

THE BOXER

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. BOXING GYM - NIGHT

A FIGHTER is training - hitting the bag, grunting, sweating, and looking like a champion. We see his determined face, his gloves, and the bag.

ANYA (O.C.)

Dan?

INT. HOME GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

DAN O'CONNELL, 37, a pudgy middle-aged man, is training in his garage surrounded by boxing equipment, expensive musical instruments, several half-painted easels, and a whiteboard with equations.

ANYA O'CONNELL, 35, stands in the doorway wearing a a large t-shirt and pajama pants. She is sleepy, confused, and visibly pregnant. Dan ignores her and continues punching.

ANYA (CON'T)

Dan!

Dan stops and grabs the bag.

DAN

What? What are you doing?

ANYA

What am I doing? It's 2 a.m. I thought you stayed up late to catch up on work.

DAN

I am working. In a way. I'm training.

Anya comes fully into the garage. She is no longer sleepy or confused. Instead, she is concerned and growing angrier.

ANYA

Training? For what?

DAN

Don't worry about it. You wouldn't understand.

ANYA

What are you talking about?

Dan returns to hitting the bag and ignoring Anya. She pauses for a beat and then approaches him.

ANYA (CON'T)

Dan, stop.

She grabs the heavy bag and pulls it back, so it is resting up against her belly. She has had enough.

ANYA (CON'T)

Stop!

DAN

What!? Jesus! Can you leave me alone?

ANYA

(getting angrier)

Dan, please. Please stop. I don't know what this is, but I'm stopping it right now.

Dan punches the bag, hard, and Anya jumps. He rips his gloves off, throws them, and storms inside. She follows.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

MADELYN, 4, stands in the dark hallway in her pajamas, holding her bear. She's crying for Anya.

ANYA

Dan, what is going on with you?

Dan is pacing and wild, speaking very rapidly.

DAN

You don't get it. You don't get it! You never do.

ANYA

What don't I get? You're not making sense.

MADELYN

Mommy? Mommy!

DAN

You just want to hold me back.

ANYA

What do you mean? Are you taking your meds?

DAN

I have a plan, and it's going to work. This is my dream!

ANYA

Dream? Boxing? You bought that bag four days ago! What are you talking about?

Anya's demeanor becomes calm, clinical, and she walks to the counter to get her phone.

ANYA (CON'T)

I'm calling Dr. Ahmad.

Dan rips it from her hand, and she jumps. He realizes he scared her, and he becomes calmer and softer, but still speaking quickly. Madelyn is now loudly sobbing.

DAN

Please, stop, just listen. Listen, it's ok. I'm ok. Don't call Ahmad. I'll stop. I'll explain.

ANYA

Dan, you can't be a boxer. You're 37.

DAN

Bernard Hopkins was 46 when he became the champ, and Foreman was 45.

ANYA

Those guys were boxers! You're a lawyer. You're out of shape.

DAN

I know I'm getting a late start, but I can do it. I know I can. I just need support.

ANYA

No, Dan, listen. We need your brain. You can't go getting punched in the head.

DAN

(frustrated, raising his voice)

No, I have a plan. I can do it. That's why I'm training. I've been studying the best fighters, reading books. I know what I'm doing. I know the strategy.

ANYA

What about your band, Dan? Remember that? Remember spending a mortgage payment on instruments?

DAN

That would've worked!

ANYA

Or painting, or math? You wanted to solve a math problem for some reason?

DAN

I could've solved the Hodge Conjecture but you wouldn't let me study!

ANYA

You were blowing off work to study math online! You almost lost your job. We have bills and a mortgage!

Dan is angry and wavering between violence and collapsing. He looks like he wants to punch her. Anya moves to embrace him, but he waves her away and charges into the nearby bathroom, slamming and locking the door.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

ANYA (O.C.)

Dan, come out. Madelyn is scared.  
Just come in and we'll call Dr.  
Ahmad in the morning. Just come to  
bed.

Dan sits against the door, angry and crying. He takes out his phone to place a call. The display reads: "Dr. Ahmad's office - After Hours." He is ready to dial.

Then he receives an automated text from the gym: "Click here to book your sparring time now!" He clicks on the message.

INT. DAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Dan sits in an upscale professional office with his dual monitors. A boxing video plays on one and a boxing website is on the other. He's on the phone with Anya.

INTERCUT DAN/ANYA

DAN

It's ok. I spoke to Ahmad for a  
while.

ANYA

Are you going to see him? What'd  
he say?

DAN

He told me to try to show a normal  
amount of interest in things. And  
that it sounds like mania, but I  
don't think it is.

ANYA

Ok, so do you have an appointment?

DAN

He said exercise is good for my mental health, and that boxing is great exercise, as long as I don't fight.

