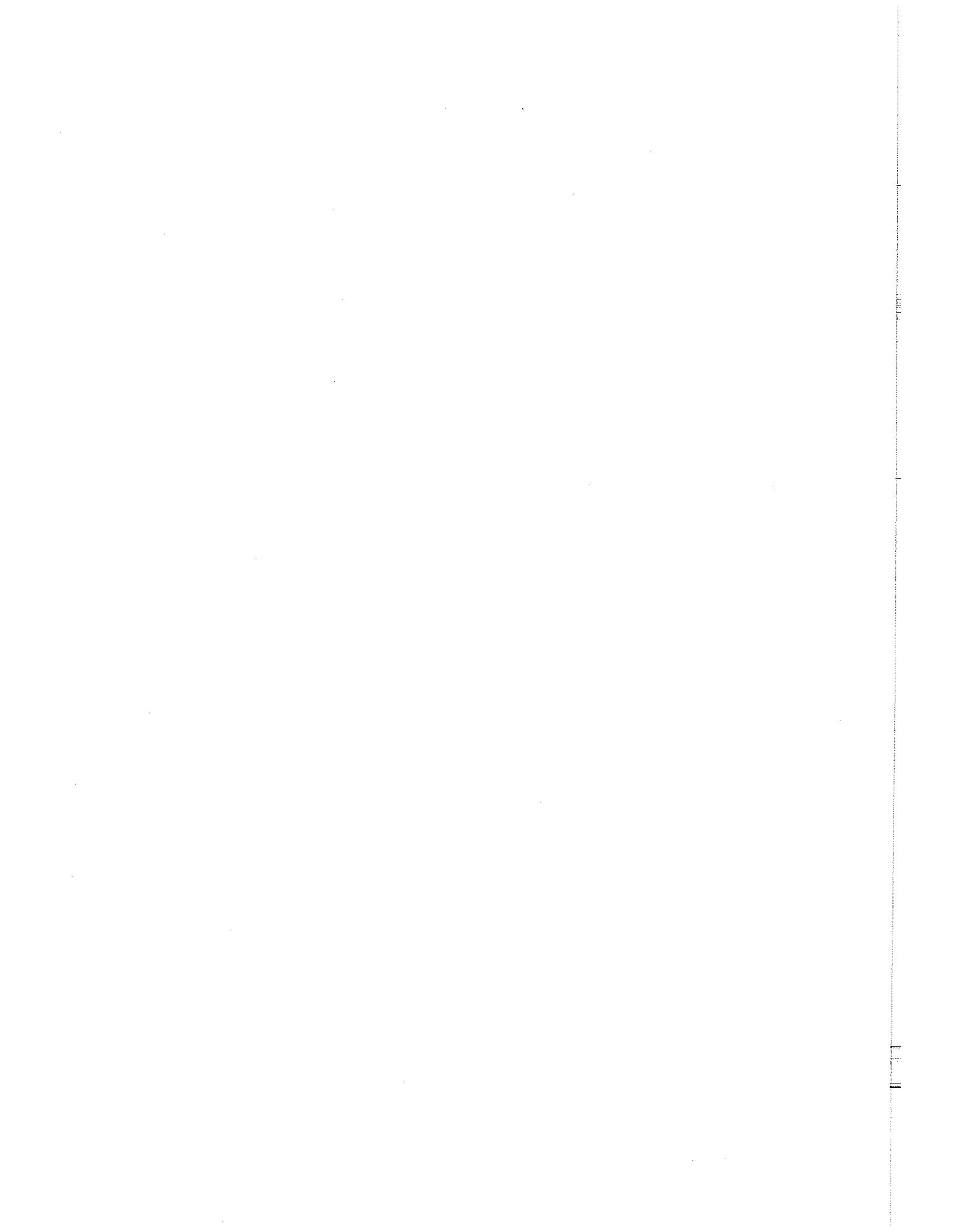


BROMANCE

written by

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FADE IN:

BROMANCE [n. bro'mans] the complicated, platonic love and affection shared by two straight males.

INT. NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

An empty Northwestern Wildcats locker room. We hear the sounds of a basketball game in progress outside.

Psychology grad student, NICK DARROW, 28, cocky and handsome, stumbles in furiously MAKING OUT with hot undergrad cheerleader MANDY, 20.

MANDY
This is so wrong...

NICK
Don't worry about Derek. We've got time before half.

MANDY
That's not what I meant.

Mandy SHOVES Nick against the lockers and kisses him.

MANDY (CONT'D)
This is so wrong it's turning me on.

Mandy unbuttons Nick's pants. Nick pulls off Mandy's uniform top and she's suddenly COMPLETELY TOPLESS.

MANDY (CONT'D)
How'd you do that? I was wearing a bra.

NICK
Years of practice.

Nick turns Mandy around and bends her over a bench.

MANDY
(spinning around)
Hey, what do you think you're doing?

NICK
(flipping her back)
Don't worry. Just relax.

MANDY
Nick, I told you. I don't do...the butt.

NICK

I completely understand. I'd never make you do anything you don't want to do.

MANDY

I'm so glad you're not like all the other guys--

Nick puts his finger to her lips and looks her right in the eye. He doesn't look away while talking.

NICK

But the older you get, the fewer chances you have to do something for the first time. You're 20 years old, Mandy. By the time you're 26, you'll probably be engaged. This is really the only time you have left to take risks and put yourself out there--to really live. Do you want to be 35 and look back and wish you'd lived more?

Mandy nods at Nick, almost hypnotized. She's been horse-whispered. Nick gets behind her, gets into position.

MANDY

Just so we're clear--after this, I'm never putting that thing in my mouth again.

But Nick's no longer listening as he puts his you-know-what in her you-know-where.

MANDY (CONT'D)

Whoa...okay, this is...different.

Nick adjusts. Mandy starts to get into it when...the half-time buzzer SOUNDS. Mandy reflexively CLENCHES. Nick gets STUCK.

NICK

Hey--ease up in there.

MANDY

(trying to unclench)
I can't. Take it out!

NICK

(straining)
I can't. It's stuck.

Mandy starts to PANIC.

MANDY

Oh my god oh my god...

NICK
Princess, relax. It's a muscle
spasm. Just slow down. Take a deep
breath.

Mandy takes a breath just as...her 6'7" Power-Forward
boyfriend, DEREK, enters the locker room.

DEREK
What the--

Mandy SPASMS even harder, GRINDING Nick.

NICK
(in pain)
Shit!

MANDY
What?! You want me to--

NICK
No, don't!

DEREK
MOTHERFUCKER!

A moment later, CHARLIE, ROB and JAKE, Nick's closest friends
and colleagues, arrive breathless.

CHARLIE
Darrow, hurry, it's half--
(takes in the scene)
Dude, is your dick stuck in her--

NICK
(motioning)
Eyes up here, Charlie.

DEREK
I'm gonna fucking kill you!

Derek LUNGEs at Nick. Nick DUCKS and Mandy takes a PUNCH
square in the face. Mandy and Nick, still attached, FALL
backwards.

