand. And we'll go into:

A SERIES OF SHOTS

Over some appropriate soulful R & B SONG, Dave will return to the empty downtown YMCA gymnasium where he'll shoot hoops all by himself. And he'll push himself really hard. And then Darnell will show up with the same idea. And he'll pick up a loose ball off of one Dave's missed shots and fire it back at him -- as if it to say "let's do this" -- an obvious challenge to a little one-on-one game. And then they mix it up hard, taking each other to the rim, sweating all over the floor, busting each other's lips open with elbows and wild moves. This is the equivalent of a boxing match with a basketball. And then we'll INTERCUT with the Aquatics Center where we see Bryson step up to the starting blocks for his final heat. And the starter gun goes off, and he's in the water. And we're on an expectant Julie holding her breath. And then we're under water seeing Bryson slice through liquid. And then he makes his turn and heads back the other direction. And then he hits the wall hard in first place. And we're on Julie again, jumping up and down and hugging other parents in the bleachers. And then as Julie looks back down at the pool, something's wrong. Bryson's not getting out of the water. And nobody seems to notice. And then she's fighting to get through the crowds as some of the coaches are jumping in the water into Bryson's lane. And then we'll INTERCUT with Dave and Clarice's bedroom as Clarice sits in her bathrobe, her eyes red with tears. And then Dave's cell phone is ringing on the night stand, but before Clarice can pick it up, Mama gets to it first, and she sees Julie's ID come up on the screen and pushes the "power off" button with a self-righteous look on her face. And we'll END the SERIES OF SHOTS as:

INT. DOWNTOWN YMCA - GYMNASIUM - NIGHT - SAME TIME

Dave and Darnell are completely spent from their game of one-on-one and they collapse into sitting heaps against the wall. Darnell finally breaks the silence. "So you think all the shit I been through is all my own fault." Dave tells him shit comes down on everybody. It's all about how people choose to react. Darnell wonders what makes Dave such an expert. Dave says, "Trust me, you ain't the only brother with problems. In fact, you got no idea how good you have it with a terrific son like Marcus in your life." At least Darnell has a kid. At the rate Dave's headed, he ain't ever gonna be a father. Darnell smiles. "And here I been jealous of you for fifteen damn years for robbing my scholarship from me." Dave says he guesses that about makes them even.

A few beats pass before Darnell asks him the million-dollar question: "So when the shit come down on you, how do you choose to react?" Dave looks at him sadly and says he wishes he could answer, but right now he doesn't have a damn clue.

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

And when Dave returns home, depleted and defeated, Mama is there by Clarice's side and she is loaded for bear. She rips Dave a new one. He can have his little white hoochie-mama if he wants to, but she will not let her daughter be hurt. Dave doesn't even try to defend himself. He just doesn't have anything left. And then the house phone RINGS, and Clarice goes to answer it. It's Brock and he has some news that he needs to get to Dave. Clarice hands him the phone. Brock tells him that Julie has been trying Dave's cell phone for an hour and finally reached out to him when she couldn't get through. Dave asks what happened. Haltingly, Brock says there was an accident at the pool. Dave wants to know what kind of accident. And now Clarice and Mama's ears perk up. Brock tells Dave he doesn't know how to say this, but in his last race, Bryson went into the wall too hard and hit his head. They took him to All Saints, but he never regained consciousness. "He's gone, Dave. He's gone." Dave slowly hangs up the phone. He looks like he's been punched in the gut. Clarice wants to know what's wrong, what's happened? Dave recounts what he knows, cryptically. Clarice says, "Oh, Sweet Jesus." Dave says he has to go to the hospital. Somehow, he has to be there for Julie. Clarice says she agrees and that she'll go with him. But Dave can't believe this. What does she think he's gonna do -- hit on a woman who has just lost her son?! Then stern-eyed Mama weighs in. Now she's sorry for this poor young woman who lost her boy, but if Dave goes to see her alone, she's not about to let Clarice stick around and be humiliated. Dave glares at Clarice. Is this true? Clarice's hurt gets the best of her and she doesn't say anything. And Dave turns to leave, saying Clarice needs to do what she has to do, and he is going to do the same.