ANYA

(skeptical)

So, what? You just want to go work out in a boxing gym?

A knock on the door. Dan's boss, DAVID, 50, opens the door without waiting for a response. Dan quickly minimizes his screens.

DAN

Hey David. What's up?

DAVID

Dan, where's that brief? You said you'd have it to me yesterday by the end of the day.

DAN

Yup, just finishing it up now. Sorry, I had to leave yesterday for a family emergency.

DAVID

OK, sorry to hear that. But it's due in two days and I need time to review it.

DAN

Ok, no worries. You'll have it by 6.

David nods, hesitates, and then leaves. Dan returns to his call.

DAN

Sorry. That was David. I have to run. I may be late tonight.

ANYA (O.C.)

OK, see you tonight.

Dan hangs up and continues watching the boxing video while he opens a document to work on.

INT. BOXING GYM - DAY

Dan and Anya walk through a boxing gym, surrounded by weights, bags, and a few other people. Dan is smiling, happy, and showing an apprehensive Anya around. A large man is lifting weights nearby.

DAN  
(to the man)  
Hey, what's up!

The man looks confused, then annoyed, and ignores him.

ANYA  
I guess this looks...nice.

DAN  
Yeah, it's great. See? Just weights, some cardio, nothing is scary or dangerous.

ANYA  
And you're not actually fighting?

DAN  
I just want to get healthy. I could stand to lose a little weight. Dr. Ahmad said it would be good for me.

ANYA  
Okay...I mean, I guess it would be good for both of us.

Dan signals to someone off-screen and Anya turns to look. FRANK, 52, a gym employee, is standing near the empty ring and approaches with a clipboard.

FRANK  
Are you my two o'clock? Dan O'Connell?

DAN  
Yeah.

ANYA

Dan?

FRANK

OK, go lace up, you have to wear a mouthguard and headgear. We'll just start light today.

Anya grabs Dan's arm and pulls him close.

ANYA

No! Dan, no! You said you wouldn't fight.

DAN

This is going to be fine. It's just practice. I'm going to show you that you have nothing to worry about.

ANYA

Do not do this Dan. You're not a boxer. You said you wouldn't.

Dan gets in her face.

DAN

(whispering)

I'm going to fucking show you. And when I'm a champ, I'm going to fucking leave and take Maddie. You never support me. You'll see.

He jerks his arm away from her and climbs the stairs into the ring. She stands frozen, horrified.

INT. BOXING RING - CONTINUOUS

GARY, 50, stands at the other end of the ring putting on headgear. He is older and in worse shape than Dan.

FRANK

Okay, guys, we're not trying to kill each other. Keep your gloves up. Alternating jab-cross.

The men touch gloves, take a few steps back, and are ready to fight. Anya can only watch. Tears well in her eyes.

Gary comes in tentatively, hesitates, and slowly jabs towards Dan. Dan blocks it with his glove and returns with a hard right to Gary's head.

FRANK (CON'T)

Hey, I said easy!

Gary steps back, pauses, and approaches Dan again. He throws a left and then a right cross, which Dan dodges. Dan throws a wild haymaker which sends Gary reeling.

FRANK (CON'T)

Goddamnit! I said easy! The hell  
are you doing?

Gary shakes his head to regain his concentration, waves off Frank, and steps back to Dan, who is grinning.

Gary baits him with another left, which Dan dodges. When Dan jabs, Gary counters with a left and then a brutal uppercut, connecting with Dan's jaw, and sending him reeling back and crashing to the mat.

ANYA

(shrieking)

Dan!

FRANK

Goddamnit! Ok, that's it. Stop,  
stop.

GARY

He fucking started it.

Gary does a little shadowboxing while Anya scrambles into the ring.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Anya is crying on the phone while Madelyn screams at the foot of the bed. Dan is locked in the bathroom. Anya paces from Madelyn to the bathroom door and back.

ANYA  
 (to the phone)  
 Yes, I'm holding for Dr. Ahmad.  
 Dan O'Connell, date of birth  
 8/27/1994.

She pounds on the door.

ANYA (CON'T)  
 Dan, please! Please open the door.  
 You're scaring Madelyn. Please.  
 (to the phone)  
 No, I don't think he's been taking  
 them. He's getting worse. No, I  
 don't think he'll go.

The bathroom door opens and an eerily calm Dan emerges. He has a blank look and glassy eyes. He leans over, hugs Madelyn, who is still crying loudly, and runs his fingers in her hair.

ANYA  
 Dan? Dan? Are you okay?

DAN  
 It's all okay. It'll all be okay  
 now.

He lies on the bed staring at the wall.

ANYA  
 (to the phone)  
 He came out. I don't know. I'll  
 call you back.