DEREK (CONT'D)
Baby, I'm so sorry.

MANDY
(stunned)
You hit me.

JAKE
\$100 says Darrow doesn't get a
scratch.

ROB

No way. Not even Darrow could talk his way out of this.

NICK

(to Derek)

You have every right to want to kill me. If I were you, I would beat the shit out of me.

DEREK

I will.

Derek SWINGS WILDLY. Nick DODGES it.

NICK

Then I'd tell the administration what I was doing here, and get me fired.

DEREK

No shit.

Derek GRABS for Nick's shirt. Nick narrowly ESCAPES.

NICK

And you know what? I deserve it. It doesn't matter if everyone finds out Mandy was cheating on you during one of your own games. I'm the one who was wrong here and I should be punished.

Derek stops for a moment.

NICK (CONT'D)

Or you could be the much, much bigger man, walk away, and no one ever finds out about this and I have to live with the guilt of what I've done. I'm the asshole here.

DEREK

Yeah, that's right. You're the asshole.

ROB

(quietly, to Jake)

Actually, Mandy's the asshole.

Confused, Derek turns to leave. Nick's crew is amazed.

CHARLIE

He's like a Jedi master.

Derek heads for the door just as...the ENTIRE NORTHWESTERN BASKETBALL TEAM steps in, all rowdy and pumped from a great first half. They pause for a moment, take in the scene.

Derek BURSTS into TEARS.

COACH
This is really gonna fuck up our momentum.

INT. NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY - PSYCH BUILDING - EVENING

Nick, Charlie, Rob and Jake hurry through the psychology building. They're late for a lecture. As usual.

CHARLIE
Dude, I know you hate this Jennings chick, but we're still giving up a Saturday to heckle her lecture.

NICK
That neo-feminist gender-nazi trashes two of my papers in a row and then Desmond brings her into our department. This isn't just about heckling her. This is about my reputation.

As they head through the hall, UNDERGRADS say hi to Nick. Nick is, and always will be, the most popular kid in school.

SEVERAL MALE UNDERGRADS
(bumping fists w/ Nick)
Hey, what's up, Dr. Darrow.

SEVERAL CUTE FEMALE UNDERGRADS
(flirtatious)
Hi, Dr. Darrow...

ROB
So do we even know what she looks like?

NICK
No, but we'll know her when we see her. I'm guessing hairy legs, a frumpy dress and sensible shoes.

As the crew approaches the lecture hall, a BEAUTIFUL WOMAN, late 20s, walks out and into the women's bathroom.

Nick pauses, captivated, as his crew heads into the lecture.

NICK (CONT'D)
I'll meet you guys inside. I have to go powder my nose.

Without thinking, Nick steps right into the women's bathroom.

CHARLIE
Yeah, with pussy.

INT. WOMEN'S BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Nick STARTLES two OLDER WOMEN about to enter stalls.

NICK
Sorry, ladies. I promise I'll leave
the toilet seat down.

The old women harrumph and slam the doors to the stalls.

Nick approaches the Beautiful Woman at the sink.

BEAUTIFUL WOMAN
This is the women's room.

NICK
I know.

BEAUTIFUL WOMAN
And you're staring at me.

NICK
I'm sorry. This is embarrassing,
but when I saw you walk by I just
thought, If I don't talk to her
right now, I never will.

BEAUTIFUL WOMAN
So you followed me into a public
restroom. Is that something you do?

NICK
I don't even know how to say this
without it sounding like a line,
but you just seem like someone I'd
really like to get to know.

BEAUTIFUL WOMAN
(smiling now)
You're right. You can't say it
without it sounding like a line.

NICK
I know. But it's the truth. I wish
we were already old friends so we
wouldn't have to do any of this.
You know what I mean?

The two old women in the stalls smirk. Nick's charming.

BEAUTIFUL WOMAN
Do you even know what you mean?

NICK
Look, I know you don't know me and this all probably sounds a little crazy but I've never felt this way about someone in a women's bathroom before.

BEAUTIFUL WOMAN
And I've never been felt this way in a women's bathroom before.

NICK
It sounds like we're both struggling with new feelings here. Why don't we meet up for a drink later and talk about them?

BEAUTIFUL WOMAN
(smiles again)
You really should have gone for coffee instead of a drink. At least coffee implies you want friendship before you want the drink that leads to sex.

Before Nick can respond, she strides out of the bathroom. Nick follows, a step behind.

A moment later, the old women exit their stalls.

OLD WOMAN
(to the other)
I would've fucked him.

INT. NORTHWESTERN - PSYCH BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Nick catches up with her as she enters the lecture hall.

INT. NORTHWESTERN - LECTURE HALL - CONTINUOUS

The Beautiful Woman heads to the front. Nick follows.

NICK
So how about a cup of coffee?

BEAUTIFUL WOMAN
Oh, I don't really like coffee.

NICK
You know, I don't think I got your name.

BEAUTIFUL WOMAN

You didn't.

NICK

So how do I get it?

BEAUTIFUL WOMAN

You have to earn it.

NICK

Really? Well keep an eye on me. I'm about to impress the hell out of the room.

DESMOND FELIX, former-hippie, inveterate rabble-rouser and head of the psych department, takes the stage.

DESMOND

Ladies and gentleman, I'd like to introduce Rachel Jennings.

(re: the Beautiful Woman)
Ah, here she is now.

The Beautiful Woman heads to the stage.

NICK

You're Rachel Jennings? 'Male Relationships in a Post-Gender World' Rachel Jennings?

RACHEL

You might want to keep an eye on me. I'm about to impress the hell out of the room.

Rachel walks to the podium as Nick takes his seat with the crew.

CHARLIE

That's Rachel Jennings?

NICK

(trying to hide his shock)
Doesn't change anything.

On stage, the lights dim as Rachel starts her presentation.

RACHEL

Male friendships operate according to a strict set of rules--rules that no one talks about but that hardly anyone breaks. And believe it or not, you already know them all.

She spots two TYPICAL COLLEGE GUYS sitting a seat apart in the crowd.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
For example, take the two young men
in the front.

(to the guys)
Why are you sitting a seat apart?
(the guys shrug)
Are you saving the seat for
someone?

TYPICAL COLLEGE GUYS
No.

RACHEL
It's because sitting right next to
each other would feel...

TYPICAL COLLEGE GUYS
Weird...

RACHEL
(smiles)
Right, but why?

The guys shrug. The audience is intrigued. Rachel spots a
FRATBOY sitting with his girlfriend.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
(to Fratboy)
You, in the baseball cap--when was
the last time you had dinner alone
with one of your guy friends?

FRATBOY
Last Friday.

RACHEL
Let me guess--it was at a bar.

FRATBOY
Yeah, it was.

RACHEL
And there was a game on.

FRATBOY
The Sox. How'd you know?

RACHEL
Anything to keep two guys from
actually having a meaningful
conversation.

The Fratboy looks embarrassed. The audience laughs.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Now, show of hands, guys--when was the last time you told a guy friend you really cared about him?

Hardly anyone raises their hand.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Because that's just something you don't do, right?