ACT THREE

INT. ALL SAINTS HOSPITAL - LITTLE CHAPEL - NIGHT

At the hospital, Dave finds Julie completely bereft in the front pew at the little prayer chapel. He goes to her and takes her into his big arms. And she begins sobbing that her "baby's gone, her baby boy is gone," and he holds her for a long time without saying anything.

He then tells her that Brock finally reached him, and he is so sorry he didn't have his phone with him. But what he's most sorry is for is not staying around for the rest of the meet. Maybe, somehow, if he had been there, he could have done something. Julie says it happened so fast. Everybody was cheering after Bryson had won his gold medal race. She just thought he was goofing off, staying in the pool. And then his coaches were jumping into the pool, and then they were trying to give him mouth-to-mouth, and the ambulance came and they were riding to the hospital and they were still trying to revive him. But he was gone. It was like a nightmare she couldn't wake up from, and the thing that hurts so much is that she wasn't there with him in his final moment, which elicits another round of sobbing. Dave tries to console her, saying there was nothing that she could have done. It was a freak accident. Now Bryson is in God's hands. Julie says she wishes she could believe that, but she doesn't know what to think. She feels like God is punishing her. How could God take her baby boy away from her? It's then, that Julie's ex-husband TED and his girlfriend KATE rush in. And it's clear Ted is going to be an emotional wreck, sobbing about all his regrets and not being there for Bryson and for being a selfish bastard -- which forces Julie to get hold of her own emotions and take control of the situation. She tells Ted she knows how much it hurts, but believe it or not, she doesn't give a damn about Ted's regrets. She is going to need every ounce of her energy to get through all the important decisions that have to be made. Other than that, nothing else matters right now. Ted pulls it together enough to say he understands and he will do whatever she wants. After Ted and his girlfriend exit, Julie hides in Dave's arms again and sobs. "What I am gonna do?" Dave says he doesn't know, but pledges that he will be by her side every step of the way.

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Meanwhile, a numb Clarice is sitting on the edge of her bed, frozen. Mama enters with her own suitcases and orders her daughter to put her stuff together. Until they figure out what to do, Clarice is not staying here with that man now. Clarice is going to move in with her. But Clarice just looks at her mother. She says she appreciates Mama's support, but this isn't like her running in from playing with a boo-boo on her knee that her Mama can fix. Clarice agrees she needs some space to think and make some decisions, but that it shouldn't happen at Mama's house. She needs to think this through on her own. Mama looks offended, and tries to protest this, but it's clear Clarice has made up her mind. Mama gives up trying to convince her, but reminds her that she's a strong, independent woman who doesn't need a man to take care of her.

INT. JULIE AND BRYSON'S BUNGLAOW - NIGHT - LATER

It's 1 a.m. when Dave opens the door and escorts Julie into her tiny little house. It's modest, but warm. And Julie's MOTHER is there waiting for her. And Julie rushes into her arms and Dave realizes there is nothing more that he can do for her tonight. And she gives him another embrace before he bids her "goodnight."

INT. BUDGET MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT - LATER

A little later, a numbed, confused Clarice checks into a lonely motel room with one suitcase. She runs a tub of hot water and takes a long bath, hoping to get some clarity. And then a little later, she flops down on the bed in her towel and lays there for a long time, not moving, trying to fall asleep, but failing. Finally, she grabs the Gideon Bible out of the night stand and at first leafs through it mindlessly before feeling a tug on her soul to do more than that. And then she looks deeper, hoping to find some wisdom, some truth that will help her figure things out. And she lands on a passage in Ecclesiastes that haunts her. And she reads it aloud: "There is one alone, and he has neither child nor brother... neither is his eye satisfied with riches, for it is vanity. Two are better than one because they have good reward of their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow, but woe to him that is alone when he falls. If two lie down together, then they have heat, but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him. And a three-fold cord is not easily broken." As she closes the book, thinking, trying to remember where she's heard these words before.