DAN  
 It's okay. I love you Maddie bear.

Anya runs to his side of the bed and kneels. Dan doesn't see her, and then he does.

DAN  
 In like a week, call Sheryl at my  
 office and tell her that the  
 estate planning documents are in  
 the right-hand drawer of my desk.

He sits up slightly and looks into her horrified eyes.

DAN

Then call Guardian Life. They'll tell you that this is excluded. You tell them the exclusion only applies for the first two years of the policy. Call Tom at my office if you need to.

Anya drops her phone and runs into the bathroom. She comes out with a few empty bottles in her hand and grabs her phone off the floor. She fumbles the phone and the bottles.

ANYA

Fuck!

INT. HOSPITAL PSYCHIATRIST'S OFFICE - DAY

Anya sits in a chair across the desk from DR. AHMAD, 67, and they make small talk until the door opens. Dan is led in by a nurse. He is not wild or upset, but meek and subdued.

Dr. Ahmad motions to the seat next to Anya and Dan takes the seat. Anya's face is hard, and she doesn't look at him, but she takes his hand.

DR. AHMAD

Dan, good to see you. How are you feeling?

DAN

Good. I feel good today. Level.

DR. AHMAD

Good, good. This combination of meds seems to be working, and you've been responding well to therapy.

DAN

Yeah, I feel better. Like my old self. Calm, not wild anymore.

Dr. Ahmad nods slightly toward Anya. He turns to her, but still, she doesn't face him.

DAN

Anya, I don't know what to--

ANYA

Dan, it's ok, you don't have to--

DAN

--No, I do. Nothing could excuse my behavior. I wasn't myself. When I'm like that, everything seems so clear. It makes sense in my head.

ANYA

(still looking ahead)

I know, it's ok.

DAN

I thought I was better, that I didn't need the meds. Thank you for staying.

ANYA

I know. This wasn't the first time.

(she finally looks at him)

You're sick. That's all it is. I wouldn't leave you if you had cancer. There's no difference. Not to me, anyway.

DR. AHMAD

He's on 600 milligrams of Seroquel extended release, plus trazadone for the sleep and hydroxyzine for the anxiety.

ANYA

Ok great. I got it. I'll make sure he takes them.

DR. AHMAD

And call the outpatient clinic in the morning to set up weekly cognitive behavioral therapy sessions. They should be able to see him right away.

ANYA

Ok, I will.

DR. AHMAD

He must go to therapy. That is as important as his medication. He must change his thinking.

ANYA

Understood.

DR. AHMAD

It would be like if he were addicted to heroin, and went into rehab, but refused to give up heroin.

Dr. Ahmad stands and leans across the desk to extend a hand to Dan. Dan and Anya stand, and Dan shakes his hand.

DR. AHMAD (CON'T)

Good luck Dan. We'll see you in the office in a month. If anything comes up in the meantime, call us right away.

DAN

I will. Thank you.

INT. LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - NIGHT

Dan sits on an overstuffed couch in a comfortable living room. He flips through a streaming service looking for a movie while Madelyn plays with Barbies nearby. Anya is in the kitchen.

INTERCUT DAN/ANYA

ANYA

Hey, popcorn is almost ready. Did you find anything?

DAN

No, there's nothing good.

ANYA

There has to be something. There's a thousand movies on there, and we have three streaming services. I'm sure you can find one movie.

DAN

I'm looking. Anything but more Bluey! I've been watching Bluey all day long with Maddie.

Anya enters the room with a large bowl of popcorn and two Cokes. She places the snacks on the coffee table and sits by Dan on the couch.

ANYA

Are you nervous about tomorrow? First day back and all?

DAN

No not really. It's just temporary, reviewing documents. Should be easy.

ANYA

I'll be at work, but I'll call you at two to make sure you take your meds. Okay?

DAN

Okay. What about a documentary? Something educational?

ANYA

Ugh, really? Movie night is educational?

She grabs a handful of popcorn, looks at it, and drops it back into the bowl.

ANYA (CON'T)

Oh crap, this is greasier than I thought. Find something and I'll grab some paper towels.

Dan scrolls through documentaries and finds one on Magnus Carlen, the world chess grandmaster. The blurb describes the rise of the young chess prodigy. Anya enters and sits, and he scrolls to something else.

ANYA (CON'T)

If you don't pick something, I'm turning on Bluey and we're going to have a sing-along.

DAN

Here, you pick something, just good lord, not Bluey!

MADELYN

Bluey! Bluey!

As Anya takes over the remote and snuggles up to Dan, he reaches his arm around her. We see his phone in his hand, behind her head, and he opens a browser. He types in: "How old is too old to become a chess grandmaster?"

FADE OUT.