

THE BARKING SPIDER

By

Robert Gately and Lois Gately

www.rgately.com
gately@verizon.net
610-866-7965 (H) or 610-730-9481 (C)
2545 Black River Road
Bethlehem, PA 18015

FADE IN:

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL TRACK - DAY

Dozens of STUDENTS stretch, run-in-place and otherwise create an atmosphere of a pending track meet. Among the students, LANA, 18, in sweats, walks and stretches at the same time.

Close by, GOODMAN, 18, a foot taller, also warms up. She snarls at a competitor for no reason except to intimidate.

LANA (V.O.)

Today everyone is talking about Goodman, wondering if she'll be the first High School State Champion three years in a row in the 800 meters. She got a scholarship to State, but the coach there is being investigated for unfair recruiting practices. Minor infractions.

Lana looks up in the stands at JOE GREGORY (late-60s), mixing in with the crowd, arm-pumping for Lana's benefit.

LANA (V.O.)

But I'm getting ahead of myself. This is a story about my grandfather and me, actually. And it begins a lot earlier.

INT. MIDDLE CLASS LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

A younger Joe Gregory (50) lays on a couch watching TV. A photo of a smiling woman and an urn sit on the fireplace mantle. A picture of the Eiffel Tower hangs over the urn.

PRESENT-DAY LANA (V.O.)

By his own accounts, this was not the best times in Gramps' life. Nana died before I was born. She always wanted to go to Paris. And he had regrets for not taking her there ... for not being more gracious when she was alive. He just sat and watched TV a lot after she died. He missed her.

Joe's eyes droop. His cell phone rings. Agitated, he opens his eyes, takes a look at who's calling, then answers it.

STEVEN (V.O.)

Hi, Dad. What are you doing,
watching TV again?

(Continues talking, muted)

PRESENT-DAY LANA (V.O.)

Uncle Steven checked up on Gramps a
lot, a Gramps I never knew. A bit
cranky and stingy, I've been told.

(pause)

Steven handled his IRA. He heard
Disney was interested in Fixar, a
special effects company in movies.
He felt guilty over losing much of
Gramps portfolio in the housing
crash and wanted him to invest
small to start. But Gramps wanted
to invest everything in Fixar.
Reluctantly, Steven did. But then
the pandemic hit and Disney and
Fixar's stock prices plunged.
Gramps was upset, of course.

Joe hangs up, agitated, depressed. He becomes sedentary
again. Before long the door bell wakes him.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Joe answers the door to find DIXIE, (30), wearing a oversized
shirt hiding her pregnancy. She holds a suitcase.

PRESENT-DAY LANA (V.O.)

So, my sorry mother appears out of
nowhere with me in her belly. By
her own admission she used drugs
occasionally while I was her tenant
for nine months.

JOE

Run out of friends to mooch off of?

DIXIE

No, Dad. I had an option to live on
Al Pacino's yacht, but I figured
you and I needed to spend quality
time together. May I come in?

JOE

For how long?

DIXIE
 Forget it. I forgot how much I
 hated living here.

She walks away and Steven slams the door. A beat and there's a knock on the door again. It's Dixie standing in a puddle.

DIXIE
 My water broke.

INT. HOSPITAL - LATER THAT NIGHT

Joe stares at a curly-hair baby through the window. The name tag on her wrist says GREGORY. A frown appears over his face.

INT. DIXIE'S HOSPITAL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Joe enters just as a nurse hands Lana to Dixie and leaves. Dixie takes a long look at Lana.

JOE
 She's Black.

DIXIE
 Well, at least now I know who the
 father is.

JOE
 Really? That's all you have to say.

Joe just shakes his head and leaves in a huff.

PRESENT-DAY LANA
 I looked more black at birth. Never
 broadcast that I was Black. Thought
 it was gratuitous in a way, with
 everyone strutting around their ...
 blackness. From what I'm told,
 Gramps made his feelings known that
 one day, and never again.

INT. JOE'S KITCHEN - DAY

Joe sips coffee while reading the newspaper at the table. He ignores the distant cry of a baby. He hears a distant HONK.

HALLWAY

Dixie saunters down the stairs, enters and--

DIXIE

That's my ride to work. Francine
will be here shortly.

Dixie opens the door and FRANCINE, the baby sitter, late-teens, bobby-soxer type, appears. As Dixie leaves--

DIXIE

Want my life? Lana needs to be
changed. Bottle's in the fridge.

LIVING ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Hours later, Francine flounces in from the kitchen.

FRANCINE

I have to leave a little early, Mr.
Gregory. Dixie will be home
shortly. She said you would take
over when I have to leave.