Murmurs of agreement from guys in the audience.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Have you ever wondered why you blindly follow these rules?

Rachel clicks to a slide of a cave painting. HOMINIDS, early humans, hunt a massive WOOLLY MAMMOTH.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

About a million years ago, we left the jungle to hunt on the savannah. Life back then was all about competition. Competition for food, for mates, for survival. If you showed any sign of weakness, you'd lose access to all of these things. The rules evolved as a way for men to demonstrate their strength, to avoid seeming weak.

Next slide. A strapping ALPHA-HOMINID spears a MASTODON while several smaller BETA-HOMINIDS guard his flank.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

The rules were necessary for living in that world. And they served their purpose. Violating one of them could cost a young male his life.

In the front row, Nick leans over to his crew.

NICK

(re: a hominid)
That one kind of looks like Charlie.

It kind of does. The guys laugh.

Next slide. Present day. ROAD RAGE in action. A SALARYMAN SMASHES the windshield of another man's car with a bat.

RACHEL

Now fast-forward a million years. The rules are still frozen in place even though their utility has run out. They no longer serve any purpose in our society. They're residue. They're holdovers.

Nick's looking increasingly irritated.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Since women don't follow these rules, they can have more deeply meaningful emotional connections.

NICK

(a little too loud)
I'd like to see her meaningfully connect with another woman.

RACHEL

(ignoring him)
And two heterosexual men can be just as close as two women if they can just get over these pointless, prehistoric rules.

NICK

(even louder)
That's ridiculous.

RACHEL

Excuse me. Do you have something to add...

NICK

Nick. Nick Darrow.

Now Rachel looks surprised.

RACHEL

You're Nick Darrow? 'Primacy in the Pack' Nick Darrow?

NICK

(quietly)
I told you to keep an eye on me.

RACHEL

(angry, covering the mic)
I should've known. This is exactly what I'd expect from someone who thinks fist-fights are a form of male bonding.

NICK

You should've thought of that
before you went after me in *Applied
Psychology*.

The audience begins to shift uncomfortably, unsure of what's going on.

NICK (CONT'D)

You're right that there are rules
to male friendship but you're wrong
that they're pointless.

RACHEL

Let me guess--you're going to grace
us with a boxing metaphor.

NICK

Baseball, actually. The 2002
Yankees. Four pennants in a row. A
couple fist-fights and Steinbrenner
decides the team needs 'sensitivity
training.' Trust games, therapy--by
the end of the month the guys were
all holding hands and singing
'Kumbaya.' And after all that do
you know how they did?

(beat)

Their worst season in fifteen
years.

A STIR ripples through the audience. Nick smiles. Rachel
doesn't. Confused, people start getting up to leave.

NICK (CONT'D)

But I'm sure you have another
explanation for why that happened.

Rachel glares at him. Nick glares back. This isn't over.
Desmond watches them from the back of the room, intrigued.

INT. NORTHWESTERN - DESMOND'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A post-lecture dinner party at Desmond's house. PROFESSORS
and GRAD STUDENTS drink and listen on as a DISTINGUISHED
PSYCH PROFESSOR holds court.

DISTINGUISHED PSYCH PROFESSOR

(droning on)

...I said to Larry, well, if you
can say that to Cornell West, you
can damn well say it to me...

Desmond looks extremely bored. At the other end of the table,
Nick and Rachel whisper heatedly.

RACHEL

(whispers)

First of all, it was their worst season in fourteen years and it was obviously because they lost O'Neil, Martinez, and Knoblock.

NICK

(whispers back)

Nice try, but O'Neil and Knoblock had been mailing it in for years.

RACHEL

Have you even read Kolbert, Franklin and Spurr?

NICK

Look, you can cite whatever papers you want. The truth is that life now isn't so different than it used to be. The workplace is a jungle. Sports are warfare. The rules are still relevant. That's why we follow them.

Various professors shoot them dirty looks. Desmond's amused.

DISTINGUISHED PSYCH PROFESSOR

(trying to ignore them)

...which is how I ended up stranded in New Haven, of all places, a full day before I was supposed to give my talk at Yale.

NICK

I shouldn't even be talking to someone who claims that more physical contact between men could improve productivity at work.

RACHEL

You know what? Maybe this subject's just too personal for you. This is textbook cognitive dissonance, Nick. You've been living your life by these rules. Of course you think they're relevant.

At this point, their conversation is too loud to ignore.

DISTINGUISHED PSYCH PROFESSOR

Jesus Christ, Desmond--can you rein those two children in?

DESMOND

Actually, Harold, their conversation seems a lot more interesting than yours.

Distinguished Professor scoffs. The assembled group titters. Desmond's enjoying being the instigator.

DESMOND (CONT'D)
Nick, you were saying...

Nick realizes everyone in the room is watching him.

NICK
(clears his throat)
Well...I was just saying, the real issue is that the gender imperative created these rules and they're too deeply ingrained to change. A lion can't just decide to be friends with a gazelle even if he meets a really nice one.

RACHEL
Now you're just using animal behavior cliches to deflect criticism.

NICK
Okay, then I'll simplify it for you. No human male could ever possibly be friends with another guy if he broke the rules.

RACHEL
Why--because he'd actually get to know him in a meaningful way?

NICK
No--because of a million years of evolution.

Desmond sips a drink, deep in thought, a mischievous grin spreading across his face.

INT. NORTHWESTERN - PSYCH BUILDING - SEMINAR ROOM - DAY

Desmond addresses the entire assembled psych department at their monthly meeting in the seminar room.

DESMOND
So the question of the hour is: can two heterosexual males be friends if they break 'the rules'?

Nick and Rachel glare at each other from across the table.

DESMOND (CONT'D)
And I have a slightly unorthodox idea for an experiment.
(MORE)

DESMOND (CONT'D)

In a single-blind study, we'll find two men and have one systematically break every rule of male friendship. As you all know, we have an open associate professorship here. So if Mr. Darrow is right and two men can't be friends when the rules are broken, he gets the job.

The room is suddenly ABUZZ in conversation. Desmond waits.

DESMOND (CONT'D)

And if Ms. Jennings is right, and breaking the rules actually allows for a deeper connection, then the professorship is hers.

DISTINGUISHED PSYCH PROFESSOR

But Desmond, this isn't a controlled experiment.

STUFFY PSYCH PROFESSOR

It's informal, and, frankly, isn't it all a little juvenile?

DESMOND

Tim Leary and I used to do guerilla research like this all the time back at Harvard. And, frankly, this department could use some healthy debate.

Desmond looks over at Nick and Rachel.

NICK

I love it. I'll go out and find you two subjects tonight.

DESMOND

Just one subject, Darrow. You'll be the other one.

Again, the room erupts into excited chatter. Desmond is clearly relishing his role as troublemaker. Charlie, Rob and Jake all look to Nick--he's been put on the spot.

NICK

(thinks about it)

Fine. I'm still in.

RACHEL

Of course he's still in. Now he can just torpedo the whole thing.

DESMOND

He won't. Because you'll go pick out the other subject together. And you'll present your findings every two weeks to myself, Dr. Williams and Dr. Novak. We'll officiate.