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A little later, when Dave walks into the darkened living room and sees that Clarice has gone, he sighs sadly.

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT - MOMENT LATER

And the loneliness is worse when he enters the bedroom and sees drawer in Clarice's vanity open and empty. Without taking his clothes off, he slowly lies down on their marriage bed and stares at the ceiling, thinking. This is very sad, but he wonders if maybe it's for the best, after all. And we'll DISSOLVE TO the sunlight of morning peeking in through a window.

INT. BUDGET MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Only it's coming through the window of Clarice's motel room. And she wakes up, disoriented at first, and then remembers where she is and why, and she pops out of bed with a sense of mission.

INT. CLARICE'S PRIVATE OFFICE - DAY

When Clarice shows up for work, this time she's not trying to hide anything. Michelle can see it in her eyes. She's left Dave, hasn't she? Clarice nods through her tears. And after she has recounted all that has transpired, Michelle tells her that she is not shacking up by herself in some no-tell motel and she is not moving in with her Mama, which would be worse. She is going to be a guest at her and Todd's house for as long as she needs to figure out her next move. Clarice thanks her, and then wonders something aloud. In all of Michelle's soul-searching when she and Todd were separated, did Michelle ever come across this strange verse in Ecclesiastes "about two are better than one?" Michelle says she's been focused on all the verses that talk about grace and forgiveness, but she likes the sound of that one, too, because two is definitely better than one when it comes to making love. When Clarice looks at her a little cross-eyed, Michelle says "What? God created sex for wives and their husbands, girl. You don't think he meant for it be fun?" Clarice has to smile at her friend's lust for life.

INT. EMMANUEL FELLOWSHIP CHURCH - PRIVATE ANTEROOM - DAY

A somber Julie is in a black dress and is with her mother and a few of her family members apparently waiting for the start of the funeral. Dave enters, dressed in a black suit, and Julie moves over to him. She thanks him for helping her with funeral arrangements these past few days and for helping her find a church to hold it in. Dave says he hasn't been the most loyal parishioner over the years, but he Pastor Wilkes has been his pastor since... he was a teenager and he couldn't think of anybody more loving and wise than him to do Bryson's service.

INT. EMMANUEL FELLOWSHIP CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY

And a little later, as Dave escorts Julie out of the anteroom into the sanctuary where Bryson's coffin is resting among flower bouquets and a wonderful photography. And it takes Julie's breath away how many people have showed up. Dave is deeply moved to.

They see Bryson's teammates and coaches from his swim team all there, wearing their swim team jackets. And then Dave sees that Brock has showed up with several of the boys from their little league team all dressed in their little suit, including Marcus, Jaylen and Darius. After Dave escorts Julie and her mother to their seats in front, he crosses over to where Brock is sitting with the boys. Dave can't really get any words out as Brock wraps him in a big bear hug and apologizes to him for sticking his nose in where it didn't belong. But Dave tells him that's what friends do, and while he doesn't know what he's going to do yet, he appreciates that Brock has his back. And then as the funeral gets under way, Dave sits up front with Julie and her parents as Pastor Wilkes begins the service Dave and doesn't see that Clarice has slipped into the back row. And we'll go into:

A SERIES OF SHOTS

As the service unfolds OVER just the right piece of MUSIC, we'll see the Gospel Choir again singing some beautiful anthem, and then members of Bryson's swim team come up to fete him, and his swim coach comes up to read a eulogy, and as it all happens, we'll see the tearful reactions of all our main players. And then we'll DISSOLVE TO:

INT. EMMANUEL FELLOWSHIP CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY

Moments later, as Pastor Wilkes is concluding his remarks. And he says that there are no good earthly reasons for why tragedies happen, but that in God's sphere, there is a season for everything under the sun. He then goes onto quote from Ecclesiastes. He tells Julie that at a time like this, two are better than one. But three is even better than two... because God makes up a three-fold cord that is never easily broken by the travails that this life throws at all of us. And he wants her to know that this church stands ready to encircle her with a three-fold cord of love protection in the days ahead as she grieves the loss of her boy. And as she an amazed Clarice listens, a memory comes over her.