JOE

She said that, huh?

Francine nods and then exits. The SOUND of the door slamming awakens Lana. Her distant cries forces a groan from Joe.

Disgusted, he growls and gets up.

MONTAGE -- LANA CAPTURES JOE'S HEART; DIXIE DISTANCES HERSELF

-- Lana has a dirty diaper. Joe holds her up-and-out by her armpits, like she's radioactive. He awkwardly changes her diaper and appears repulsed at what he sees and smells.

-- Lana's birthday party: a #1 candle is buried in a cake. Joe, Steven, and Dixie laugh at Lana's dirty face.

-- Another birthday party with a '# 2' candle in a cake.

-- Living room: Joe watches Lana dance to Sesame Street music

JOE

Come on, kid. Slow down or I'll
crush a Valium in your sippy-cup.

-- Lana plays with coins on the table. Joe takes them from her, but misses one. Lana picks it up, puts it in her mouth and chokes. She stops breathing; passes out; goes lifeless.

Joe performs the Heimlich, then tips her upside-down and slams her back. The coin flies to the floor and Lana breaths again. As she hysterically cries, Joe can't stop hugging her.

-- Dixie stumbles in the door, drunk. She tiptoes upstairs and doesn't know Joe is watching her from the living room.

-- Joe gets poop on his hands, face and shirt, while changing Lana's diaper. He looks like he's been through a war.

-- Lana jumps on Joe's stomach and chest while Sid-the-Science-Kid plays on TV in the background. While she jumps he changes to Barney reciting "I love you, you love me." He changes the channel again to the Cat-In-The-Hat where The Cat summons "Thing-One" and "Thing Two".

-- Joe's changing Lana's diaper - he's somewhat of a pro now.

-- JUMP CUTS to birthday candles number 3, 4, and 5.

END MONTAGE and CUT TO:

INT. JOE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Joe peeks out the window and sees Dixie talking to a MAN in an Army uniform in a car. They get out of the car and start walking up the driveway. Joe exits the house to meet them.

EXT. PORCH - CONTINUOUS

As they walk up the driveway,

DIXIE
Dad, this is Bill. Lana's father.

JOE
Five years. He finally shows up?

DIXIE
He was in Afghanistan. He never knew. I just told him.

BILL
I'm going back to Afghanistan on Monday, Sir, and I ...

JOE
I don't want to hear it ... Bill!

DIXIE

Dad, that's just not right. Stop.
You're being prejudiced.

JOE

I don't care if he's green or blue.
Leave, and don't ever come back.
You're not welcome here. Got it.

As Bill leaves, Dixie follows him into the car. And, as Joe goes back into the house--

PRESENT-DAY LANA (V.O.)

That was the only time my father came to see me. I guess Gramps scared him off because Bill never returned. Gramps and Steven became my male role models.

INT. JOE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Joe peeks out the window and watches Bill leave. Lana turns on the radio and bolts up from behind.

LANA

Tag. You're it. Catch me.

Joe chases her as she screams and laughs. Another song plays - Lana grabs Joe's hand and they dance for a few seconds. Joe farts then looks around as if someone else did it.

JOE

Barking spider. Did you hear that?

Unaware of Dixie's presence, he makes a 'raspberry' SOUND with his lips.

DIXIE

I don't believe you. Teaching my daughter how to fart! That's very mature of you, Dad!

Dixie grabs Lana and drags her upstairs. Lana screams, and Joe collapses in his chair, saddened by the sounds.

INT. JOE'S BEDROOM - MORNING - NEXT DAY

A woman's JEWELRY BOX sits on top of the dresser. When Joe comes out the bathroom, he steps on something.

He picks it up, inspects it, and immediately goes to the jewelry box where one of its drawers is opened slightly.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Dixie pours Cheerios in a bowl in front of Lana who sits in a chair at the table. Dixie reaches for the milk.

LANA

I don't want milk.

Dixie tries feeding the cereal dry to her, but Lana grabs the spoon to feed herself and spills Cheerios on the floor. Dixie steps on them. CRUNCH. CRUNCH.

DIXIE

Now look what you've made me do.

Dixie smacks Lana's hand. Lana wails.

Joe appears and muscles his way between Dixie and Lana. He gently strokes Lana's head, then follows Dixie into the--

LIVING ROOM

As Joe comes at her, Dixie backpedals to the couch.

JOE

What did you do with your mother's diamond necklace?

DIXIE

What do you think I did with it?
First two guesses don't count.

Joe hyperventilates. He grabs her by the collar and has a hard time letting go, but he does. His hands shake.