Desmond gestures to two PROFESSORS, one male, one female.

DESMOND (CONT'D)

So what do you say, Nick? Rachel? Do we have a bet?

Nick hesitates for a moment. Rachel notices.

RACHEL

I think the stakes just got a little too high for Darrow.

NICK

Actually, I was thinking they aren't high enough. Not only does the loser not get the professorship, but she has to leave the department.

Now Rachel hesitates.

NICK (CONT'D)

Stakes get a little high for you, Jennings?

Nick and Rachel stare each other down.

RACHEL

I'd start looking into social work if I were you.

NICK

And if I were you, I wouldn't sign any long-term leases.

DESMOND

(suppressing a smirk)
I'll take that as a 'yes.' Now go find me a man.

EXT. LAKE MICHIGAN - MARINA - DAY

Nick and Rachel scout for subjects at a large park at edge of Lake Michigan. It's a beautiful day and all around them FAMILIES picnic, COUPLES canoodle and FRIENDS play frisbee.

RACHEL

So is Desmond normally this...

NICK

Batshit? No--even for him, this is out there. But the guy thinks it's 1971 and he's still riding around with Ken Kesey and the Pranksters.

Nick spots a TOUGH EX-MARINE in full fatigues with a thousand yard stare and a mean-looking bullmastiff.

NICK (CONT'D)

Here we go. That's a real guy.

RACHEL

With real flashbacks and PTSD. No way. He'd freak out if you looked at him wrong. Nice try, Darrow, but we need a normal guy.

The Marine's face twitches. Nick sighs--that would have been easy.

INT. THE "L" TRAIN - LATER

Nick and Rachel ride the crowded "L" train at rush hour. Rachel points out an EFFEMINATE-LOOKING GUY reading poetry.

RACHEL

How about him?

NICK

I don't even think that's a dude.

Effeminate-Looking Guy stands up. He's actually a MASCULINE-LOOKING WOMAN. She winks at Rachel as she gets off the train.

EXT. LINCOLN AVENUE - EVEN LATER

Tired and dejected now, Nick and Rachel walk down a bustling Lincoln Avenue, still scouting.

Nick points out an ALPHA-DUDE as he playfully shoves one of his friends outside a bar.

NICK

Why not him?

RACHEL

If you keep picking guys who could've been in your fraternity, this is never going to end.

Rachel spots a WAIFY ARTSY GUY selling paintings at a street corner.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
What's wrong with that guy?

NICK
Remember we're looking for a subject here, Jennings. Not trying to find you a boyfriend.

RACHEL
You know what? I think you're being difficult on purpose.

NICK
I'm just trying to keep you from picking a ringer.

Frustrated, Rachel takes a seat at a cafe.

RACHEL
(muttering)
I need a drink.

Nick sits down at an adjacent table, with his back to her.

NICK
(muttering)
Yeah, you do.

They sit in silence for a moment, back to back.

RACHEL
This isn't going to work.

NICK
Perfect. Go tell Desmond. I'm sure he can get you your old job back at Brown.

Nearby at the cafe they both spot MATT STONE, 29, at the same time. A BABY SHOWER is in progress and Matt is hopelessly adrift in a perfect storm of BABIES crying and WOMEN chatting.

RACHEL
(joking)
How about that guy?

NICK
(laughs)
Yeah, the one gay dude at a baby shower.

Matt sits in a corner while YOUNG WOMEN with INFANTS kvetch to a newly PREGNANT WOMAN.

WOMAN WITH 6 MONTH OLD
...no matter what kind of nursing
bra I wear, I still leak through.

WOMAN WITH 9 MONTH OLD
You're lucky you can still wear a
bra. My nipples are so tender, I
can barely use my pump.

WOMAN WITH 1 YEAR OLD
And soon you'll have hair growing
in places you never thought you'd--

Nick and Rachel watch Matt look around desperately just as
KATE RAMSEY, 29, Matt's hot, assertive fiancée makes her way
toward him carrying a cup of tea. She sits down with him as
he takes a sip, thankful to be saved.

KATE
(re: the tea)
They were out of cream so I had
Marcy steam some breast milk into
it.

Matt SPITS out the tea.

KATE (CONT'D)
Kidding...
(looks at Matt)
You're miserable here, aren't you?

MATT
I've heard things no man should
hear.

KATE
I told you this would be boring.

MATT
I just feel like I barely get to
see you since we moved here.

KATE
Baby, you know I need to put in
time if I want to get on the
partner track. I just think you'd
be a lot happier if you made some
of your own friends.

This catches Nick and Rachel's attention. They trade a look.

MATT
That stuff takes time. We've only
been in Chicago a few weeks.

KATE
So be more proactive.

MATT

It's not like it is with girls--
guys can't just go out and meet new
guy friends. And it's not like I
meet people designing websites all
day.

KATE

You're probably right...it's just
that from where I'm sitting, it
sounds like you're kinda being a
huge wuss.

MATT

(playful)

You really think calling me names
is going to get me to do this?

KATE

I may have other ways to persuade
you.

(leans in sexily)

Come on, baby. Just try. For me.

Excited, Nick and Rachel quickly get up and step away. They
realize they've struck gold.

NICK

This is our guy.

RACHEL

I'm sold.

They watch Matt pretend to check his cell as the baby shower
swirls around him.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Alright, Darrow. Go work your
magic.

NICK

I can't just introduce myself.

RACHEL

You hit on me in a women's
bathroom. You can't go talk to a
lonely guy?

NICK

No, because then I'd be hitting on
him. This requires planning and
execution. Just be patient,
Jennings. I promise you by the end
of the month, you'll be back at
Brown crying into your copy of
Woman Warrior.

(studying Matt)

(MORE)

NICK (CONT'D)
Alright, baby-shower man. Let's do
this.

EXT. MATT AND KATE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Nick, Charlie and Jake are staked out in a car across the street from Matt's apartment building.

INT. CHARLIE'S CAR - SAME TIME

The dashboard's littered with fast-food wrappers. Nick dozes in the backseat, while Charlie and Jake watch the apartment, bleary-eyed.

NICK
(yawning)
So has the subject moved yet?

CHARLIE
Why did I get stuck with this part?

NICK
You have the most experience
stalking ex-girlfriends.

JAKE
(laughing)
And the most restraining orders.

CHARLIE
At least I didn't make out with a
tranny at Mardi Gras.

JAKE
She wasn't a tranny, dude. She was
just really tall!

CHARLIE
Yeah, with an adam's apple.

NICK
Come on, guys. Eyes on the ball--or
balls in your case, Jake.

Charlie laughs. Jake shoves him. Just then, Matt leaves his apartment and gets into his car.

CHARLIE (INTO PHONE)
Subject's on the move!

NICK
Perfect. Tail him. I'll call Little
Pete.

INT. TRENDY BAR - NIGHT

Matt sits at a trendy, lively bar, incongruously drunk and dejected, complaining to the BARTENDER.