INT. EMMANUEL FELLOWSHIP CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY (1994)

She FLASHES BACK to this same church a dozen years earlier as a younger Pastor Wilkes binds he gold-braided cord around her and Dave's shoulders on their wedding day.

INT. EMMANUEL FELLOWSHIP CHURCH - SANCTUARY - (PRESENT DAY)

And as we return to the present, tears stream down Clarice's face, she now understands the message that has been knocking on her heart.



In the front row, a familiar memory has also come over Dave, and for some reason he finds himself compelled to turn around. It's then he sees Clarice at the back of the church. And she nods to him through her tears. And as he turns back to the service, we can see Dave is more confused than ever. And we'll DISSOLVE TO:

INT. EMMANUEL FELLOWSHIP CHURCH - COUNSELING CENTER - DAY

A little later, Clarice is still in her funeral clothes as she waits in the empty receiving office of the counseling center. And then Carmen enters, surprised to see her. Clarice apologizes for not making an appointment, but she was hoping Carmen might have a few moments for her. Carmen's smile says absolutely.

INT. EMMANUEL FELLOWSHIP CHURCH - COUNSELING CENTER - DAY

Sometime later, Clarice has given Carmen her entire story. Carmen tells her she believes it was no accident that Clarice fell upon that verse in Ecclesiastes. And no accident that God has used her accident as a chance to transform her life. What the writer of the book, King Solomon, was talking about was "the buddy system," the idea of safety in numbers. One is not only the loneliest number in this world full of snares. It's also the riskiest, and there's not a human being alive who doesn't need the buddy system. Clarice says that's not what her mother taught her. Carmen suggests that maybe it's time for Clarice to start doing some of the talking in her relationship with her mother instead of all the listening. Clarice looks at her as if that is a foreign concept, but then something dawns on her.

INT. JULIE AND BRYSON'S BUNGALOW - DAY

It's late in the afternoon, and Dave has followed the funeral party back to Julie's little house, where her family and friends have gathered for quiet grieving and a little food. Suddenly, Julie looks at him and whispers to him that she feels as if she is suffocating. She asks Dave if he would drive her back to the cemetery before it gets dark so she can spend some time at Bryson's grave without anybody hovering over her. And he, of course, is happy to do that.

INT. MAMA'S LITTLE HOUSE - DAY

Meanwhile, Mama opens the door of her quaint little Craftsman in a neighborhood full of similar homes. And she is surprised to see Clarice standing there. But she's also relieved.

Finally the girl has come to her senses and come home to Mama. As for Dave, good riddance to bad rubbish. But Clarice says that's not why she's here and has something she needs to say to Mama. She tells her mother that she's thankful for the many wonderful lessons she taught her, but there are some lessons that need to be dead and buried, and maybe her daddy's leaving shouldn't just be blamed on him. When Mama tries to protest that she will not suffer disrespect, Clarice stands up to her. In all Mama's lectures about being strong-willed, ambitious and independent and how to train up a man to be a proper husband so he won't hurt you, Mama forgot to teach her how to be a proper wife. But more than that, she forgot to teach her how to be a friend, whether it is in a relationship or a marriage. And from now on, she intends to learn how to do that, and she hopes it's not too late for a Mama to learn how to change her stripes, too. And with that, Clarice kisses her on the cheek, and walks out, leaving Mama speechless.