JOE

You hocked your mother's necklace?

DIXIE

Mom would've given it to me,
anyway. That makes it mine.

She gets up storms out while Joe tries to calm himself.

KITCHEN - LATER

Joe pours Cheerios in the bowl, and hands Lana a spoon.

She feeds herself but spills cereal on the floor. She cowers a bit, but Joe steps on the cereal. CRUNCH. CRUNCH.

Lana gets down from the chair and they both stomp on the cereal, laughing. Then they sit down on the floor. A beat--

JOE

Okay. Now we have to clean up.

LANA

You do it.

Lana gets up and Joe blocks her exit. There's a moment of obstinacy. As Joe starts putting the Cheerios into the bowl--

JOE

Goodbye, Cheerios.

She helps picking up the Cheerios.

LANA

G'bye, Cheer-oze.

She farts and they both look around for the phantom culprit.

EXT. JOE'S HOUSE - DAY

Lana watches Joe perform his Monty Python antics as he chases a butterfly. He hands her the net and she copies his clowning walk as Steven pulls up in his car. Joe gets up and meets him halfway, out of hearing range of Lana. As they watch her--

JOE

I lost it this morning. Dixie hocked your mom's jewelry. And now she's in jail for drug possession. So, I've filed for custody of Lana.

STEVEN

Good. It's the best thing for Lana.

JOE

Fixar's down again, you know.

STEVEN

Sell a few shares anyway, and go to Paris, why don't you?

JOE

Too many kooks who want to spit on
Americans. Besides, they're still
pissed-off at us because of Iraq.

SERIES OF SCENES

-- BATHROOM: Lana, in pajamas, brushes her teeth with Joe.

-- BEDROOM: Lana jumps on the bed and does a somersault. Full
of energy. Joe gives the sign language for 'I love you'.

PRESENT-DAY LANA (V.O.)

It was always hard for him to say I
love you. But I always knew he did.

-- BOOKSTORE: Lana pushes the button on a book summoning
music, Elmo's voice: another book produces the alphabet song.

-- JAIL: Dixie walks out of jail and a MALE FRIEND waits in a
car for her. She hops in and they start smoking pot.

END OF SERIES

EXT. JOE'S HOUSE - NEXT DAY

Joe gardens while Lana chases a butterfly. A sedan pulls up
and Dixie bursts through the front door with a suitcase.

Lana runs up to Dixie, sits on Dixie's foot, and won't let go
of her leg. Dixie, sobbing, looks to Joe for some help. Joe
slams a net to the grass catching an imaginary butterfly.

JOE

Lana. Look. I caught a butterfly.

Lana lets go of Dixie and runs to Joe giving Dixie time to
throw her suitcase in the sedan and drive off.

Lana stalks a white-winged butterfly and flops the net on top
of it. Joe comes over and makes a fuss over the event.

PRESENT-DAY LANA (V.O.)

My mom leaving should have a bolder
imprint on my mind. But what I
remember about that day was I
caught my first butterfly.

EXT. PARK - DAY

While Joe and Steven watch Lana on the slide--

STEVEN

You got custody. I wouldn't worry.

JOE

I can't raise Lana on my own. Too old. Make too many mistakes. Don't have the patience for this anymore.

Steven laughs. Joe's reaction - a query.

STEVEN

You haven't noticed. I've never seen you so engaged in life.

MONTAGE - AS THE YEARS PASS

-- Dixie staggers down a street, drunk. A quick blast of a POLICE CAR siren leads to a JUMP CUT mug shot of her. The caption: B MISDEMEANOR, LOITERING; PUBLIC DRUNKENNESS.

-- A 5-year-old Lana practices gymnastic exercises with precision while Joe looks on through a viewing window.

-- While Joe and Lana eat, Joe reads from a lesson book.

JOE

C-C-at. H-h-at. B-b-at. Spell FLAT.

LANA

F-L-A-T

Joe claps and Lana stands and takes a bow.

-- JUMP CUT: SUPER 5 YEARS LATER: at the dinner table.

JOE

Purification

LANA

P-U-R-I-F-I-C-A-T-I-O-N

-- JUMP CUT: SUPER 2 YEARS LATER: Track practice, 13 year-old Lana finishes a run with other students.

-- JUMP CUT to Lana smoking behind the stadium stands with a few CHILDREN.

PRESENT-DAY LANA (V.O.)

When I became a teenager, I hung out with a bad crowd who smoked. One time the Track Coach caught us smoking cigarettes behind the bleachers.