MATT

...it's just that I'm new in town
and my fiancée wants me to make new
friends, but you can't just do that
because--

Clearly not listening, the bartender just moves down the bar to a HOT DRUNK GIRL and asks if she wants another drink. She does. We see she's hanging onto...Nick.

Nick watches Matt across the room, ignoring the Hot Drunk Girl as she drones on.

HOT DRUNK GIRL

...so I told Amanda, I don't care
what Chris said, I know what I saw--

Nick barely pretends to listen. Finally the Hot Drunk Girl grabs his face and redirects his attention to her breasts.

HOT DRUNK GIRL (CONT'D)

They're down here.

A huge burly guy, LITTLE PETE, lumbers over to Nick. Nick slips him some money.

NICK

Remember: once I step in, you knock
him out, then I'll hit you in the
stomach and rescue him. Okay?

(Little Pete nods)
Just go easy on him.

Little Pete nods again, then goes and takes a seat right next to Matt at the bar.

Nick gives Little Pete the signal. On cue, he backs into Matt while simultaneously spilling his beer on himself. Then turns and grabs Matt by the shirt.

LITTLE PETE

What the fuck was that?

MATT

Oh, man...sorry. I didn't see you
there.

LITTLE PETE

(getting in Matt's face)
Well can you see me now, bitch?

Little Pete's six THUGGY FRIENDS crowd Matt. Matt laughs nervously, starts to sweat.

MATT
No, no, it's just...I didn't notice you--

LITTLE PETE
(to Thuggy Friend)
Did you hear what this douchebag just said?

THUGGY FRIEND
He's disrespecting you, man.

MATT
No, I'm not. I respect you. I have a ton of respect for you.

LITTLE PETE
(inches from Matt)
This isn't good. There are penalties for this kind of thing.

Across the room, Nick finishes his drink and saunters over to the altercation.

NICK
Hey, is there a problem here?

LITTLE PETE
What--you want a piece of me too?

NICK
Me? No. What I want is for you to go make up with your dad. Just because he used to hit you doesn't mean he didn't love you.

LITTLE PETE
What the fuck did you just say to me?

MATT
I think what he said was--

LITTLE PETE
That's it. You're fucking dead.

Little Pete SWINGS at Matt. Matt deftly side-steps it and throws a nasty RIGHT-HOOK. Little Pete STAGGERS back. Nick's stunned--he didn't see that coming.

Then Little Pete cracks his neck and just shakes it off.

LITTLE PETE (CONT'D)
(angry now)
Now I'm going to kick both your
asses for real!

MATT
What?

NICK
Shit.

Nick GRABS Matt and the Hot Drunk Girl and BOLTS out of the bar. Little Pete and crew TAKE OFF after them.

EXT. TRENDY BAR - CONTINUOUS

Nick, Matt and the Hot Drunk Girl JUMP into a cab as it's pulling away from the bar, just inches ahead of the angry mob.

INT. CAB - CONTINUOUS

The Hot Drunk Girl is squeezed awkwardly between Matt and Nick. Everyone's out of breath, adrenaline flowing.

MATT
Hey man--thanks for stepping in
back there.

NICK
I should be thanking you. You're
the one who saved my ass.
(catching his breath)
But what the hell happened?

MATT
I don't know. That guy just picked
a fight with me.

NICK
(pointedly)
Where were your friends?

MATT
Um...you know, it's just...I'm just
new here and...I don't really know
anyone.

NICK
Well you made a friend tonight.

MATT
(flattered)
Oh, it was really nothing.

NICK

Let me at least buy you a drink to thank you. What's your number? We should meet up.

MATT

Really? Sure--I mean, that's great. 312-490-2364.

Nick punches it into his cell.

HOT DRUNK GIRL

Don't you want my number too?

NICK

(puts his arm around her)
You're coming home with me right now. Why would I need your number?

HOT DRUNK GIRL

(in disbelief)
Why would you need my number? Like maybe so you can call me again.

Nick puts his finger to her lips and looks her right in the eye. He doesn't look away while talking.

NICK

Look, I know what you're going to say. And, believe me, I understand how you feel. But lets not fight this thing that's happening between us. Let's just go home and have a special night together and not spoil it with any of this. We can figure out the rest in the morning. Okay?

She nods at Nick, almost hypnotized. Matt's awestruck.

The cab pulls up outside Matt's place. Nick steps out of the cab with Matt.

MATT

Dude, you just horse-whispered that girl. It was amazing.

NICK

Thanks, man. Hey, we should meet up this weekend.

MATT

Cool. That'd be great.

Nick gets back into the cab.

NICK
(to himself)
And the bromance begins...

HOT DRUNK GIRL
What?

NICK
Nothing, Duchess. Let's take you
home and get you out of those
clothes.

INT. MATT AND KATE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - ANOTHER NIGHT

Matt sits at his laptop, flanked by stacks of web design manuals, looking miserable, uploading before-and-after pictures of KIDS WITH BACK-ACNE for a dermatologist's site. Kate comes over with a plate of Mallomars and milk.

KATE
Here you go, sweetie. And there's a
fresh pot of coffee in the kitchen.

MATT
(antsy)
Are you sure you don't want me to
come to your business thing with
you?

KATE
It's just a client dinner. And
it'll go late. So it's the perfect
time for you to work. You'll have
the whole place to yourself for
hours. You can finally finish that
website.

Kate kisses Matt then heads for the door.

KATE (CONT'D)
No distractions.

MATT
I still don't see how uploading
jpeg's of zitty kids is going to
help my career.

KATE
Come on, baby. If you want to grow
your business you have to take
whatever work you can get.

The moment Kate leaves, Matt gets up and paces.

In a SERIES OF FADES we see Matt: sit down, open a manual, close it, fidget, surf the web.

Finally, his cell rings and he literally pounces on it. It's Nick.

MATT (INTO PHONE)
Hey, Nick...Yeah, that'd be great,
but I've got...

Matt looks over at his web design work, then back at the phone. He knows what he has to do.

MATT (INTO PHONE) (CONT'D)
...actually, a movie would be
perfect.

EXT. MATT AND KATE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Nick pulls up to Matt's place on his motorcycle. Matt comes outside.

MATT
I'm really glad you called. You
saved me from a night of torture
and--
(notices Nick's bike)
Hey, nice bike.

NICK
Thanks. Hop on.

Matt suddenly realizes what "hopping on" will entail.

MATT
You know, you didn't have to pick
me up. I could've met you there.

NICK
Don't worry about it.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHICAGO STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Matt rides shotgun on the bike, awkwardly trying to keep from essentially straddling Nick.

Completely off-balance, Matt holds the sides of the seat because he doesn't want to put his arms around Nick.

NICK
You okay back there?

Nick purposely makes a SHARP TURN. Matt SLIDES over, barely keeps from falling off.

MATT
(not okay)
Perfect.

NICK
Glad to hear it.

Nick smiles as he makes an even SHARPER TURN. Matt has no choice now--he grabs onto Nick for dear life.

Then he begins scooting his crotch away from Nick, contorting his back, just as Nick stops at a red light. Matt FALLS off.