INT. DAVE'S TRUCK - TRAVELING - NIGHT

As they're driving to the cemetery, it's now officially dark, and Julie suddenly says she's changed her mind about wanting to go to Bryson's grave. She asks him to take her to the overlook outside the city. It's the place she and Bryson used to go to look at the stars together. Dave says sure.

EXT. CITY OVERLOOK - NIGHT

And moments later, when they arrive, Julie gets out of the truck and looks up to the stars. She then climbs into the back of his truck and lies down in order to get the view she and Bryson always got. She then asks him to put some music on the radio, and he's not sure where she's going with all of this, but he complies. He stands by the side of the truck for a long moment before she looks up at him and asks him if he will lie down next to her. She says she just wants to feel something, anything, besides the hurt she is feeling right now, and needs to feel him next to her. Dave's blood is now pumping, and against his better judgment, he says okay. And after another quiet moment of looking up at the stars, she snuggles up against him and whispers that it's okay if he wants to kiss her. Dave hesitates for a long moment, and then gives into the temptation, and soon they are entwined in a kissing, groping, passionate embrace. It is at about the point of no return when the radio begins playing "Three Times a Lady," and something inside Dave pushes back from the brink. He pulls away from Julie, frozen with guilt. He apologizes, but says as much as he wants to go through with this, he just can't. It would be wrong in more ways than one. Julie sits up and buries her head in her hands. She realizes how wrong she was to manipulate him like this.

But Dave tells her she's the last one who needs to apologize, especially with all that's happened in the last few days. He's the one who needs to apologize for flirting with a fire that would only end up burning them both. And he wants her to know that he knows that God has somebody special out there already picked out for her. It just can't be him. Through her tears, Julie tells him that she hopes Clarice figures out what a good man she really has. Dave says all he knows is that he has to be the man he's supposed to be and he's not sure he's really ever been that man until this moment.

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

And when Dave returns home, he's surprised to find Clarice there, sitting in the lamp light, reading a bible. They both try to speak at once, and then he defers to her. She says she's been doing a lot of soul-searching, but the bottom line is she wants him to know she is home to stay, no matter what he decides to do. And Dave says he is here for the same reason. And she rushes into his arms and he holds her for a long time. He says he knows they have a lot that they need to say to each other. She smiles through her tears, saying she'll put on a pot of coffee because she has a feeling it's going to be a very long night, and we'll DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. LITTLE LEAGUE FIELD - DAY

Some weeks later, and Dave and Brock's team is in the middle of an important game. If they win, they advance to the playoff tournament. In the bleachers, Clarice is sitting next to Julie -- a peace, perhaps even a friendship has formed -- and they cheer for Dave's team together. And then as Dave is giving Marcus a pep talk before he steps up the plate, Dave notices somebody else has come to cheer. It's Darnell, looking clean and sober. Dave points him out to Marcus who gets a big smile on his face... and promptly steps up to get the game winning hit.

And following the game, there are interesting cords-of-three strands forming all over the ball field. Darnell stands with Marcus at pitcher's mound. He tells him he knows he hasn't been the kind of father Marcus deserves because nobody ever taught him how to be one. But he's willing to learn if Marcus will be patient with him. And Marcus asks him if he knows how to hit fly balls? Darnell smiles and tells Marcus to get out in left field. And then Darnell proceeds to hit his son a pop fly.

And then Brock approaches Julie in the bleachers. He wonders if she would like him to walk her to her car, because this is not the safest neighborhood for a couple of white people. She laughs and says sure.

And as they walk off, she says she was wondering if he likes video games. He smiles and says sure, as long as they come with pizza. She says "it's a date, then?" He says enthusiastically, "Yes, please."

And finally, Dave and Clarice are sitting on the bench in the dugout. She says she is very impressed with his coaching skills and apologizes for not knowing it until now. She also tells him that he's going to be a really good father. Dave says thanks... someday hopefully. Clarice breaks into a broad smile, and says, "Try seven and half months from now." And as Dave's jaw drops, we'll FADE OUT.

THE END