-- The TRACK COACH and Lana walk up the porch to Joe's house. Joe comes out to meet them and Lana runs into the house.

-- HOSPITAL - CANCER WARD: Lana and Joe appear at the nurse's station. A NURSE leads them into an office. She points to a lung graphic and lectures Lana about smoking. (muted)

PRESENT-DAY LANA (V.O.)

Gramps didn't get angry, or yell, or ground me for smoking. He simply took me to the cancer ward at the hospital where people were dying of emphysema, mainly from smoking.

-- CANCER WARD: The nurse leads Joe and Lana to where PATIENTS are either walking around or lying in bed.

Some have oxygen canisters with them while others struggle breathing on their own. Most look like they are ready to die. Lana takes in the horror of it all, wide-eyes and silent.

-- JOE'S HOUSE: Lana bolts into the house and runs upstairs and Joe heads for the kitchen.

He sits at the kitchen table, grabs the paper, and reads. Lana bursts into the kitchen, throws down 3 packs of cigarettes on the table and exits.

PRESENT-DAY LANA (V.O.)

I didn't know it at the time, but that was the day I learned what love was about. I began loving Gramps. I knew he had my back.

END OF MONTAGE

INT. DINNER TABLE - NIGHT

MONTHS LATER, while Joe and Lana eat, Lana stares at a couple of pictures of boys in her notebook. The letters F-R-A-N-K and S-E-A-N appear over the photos.

LANA

I think I like Frank more. I don't know what to do, Grandpa.

JOE

All I know is you can't ride two bicycles at the same time.

Abruptly, Lana closes the book and suddenly has an attitude.

LANA

If you're pro-life why did you give mom \$1000 for an abortion.

JOE

Wow! Where did that come from?

Lana folds her arms. She's expecting an answer.

JOE

I changed my beliefs since then.

LANA

But you taught me don't let anyone sway you in your beliefs.

JOE

Sometimes you have to. Sometimes you believe in the wrong thing because you're too headstrong and you don't know it. And sometimes the world changes and you have to change along with it. That's why you have to listen to your heart.

LANA

What made you change from pro-choice to pro-life?

Joe looks deeply into Lana's eyes, and leans forward.

JOE

You.

A moment passes while Lana thinks.

LANA

But what if I was pregnant and complications arose and the doctor couldn't save both of us?

Joe lets out with a heavy sigh.

LANA

Come on, Gramps. If the doctor can save only one life, but not both, and the doctor asks you to make a decision, what would you do. If you're pro-life, you'd let me die and save the baby, right?

JOE

Listen, if your life is on the line, I'll always choose to save you. That's just the way it is, whether I'm pro-life or pro-choice, or pro-anything.

Lana, filled with emotion, hugs Joe.

LANA

I love you, Gramps.

Joe extends the sign language for "I love you".

LANA

You loved Nana a lot. How come you never took her to Paris?

He reflects on the question. His demeanor becomes distant.

JOE

I always thought my bank account was more important than Nana's Paris dreams. 'Which would you rather have', I asked her, 'a remodeled kitchen that you'll have forever, or a trip to Paris that would only last for a week?'

(sighs)

I didn't realize memories of a trip lasts forever, something we can relive time and again. Now all I'm left with is memories of her. Got some good ones, but I'd sleep a lot better if I had a memory of making Nana's dream come true. Now stop asking these questions. You're growing up too fast. Stop growing up. Nothing good can come out of it. Growing up is a trap.

SERIES OF SCENES

--JOE'S BEDROOM: Joe sleeps but awakes at the sound of Lana vomiting. He get's up and bolts to her room to see her puking in the wastepaper basket. He holds her head while she pukes.

-- A DANCE STUDIO: A 16 year-old Lana dances with other PEOPLE, Joe included.

-- HIGH SCHOOL TRACK - Joe watches in the stands as the track COACH, 50, stopwatch in hand, has runners pairing up doing 50 meter dashes. When it's Lana's turn, the coach drops his arm. They're off. Lana crosses the finish line second.

-- JUMP to the another year: Joe watches Lana run a longer distance and she leads a pack of ten.

-- OUTSIDE A RESTAURANT SOMEWHERE -- Dixie walks out in her waitress uniform and hops in a car. The driver offers her a joint. She accepts it and the car drives off.

-- SCHOOL GYMNASIUM: Basketball - Joe watches Lana playing first string point guard. She takes the ball down court and passes off to the CENTER who scores.

LATER at the School Gymnasium: Lana dribbles down the court when she sees her mother enter the gym. Lana stalls and the ball is stolen from her.

Dixie staggers onto the court. The referee stops the play.