EXT. MOVIE THEATER - MARQUEE - NIGHT

Nick and Matt stand outside the theater and check the marquee--a few action movies and thrillers and one romantic comedy. Nick's already smirking.

MATT
(re: an action movie)
I heard that one's good.

NICK
Got terrible reviews.

MATT
Oh.
(re: the two thrillers)
I'd see either of those.

NICK
Saw 'em already.

Only the romantic comedy is left now.

MATT
Well I guess we'll just go somewhere else.

NICK
You forgot "Love Trap."

MATT
(thinks Nick's kidding)
Yeah, right.
(off Nick's look)
Are you serious? You want to see that?

NICK
Sure. I'll see anything
McConaughey's in.

Matt's still waiting for the punch-line as Nick enters the theater.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - CONCESSION STAND - NIGHT

Nick pays for their popcorn and sodas. Matt hands him money.

MATT
Here you go.

NICK
(won't take it)
It's on me.

MATT
Just take it.

NICK
Don't worry about it.

Feeling uncomfortably date-like, Matt does an end run around to give the cash directly to the cashier, but Nick blocks him.

NICK (CONT'D)
It's my treat.

MATT
Okay, fine.

Matt takes a step away, then DARTS back to slip the cashier the money, but Nick's too fast and heads him off.

NICK
I insist.

MATT
(unhappily)
Thanks.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - MOMENTS LATER

As Nick and Matt find their seats, Matt puts his jacket between them and takes the seat one over, giving himself the standard dude-on-dude "courtesy seat."

Nick, stifling a smile, moves Matt's jacket over and slides into the seat next to him, violating the rule and Matt's personal space. Matt looks at Nick questioningly.

NICK
What?

MATT
(re: the courtesy seat)
Are you...do you want to...?

NICK
Do I want to what?

MATT
(it's just too awkward)
Nothing.

Matt slides over again, giving himself another courtesy seat.
Nick slides right after him.

NICK
Much better. Now we're right in the
middle.

Matt looks disturbed.

NICK (CONT'D)
You're okay with seeing this,
right? It doesn't make you
uncomfortable, does it?

MATT
(uncomfortable)
No. Not at all.

Nick reaches into the popcorn bag on Matt's lap, causing Matt
to squirm, and eats a handful of popcorn.

INT. MATT AND KATE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Matt enters his apartment and very self-consciously turns and
waves. Outside, Nick waves back, sitting on his motorcycle,
still idling in the driveway.

Kate walks over to Matt.

KATE
So I guess you finished the whole
site tonight.

MATT
(caught)
Oh...I did some work, then I just
went out for--

KATE
(playfully pokes him)
Liar. You didn't do any work. I
checked your computer.

MATT
What? You checked up on me?

KATE
And you lied to me.

MATT
(thinking fast)
Well, if you let me finish, I was
going to tell you I went out with
Nick. I thought you wanted me to
make new friends.

Kate's whole demeanor softens.

KATE
Sweetie, why didn't you just say
that? I'm so sorry. That's great.
(hugs Matt)
How was it?

Matt notices Nick still idling in the driveway, waiting to
make sure Matt's safe and sound.

MATT
It's actually still going on.
(calls out to Nick)
Goodnight!

Nick waves goodbye and Matt closes the door.

KATE
So was it fun?

MATT
Yeah, it was...actually, it
was...you had to be there.

KATE
(barely listening)
I'm so proud of you, baby.

INT. NORTHWESTERN - PSYCH BUILDING - SEMINAR ROOM - DAY

Nick and Rachel deliver their first bi-weekly presentation to
Desmond and the rest of the department.

NICK
I've invaded the subject's personal
space. I've confused the context of
our first outing. And let's just
say we saw a gender-inappropriate
movie--a chick-flick.

DESMOND
Good. A classic social-conventional
transgression.

STUFFY PROFESSOR
Which forces the subject out of his
comfort zone.

NICK

Exactly.

RACHEL

And which also forces Nick out of his comfort zone.

Nods and murmurs from other professors. Nick ignores her.

NICK

I've left him three messages this week. And do you know how many times he's called me back?

(to Rachel)

Come on, Jennings. Give it a guess.

CHARLIE

(way too excited)

None! The guy is freaked out!

RACHEL

This is just the initial awkwardness. It'll pass.

NICK

Really? Alright. Let's speed things up then.

Nick takes out his cellphone.

NICK (CONT'D)

'Rule': 'You can never call a guy without a reason for the call--just to talk.'

He dials Matt's number and hits the speakerphone button so everyone can listen in.

INT. MATT AND KATE'S APARTMENT - SAME TIME

Matt's back at his laptop, playing Minesweeper--the same stacks of web design manuals beside him, next to an untouched plate of Mallomars.

Kate enters the room and he quickly starts fake-typing.

KATE

Baby, you have to stop taking breaks.

Matt's cell rings. He reaches for it.

KATE (CONT'D)

Matt, don't answer it.

Kate checks who's calling.

KATE (CONT'D)
(sweetly)
Oh, it's okay. It's Nick. You can
take it.

MATT
(matter of factly)
Can't. Working on a site.

KATE
Come on. I think he just really
likes you.

Matt lets the call go to voicemail.

KATE (CONT'D)
He's excited to hang out.

MATT
Look, I gave it a shot, but I told
you, it got weird.

KATE
It can't be that bad.

The home phone rings. Matt checks caller ID. It's Nick.

MATT
Really?

NICK (ON ANSWERING MACHINE)
Hey, it's me, just calling because
I was thinking about you. I tried
you a few days ago and didn't hear
back. Just wanted to see if
everything's okay. And if you're
busy, don't worry about it. I'll
just check in on you again.

MATT
(to Kate)
See what I mean?

Kate just shrugs.

INT. NORTHWESTERN - PSYCH BUILDING - SEMINAR ROOM - SAME TIME
Nick, Charlie and crew are gloating over Rachel.

NICK
That was call number four. How long
do you expect this 'initial
awkwardness' to last, Dr. Jennings?

RACHEL

About as long as one of your relationships.

NICK

So the cab ride from the bar to my apartment?

Nick's crew laughs. Nick waves goodbye to Rachel, who still looks calm. Desmond watches on, amused.

INT. MATT AND KATE'S APARTMENT - SAME TIME

Kate rubs Matt's shoulders while Matt sits at his desk. She's in full-on mommy-mode.

MATT

What kind of guy calls just to say hi?

KATE

I think he's being sweet.

MATT

I think he's hitting on me.

KATE

Matt, you said you saw him horse-whisper that girl. He's not gay. You're being homophobic.

MATT

Well, maybe he's being homo.

KATE

Look, if one-on-one's too weird, I'll come along and he can bring a date. I really want to meet him.

MATT

I don't want to do a boring dinner double-date.

KATE

Then let's have him come play tennis with us. We could get back into a regular doubles game like we had in New York. Wouldn't that be great?

MATT

I don't know.

KATE

Come on, baby. For me. And the way you described him, I'm sure he'll have no problem finding a date.

INT. NORTHWESTERN - PSYCH BUILDING - SEMINAR ROOM - SAME TIME

Nick packs up as the professors leave the seminar room.