DIXIE

Come on girl. You can do better
than that. Give me a 'L'. Give an
'A'. Give me an 'N'. Give me an 'A'
and what do you got? LANA ...

A uniform SECURITY GUARD pulls Dixie off the court.

END OF MONTAGE

EXT. TRACK - DAY

Lana runs with other TEAMMATES on the track. The coach watches as Lana makes a gradual move up on the leaders. A series of QUICK JUMPS show Lana getting in shape.

INT./EXT. JOE'S CAR - DAY

Joe parks in the High School parking lot with Lana. They get out and as they walk behind the stands they see a couple of teenagers kissing. Joe eyes Lana with a query and grunts.

LANA

Stop it. I'm not doing anything.

JOE

I never said you were. Did I?

LANA

Grunting like a hog suggests you think I have.

JOE

Animals have one drive greater than the sex drive. And that's to stay alive. I'm praying God helps you on the second so you can appreciate the first when the time is right.

LANA

Don't worry, Gramps. My mother is a perfect example of what not to do.

As they head for the track--

JOE

I read about this Goodman girl. She's quite good, isn't she?

LANA

Coach says she'll be laying low the first half of the race. He says if I build an early lead her big kick at the end won't be enough to win. He says she'll lose her advantage as a sprinter if I do that. Coach says I've got the stamina to beat her. I mean, if she goes after me early, she'll burn herself out, I guess. She ran the last 400 in 49 flat at the States last year. As a sophomore no less! I can't do that. So, I have to burn her out early.

JOE

Reminds me when I was a boxer?

LANA

You were a boxer? You?

JOE

In the Navy. Beat everyone I faced. This one guy was better than me. He should've won. When we clutched I told him a part of a make-believe story. My father was allergic to bees so I told him my dad got stung by one and he scratched it until his leg got infected. I told him the poison travelled up his leg and into his blood system. I didn't tell him all at once. It was over a few rounds. Whenever we clutched I told him a little more.

They reach the track and another RUNNER waves her over.

LANA

I gotta go, but I'll bite. What happened next?

JOE

Well, during the eighth round I whispered my dad died that morning. He dropped his hands and said through his mouth piece, "Aagh". Then I clocked him as hard as I could. He went down for the count.

Lana sighs and leaves for the track. Joe yells to her--

JOE

But I beat him when he should have won. He lost focus. That's the point. So, stay focused.

EXT. BLEACHERS - LATER

Joe watches Lana talk to the Track Coach. She nods as he talks, obviously giving her instructions.

EXT. STARTING LINE ON THE TRACK - MOMENTS LATER

Eight RUNNERS take their marks. Lana nods to Goodman. The gun fires; the runners take off. Lana strains to hold third as her foot hits the side of the track. She stumbles a bit.

Lana takes the lead coming down the stretch for the first time. As the Coach watches Goodman make her move--

COACH (O.S.)
IT'S TOO LATE! It's too late?

IN THE STANDS

Joe's cell phone rings. He answers it. Into the phone--

JOE
Not now, Steven. Lana is in the middle of running the 800.

STEVEN (V.O.)
Dad, Fixar just signed a ten picture deal with Disney. The stock hit the roof. You're a millionaire.

He drops his cell phone, leans forward and holds his chest. He's having a stroke while watching Goodman beat Lana.

ON LANA

She gasps for breath as the coach appears, yelling (muted).

PRESENT-DAY LANA (V.O.)
The coach was yelling at me for not running as planned. But I twisted my ankle and I was going to say that when I looked up in the stands and noticed the confusion.

She sees chaos brewing where she once saw her grandfather.

INT. HOSPITAL'S INTENSIVE CARE - NURSES DESK - DAY

Lana limps a bit as she walks in with Steven. Dixie is signing papers at the desk. As Steven reads them.

PRESENT-DAY LANA (V.O.)
My mother had already arrived. Gramps had a stroke and the social worker at the hospital gave her papers to file for guardianship for my grandfather.

STEVEN
Why are you doing this?

DIXIE

He'll need long term care. You want to take care of him and make his health care decisions, Steven?

PRESENT-DAY LANA

His job had him travelling a lot. He couldn't take care of Gramps.

INT. COURT HOUSE - DAY

Lana, Dixie and Steven sit at a desk headed by JUDGE SIMPSON. As they all take turns speaking (muted during the VO)--

PRESENT-DAY LANA (V.O.)

Gramps was just made a millionaire. My mother said she was sober but everyone knew she just wanted the money. I tried to take custody of Gramps. Judge said I couldn't do that on account of I was a junior in high school. A minor. I told him I'd get pregnant which would allow me to get emancipated. The Judge just laughed. Getting emancipated wasn't as easy as I thought.

JUDGE

Lana, I'm sure your mother has her father's best interests at heart.

LANA

Gramps has the money to go to Paris now. But she's a greedy addict. And she'll never take him to France.

DIXIE

You spoiled brat. I know I haven't been a good mother, but I can be a good daughter now. Besides, he can't even speak or walk. So, how can he go to Paris?

Then Dixie, Lana and Steve talk over each other until --

JUDGE

Stop. I'm going to rule on this conservatorship after I see the doctor's report. Dixie, you have temporary custody, and that's that.
(MORE)

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Lana, it's Spring. Enjoy it. Stay with your mother until I rule on this. Nothing major needs to be decided now, so give me two weeks.

Lana gets up to leave, but turns to the Judge.

LANA

I don't mean to be disrespectful, but I'd like to say something.

The Judge nods for her to continue.

LANA

Gramps taught me a lot in life, Judge. Like the value of picking up after myself, and choosing crude words like asshole as metaphors, makes me sound ignorant since I really mean to say junkie or doper.

Lana makes a 'gottcha' face to her mother.

LANA

Gramps says hello to the trees and wind and treats an ant with the same reverence as a bird. We watched a 1000 Sesame Street shows and solved problems by twinkle thinking, with Thing One and Thing Two helping us. Maybe he was not a great father to you, Mom, but he taught me I'd appreciate life more if I stopped whining. I'm not trying to be difficult, Judge. I'm just telling you I grew up with no role models except for an old man who saw life as a holy pilgrimage. If my mother gets her way, he will die in an institution, and I will do whatever I can to stop that from happening. I will. I will.

She exits from a silent room and transition to --

INT. JOE'S HOUSE - LANA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Lana sits at a desk and has a French doctor's site up on the computer screen. The full window headline reads: FRANCE LEADS THE WAY - BREAKTHROUGH FOR STROKE VICTIMS.

LIVING ROOM

Dixie fills out a CITY NURSING HOME form.

JOE'S BEDROOM

Lana walks in and sees Joe on the floor with the wheelchair on its side. Lana struggles lifting him.

LANA

Shh. The wicked witch of the west
will hear us. How did you do this?

LIVING ROOM

A loud THUD attracts Dixie.

JOE'S BEDROOM

Dixie walks in and sees Joe pretending to sleep in bed while Lana sits in a chair pretending to read.

DIXIE

I know you're awake, Dad. *We are
going to visit a home today.*

Joe opens his eyes and grunts his discontent.

LATER

Dixie and Lana struggle to put a shirt on Joe. Lana purses her lips and makes a raspberry sound. Joe laughs.

JOE

Agheeing aghhida. Agheeing aghhida.

Joe laughs but it sounds more like a guttural fog horn.

DIXIE

Shut up! You sound like a retard.

Dixie's callousness sobers both Joe and Lana.

INT. NURSING HOME - LATER

As Lana pushes Joe in a wheelchair up the ramp to the door marked, "Assisted Living - Residence Entrance". A male ATTENDANT, 20s, green gown, greets them.

-- JUMP CUTS -

The DINING ROOM: tables crammed into a tiny seating area.

A RECREATION ROOM: four PEOPLE play cards at a table - a TV plays for a woman sleeping in a wheelchair.

A SMALL BEDROOM: a bed, a bible on a night table, and a cardboard TV hangs on the wall for show purposes.

A SMALL KITCHEN: three cooks are preparing a meal

JUMP OUT to--

EXT. NURSING HOME - FOYER EXIT - CONTINUOUS

As they leave, Joe farts and Lana pumps her arm and--

LANA

Yes. You still got it, Gramps. The barking spider strikes again.

DIXIE

That's enough. Both of you.
(to the Attendant)
Thank you for showing us around.
This a perfect arrangement.

EXT. NURSING HOME - DAY - CONTINUOUS

As Lana wheels Joe down the walkway to the car--

DIXIE

I want you both to know, that was very disturbing. And inappropriate. You can fart all you want when you get in here, Father.

LANA

Don't listen to her, Gramps. Not too many people can fart on demand. You have a great talent there. I think I'll take you on the road.

INT. AIRPORT TICKET COUNTER - ANOTHER DAY

A sign by the Ticket Lada says "To Paris". Lana takes two tickets from the ATTENDANT and wheels Joe away. He taps on the arm of his wheelchair and mumbles something.

LANA

Don't worry. We got enough money for everything. And the hotel promised a nurse would help with the bathroom stuff.