RACHEL

This isn't official, Darrow. You get at least seven days for a call-back.

NICK

It's over, Jennings. The sooner you accept that, the sooner you can start applying for positions at junior colleges.

Nick's cell rings. It's Matt. Nick hesitates for a moment. Desmond and the professors pause in the doorway.

NICK (CONT'D)

It's definitely the break-up call.

RACHEL

You don't sound too sure about that.

NICK

You all might want to listen in. We should have witnesses in case Jennings tries to back out.

Nick hits the speaker-phone button and answers his cell.

NICK (INTO PHONE) (CONT'D)

Hey Matt!

MATT (ON THE PHONE)

(unenthusiastic)

Hey, sorry I didn't call back sooner. I've been really busy.

NICK (INTO PHONE)

(smirking at Rachel)

No problem, man. What's on your mind?

MATT (ON THE PHONE)

I--we--Kate and I wanted to see if you'd play tennis with us tomorrow.

The mood in the room is energized. Charlie and the crew deflate. Nick's shocked.

NICK (INTO PHONE)

What?

MATT (ON THE PHONE)

It's totally fine if you don't want
to or if you can't find a doubles
partner.

NICK (INTO PHONE)

Oh, yeah, I don't know if I can--

RACHEL

(mouths to Nick)
You're going.

NICK (INTO PHONE)

Actually, I'm free, Matt.

(staring at Rachel)

Not going anywhere. I'll see you
tomorrow.

Nick hangs up, pissed. Now it's Rachel's turn to smirk.

NICK (CONT'D)

Don't think this means anything.

RACHEL

Right. Of course not.

NICK

This is an opportunity.

RACHEL

Great. And I'll be there to watch.

NICK

No, you won't.

DESMOND

You need a doubles partner, Darrow.

(before Nick can object)

I'm not asking.

EXT. COUNTRY CLUB - TENNIS COURT - DAY

Nick and Rachel carry their rackets toward the tennis courts.
Nick looks miserable. Rachel's stifling a smile.

NICK

Don't look so smug.

RACHEL

I'm not smug. I'm just looking
forward to a little mixed doubles.

NICK

Well, I've got a surprise for you.
(taps his tennis bag)
'Rule': 'You can never show a guy-friend that you really care.'

They enter the court and see Matt and Kate waiting. Nick gives Matt a full BEAR-HUG. Matt's caught off guard.

NICK (CONT'D)

Matt, my man...And this must be Kate. You're even prettier than Matt said.

KATE

(charmed)
And you must be Nick.

An awkward beat. Nick doesn't introduce Rachel.

RACHEL

Hi, I'm Rachel.
(beat)
I'm Nick's girlfriend.

Nick turns to Rachel questioningly. She flashes Nick a mischievous look.

KATE

Hi, Rachel. Kate.

They politely shake hands as Nick rummages through his tennis bag. He takes out a GIFT BAG tied off with a series of CURLICUED RIBBONS.

KATE (CONT'D)

Whatcha got there?

NICK

Well, I know Matt's been working really hard lately, so I brought him a little coffee-break package.

Nick holds out the gift bag to Matt. It's full of chocolate-covered espresso beans, biscotti, hot cocoa mix, Power Bars, pens and pencils.

MATT

Wow...

Matt is so weirded out he's momentarily speechless. But he makes no move to take the bag.

NICK

It's nothing.

MATT
This is just...wow.

Nick pushes the bag literally into Matt's arms, but Matt still won't take it.

NICK
I want you to have it.

Matt doesn't budge. Nick flashes Rachel a quick smile. Finally, Kate takes it for him.

KATE
Thank you, Nick. This is so sweet.
(nudging Matt)
Isn't it?

MATT
(hesitantly)
Thank you.

NICK
You don't have to thank me. This is just what friends do.

RACHEL
(interrupting the
awkwardness)
Alright, who's ready to play?

Nick claps Matt on the back and walks with Rachel to their side of the court.

NICK
(quietly to Rachel)
Who says I can't give my new man-friend a care package just because?

At the same time, Matt and Kate head to their side of the court.

KATE
That was really thoughtful.

MATT
Yeah, if Nick was my mom and this was my freshman year of college.
(beat)
The guy's gay.

KATE
You're being ridiculous.

MATT
(shaking the bag)
Come on, this is strange.

Matt reaches into the gift bag and pulls out a pencil with his name on it.

MATT (CONT'D)
You've got to admit there's
strangeness here.

But Kate doesn't get it.

EXT. COUNTRY CLUB - TENNIS COURT - MOMENTS LATER

It's Matt and Kate against Nick and Rachel. Matt's about to serve when...

KATE
Sweetie, remember to turn your
shoulder.

MATT
Okay.

He gets set to serve again when...

KATE
And step into it.

MATT
Right.

Matt sighs, resets at the line, and SERVES to Nick. Nick can easily return it, but he lets it ACE him.

NICK
Wow, man. Amazing serve. That thing
really kicks. You'll have to show
me how to do that.

MATT
Um...okay.

Rachel backs up as she gets ready for Matt's next serve.

RACHEL
(to Nick)
If this is just a cover because you
can't play, let me know. Because I
don't like to lose. I'll just pick
up your slack.

NICK
(rising to the challenge)
Are you kidding? They haven't
invented a game you can beat me at.

EXT. COUNTRY CLUB - TENNIS COURT - LATER

Kate HITS a backhand right between Nick and Rachel.

NICK

Got it.

RACHEL

It's mine.

*

*

At the last moment, Nick YANKS Rachel out of the way and SLAMS a return.

RACHEL

You remind me of the kinds of guys
I used to date when I was nineteen.

NICK

And you remind me why I only date
nineteen-year-olds.

EXT. COUNTRY CLUB - TENNIS COURT - LATER

Across the court, Kate and Matt play in perfect unity.

KATE

(calls out)
Ball. Switch.

Already at net, Matt RUSHES to the other side as Kate DRILLS a forehand down the line. Nick lobs a return.

KATE (CONT'D)

Ball. Switch.

Matt rushes back as Kate DRILLS a backhand down the line.

EXT. COUNTRY CLUB - TENNIS COURT - LATER

Kate HITS another shot right between Nick and Rachel.

NICK

It's mine.

RACHEL

Got it.

*

*

This time Rachel steps in front of Nick and NAILS a volley.

CUT TO:

A SERIES OF QUICK BEATS

Rachel DIVES for a ball. Nick's almost impressed. Rachel's fearless. But he catches himself. She's the enemy.

Matt RUSHES back and forth at the net while Kate rallies.

Nick and Rachel go for the same volley and SLAM together.

Kate stalls the game while she corrects Matt's forehand grip.
Nick KNOCKS Rachel's racket out of her hand, steals her shot.
The images breeze by at INCREASING SPEED.

CUT TO:

Nick and Rachel both race for an easy overhead.

Rachel gets there first and SLAMS it. Nick gets in Rachel's face. It's heated. They're both soaked with sweat.

NICK
I had that.

RACHEL
Obviously you didn't.