JOE

Ov oo. Ov oo.

LANA

(savors the moment)
I love you too, Gramps.

INT. PARIS AIRPORT -- TERMINAL -- EARLY EVENING

WELCOME TO PARIS signs greet Lana and Joe as they enter the terminal from the runway tunnel.

INT. HOTEL BATHROOM/BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lana enjoys the view of Paris through the window. She hears a THUD and rushes to the bathroom to find the NURSE trying to pick Joe up. Lana helps him put Joe back in the wheelchair.

NURSE

I lost control of him.

Phone rings and Lana rushes into the Bedroom and answers it.

STEVEN (V.O.)

Not a good day, Lana. I told the Judge I helped you tap into your college fund to go to Paris. He almost filed a contempt charge on me. But the worst of it is, he granted the petition today.

Another THUD and --

LANA

I gotta go. Gramps has no strength on his left side. He keeps falling.

EXT. ENTRANCE LA MARINA DE PARIS (BOAT) - DAY

Lana and Joe sit at a table boat-side, eating. A didi bag is strapped to Joe's chair. He mumbles something. Lana nods and removes the urn from the didi bag. Joe nods and Lana dumps the ashes out. Joe appears tearful, but happy.

INT. DOCTOR'S WAITING AREA - DAY

Joe mumbles something that only Lana can understand.

LANA

He's comparing the MRI he took
today with the ones I brought in.

The receptionist waves to them and--

RECEPTIONIST

You can go in now.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The doctor examines the MRI scan on his computer while Lana pushes Joe in a wheelchair into the room. She sits and waits.

DOCTOR DURYEA

When he first had his stroke, was
he disoriented? Trouble speaking?

Lana hesitates but eventually nods. The doctor examines Joe's eyes, then points to a chart on the wall.

DOCTOR DURYEA

Can you read the third line?

ON THE CHART -- THE THIRD LINE READS "A-O-E".

Joe makes an actual effort to recite the line, but a far cry from what the third line is.

DOCTOR DURYEA

Show me your teeth.

Joe cracks the corner of his mouth, a botched attempt to smile. The doctor sits back appearing grim.

DOCTOR DURYEA

Your grandfather had a hemorrhagic
stroke, Ms. Gregory. Statistics
show 10% of stroke victims recover
almost completely. Another 25 have
minor impairments. And 10% require
a nursing home or a long-term care
facility, but it's hard to tell
from the scan alone ...

(MORE)

DOCTOR DURYEA (CONT'D)
with his immobility and speech
patterns, it seems he falls in that
last category.

LANA
But your methods? People completely
recovered doing your exercises.

DOCTOR DURYEA
Yes, robust as they are, but they
work on patients whose brain damage
is less severe than Mr. Gregory's.

LANA
But I've heard him speak, I think.
And he can move his hand. Gramps
show him. Move your left hand.

Joe tries to move his hand. He taps the wheelchair.

DOCTOR DURYEA
That's normal, Ms. Gregory. And you
heard him try to read the chart. I
am sorry. You've come a long way
for nothing. But be thankful he's
alive. Fifteen percent die shortly
after the stroke. He's a survivor.

Lana nods and walks behind Joe and they exit. The doctor
turns to his desk and, as he starts to write his report--

JOE (O.S.)
Aa ... oh ... ee. Aa ... oh ... ee.

Hearing this, the doctor looks at the visual chart Joe tried
to read a few minutes before.

ON THE CHART -- The third line reads "A-O-E".

JOE (O.S.)
Aa ... oh ... ee.

INT. DOCTOR'S HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Lana, sobbing, wheels Joe down the hall. The door flies open,
and Lana turns and faces the doctor.

DOCTOR DURYEA
WAIT! Mr. Gregory, say that again.

Joe incoherently reels off a string of syllables. Nonsense syllables. Then Lana puts her hand on his shoulder and--

LANA

Gramps. Slow down. Take your time.

JOE

Aa ... oh ... ee.

The Doctor beams a smile to Lana.

DOCTOR

OK. I can't promise anything, but here's the deal. I'll waive my fee, like I promised, but you have to come here twice a day for six weeks and pay my therapist \$1000. Can you afford that, and the hotel fees?

LANA

My Uncle can wire me the rest of my college fund. We can do it. Yes.

DOCTOR

One missed session and you're out.

Lana can't stop saying 'yes' as she wheels Joe out.

INT. JUDGES OFFICE - WEEKS LATER

The Judge, Dixie and Steven sit at the table in the Judges Chambers. Silence prevails. The Judge looks at his watch.

STEVEN

You pressed charges for kidnapping?
That's low, even for you, Dixie.

DIXIE

It's been over six weeks. Dumping
ashes in the Seine takes one day.

STEVEN

They went to see a doctor in
France, Judge, and Lana says...

JUDGE

Doesn't matter, Mr. Gregory. I told
the DA to bring them here before
charging her. I was going to make a
decision of what to do then, but--

DIXIE

What difference does it make? You already signed the papers, Judge.

JUDGE

I can reverse that if your father's better which is unlikely according to his doctors here. Doesn't matter now. I have a session to go to.

As the Judge gets up to leave, Lana and Joe enter.

JOE

(labored speech)

Hi, Steven. And my wayward daughter who loves me to death, how are you doing this fine day, my dear?

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. TRACK MEET - PRESENT DAY - END OF FLASHBACK

Lana stretches while her coach comes up to her.

LANA

Hey Coach, Goodman accepted that scholarship to State already, yes?

COACH

Yes, I think she did. Stay focused.

PARKING LOT

Dixie parks her car, opens the squeaky door, and gets out.

She walks to the stands and sits. She opens her clutched hand and looks at an AA coin. She kisses it and puts it back in her pocket.

BACK TO LANA AND HER COACH

COACH

This is your senior year, Lana. Your last shot. What are you going to do differently this year, hmm?

LANA

Make my move at the hundred and run like hell. I know, Coach.

(MORE)

LANA (CONT'D)

She's got a wicked closing kick.
Don't worry. I know what to do.

BY THE STARTING LINE

Goodman warms up doing stretches.

STARTER (V.O.)

Runners find your marks.

Eight RUNNERS walk up to the starting line together,
including Lana and Goodman. Goodman looks down the line.

GOODMAN

I wonder which one of you will be
second today.

Lana leans in to Goodman--

LANA

You!

GOODMAN

You wish. Not on your best day.

LANA

We'll see. By the way, too bad
about the coach at State. Violated
recruiting rules, I hear.

GOODMAN

Yeah. Big deal. Minor infractions.

LANA

Oh. So, you haven't heard, then.

They take their marks.

STARTER (O.S.)

Runners, get set...

LANA

Didn't report all the gifts he
gave. Serious violation of some
rule. And now State can't compete
in NCAA Track and Field for awhile.

Goodman goes to say something, but the gun fires. The runners
take off. Lana retreats to last position next to Goodman.

ON LANA'S COACH

COACH

What the hell are you doing?

BACK ON GOODMAN AND LANA

Lana quickens her pace before the hundred pole. Goodman hesitates, but follows. They both settle close to the lead. The pace is quick.

LANA

Shame. All the colleges are doing it. Too bad he got caught.

Lana quickens the pace, lunges to the lead. Goodman follows.

LANA

Story will be in tomorrow's paper.
No track program for four years.
That's gotta be tough on you.

Lana quickens the pace. Goodman must hustle to keep up with her. Coming around the stretch for the first time, Goodman nestles into the lead next to Lana--

GOODMAN

You saying I have no scholarship?

LANA

Oh, you'll have the scholarship.
You're just not going to win this race. Hope you got enough gas in the tank.

Lana quickens the pace. Goodman's face tells all - the sudden realization she was just duped.

Lana and Goodman battle for the lead at the top of the stretch. As they head for the finish line Lana and Goodman are neck-and-neck. They match each other's stride, but it's Lana who proves best this day. She wins in a tight finish.

ON DIXIE

She watches with a tinge of pride.

DIXIE

That's my girl.

A shadow appears over her. She turns. It's Bill, Lana's Dad. He's wearing his Army uniform.

ON JOE

His demeanor sobers as he sees Dixie talking to Bill.

ON LANA

She heaves breaths to the ground. She straightens up and with hands on hip she tries to cool down. She takes a moment to reflect and looks up to Joe who's arm-pumping like crazy.

LANA

I don't believe it. It works. It actually works.

Lana doesn't seem to know people are back-slapping her, congratulating her, Goodman included.

The ambient SOUNDS become muted and, while she thinks to herself, she watches her grandfather beam with pride. We hear her thinking --

LANA (V.O.)

Strange how lessons are learned, sometimes. For example, crunching Cheerios on the floor with your feet can be fun, but you have to pick up afterwards. Lying may be wrong, but it may have tactical benefits, like during war or track meets. And farting? Ooo. For a child there's certainly humor in it, but there are some things you grow out of. Or, I guess I can take my grandfather's advice: don't grow up - it's a trap.

THE END