ACROSS THE COURT, Matt watches Nick and Rachel, inches from each other. It looks like they're about to kiss.

MATT
(to Kate)
They've got a pretty passionate thing over there.

KATE
So do we, sweetie.
(beat)
Just remember to step into your backhand. You're pushing.

BACK WITH NICK AND RACHEL, Nick watches Kate give Matt instructions.

NICK
(to Rachel)
Looks like she's got him on a pretty short leash.

RACHEL
Looks like he puts it on himself.

Both teams meet courtside and pack up to leave.

KATE
Good game.

RACHEL
Thanks. You too.

NICK
Seriously, man, and I've never said this about another guy before, but you move so gracefully on the court, it's like watching a dancer.

MATT
(uncomfortable)
Thanks.

NICK
It was poetry, man. Fucking poetry.

Kate beams at Nick. Rachel surreptitiously jabs him.

NICK (CONT'D)
You know, I play in a weekly
basketball game. You should really
come by. We can always use some new
blood.

MATT
Oh, yeah, I don't know if I can--

Kate surreptitiously jabs Matt.

MATT (CONT'D)
--I'd love to. Thanks. That'd be
great.

NICK
Great.

KATE
Nick, I'm just so glad Matt met
you. You know how hard it can be
meeting people in a new city.

NICK
I like to think it was fate.

Matt squirms a little as Nick and Rachel leave the courts.
The moment they're out of earshot.

KATE
(to Matt, re: Kate)
Nick's great, but I don't care for
her.

EXT. COUNTRY CLUB - MOMENTS LATER

Nick and Rachel head to the parking lot.

RACHEL
(to Nick, re: Kate)
Matt seems nice, but she kind of
sucks.

NICK
Well, you'll never see her again
because I'm ending it this weekend.
(MORE)

NICK (CONT'D)
'Rule': 'You can't bring a new friend too quickly into an established crew.' My friends will eat him alive at the basketball game.

RACHEL
Great. So you won't mind I tag along and watch.

NICK
Only if you don't mind being humiliated when I prove you wrong.

RACHEL
It's a date.

NICK
A date?

RACHEL
That came out wrong.

NICK
You just can't help yourself around me.

EXT. PARK - BASKETBALL COURTS - DAY

Nick, Charlie, Rob, Jake and crew warm up on the court, waiting for Matt to arrive. Rachel sits up in the stands.

NICK
Just remember: fuck with him on the court, act territorial, like you don't want him here.

CHARLIE
I actually don't want him here.

NICK
Good. Use that.

ROB
Me neither.

NICK
And don't be afraid to go all out.

The guys get pumped. Charlie notices Rachel up in the stands.

CHARLIE
Dude, what's Rachel doing here?
Saturday basketball is crew-only.

NICK

Relax. This whole thing is almost over.

CHARLIE

(nervously teasing)

I hope so. Because it almost seems like you're starting to enjoy this.

NICK

Are you serious? The only thing I'm going to enjoy is kicking her ass out the door.

As Nick says this, he catches Rachel's eye in the stands. She looks stunning. Nick softens. Charlie notices.

Just then Matt arrives and heads over to Nick, a little hesitant. The guys all flash him icy looks.

MATT

(relieved)

Oh, there are other people here.

NICK

You thought it was going to be one-on-one?

MATT

I wasn't sure.

Nick stifles a smile.

MATT (CONT'D)

Hey, guys. I'm Matt.

The guys barely acknowledge him.

CHARLIE

(tough)

Let's do this.

They move onto the court. Matt starts stretching gawkily. Nick and his crew smirk at each other--Matt's so out of his league here. This is going to be a horror show.

NICK

I think this'll be a lot of fun.

MATT

(oblivious)

Me too. So who are we playing?

NICK

These douchebag b-school MBAs.

JAKE
They all think they're in Boiler Room.

The other team signals they're ready. They're a bunch of guys with overly-worked-out upper-bodies and an array of receding hairlines.

BUFF DOUCHEBAG MBA
Are you front-butts ready to get eff'd again?

ASIAN DOUCHEBAG MBA
If you don't struggle, we promise it won't hurt as much this time.

CHARLIE
That's the lamest trash-talk I've ever heard.

Buff Douchebag MBA THROWS the ball roughly at Charlie.

BUFF DOUCHEBAG MBA
Let's go, cupcake.

The game starts. And the first time down the court, Buff Douchebag MBA strips the ball from Charlie, elbows Jake and scores an easy lay-up.

BUFF DOUCHEBAG MBA (CONT'D)
Let me know when you ladies are ready to start playing.

The next time down, two MBAs set nasty picks on Rob and Jake, knocking them down while Asian Douchebag MBA hits a wide-open jumper.

ASIAN DOUCHEBAG MBA
I like you guys. You make me feel like a tall black dude.

Nick takes the ball up the court and forces a tough shot even though Matt's wide open, just to snub him. Nick does the same thing the next time through.

Finally, Matt comes down with a rebound. Rob immediately SLAMS into him.

ROB
Didn't see you.

A moment later, Charlie comes off a pick and BLINDSIDES Matt, KNOCKING him down.

CHARLIE
Watch out there.

Matt gets up and dusts himself off, a little shaky. Nick smiles at Rachel up in the stands. Rachel shakes her head.

RACHEL
(mouths)
You're being mean.

NICK
(mouths back)
You're being a girl.

But while Nick's distracted by Rachel, Matt nails a perfect three-pointer right in Buff Douchebag MBA's face.

Next time down the court, Matt hits another three. Then he intercepts a pass and dishes it to Rob, who scores. The MBAs are starting to freak out.

ASIAN DOUCHEBAG MBA
This is bullshit! That guy's a ringer.

Nick's crew is shocked. Not only is Matt good, he's better than they are. The guys are forgetting that they're supposed to hate him.

JAKE
Nice grab, man.

ROB
Good look.

Nick's smile disappears. He can see Rachel beaming at him from the bleachers.

As the game goes on, and Matt hits more and more threes, Charlie's being passed the ball less and less often. Finally, he's literally screaming for the ball.

CHARLIE
(frustrated)
PASS! I'm open!

Feeling bad for him, Matt gives up a wide-open shot and passes the ball to Charlie. Only now Charlie's not expecting it, and the ball SMASHES him in the face.

Charlie looks at Matt with pure hatred as Matt grabs the loose ball and sinks the game-winning shot. Aside from Charlie, the guys are thrilled. They all celebrate with Matt.

GUYS
'Good game.' 'Great shot.'

MATT
Ah, thanks. It was nothing.

Matt's shy about compliments, but he's clearly had a lot of fun. Nick glowers, then calls out to the crew.

NICK
Come on, guys. We're going to be late.

ROB
(to Matt)
Dude, we're all about to head out to a Northwestern game. It's always a good time. You should come.

Nick gestures for Rob to cut it out. Rob doesn't notice.

MATT
Really? I'd love to.

Matt starts to walk off with Nick's crew. Nick panics.

NICK
Wait--don't you have to work today?

MATT
Shit. You're right.

JAKE
Another time then.

The guys say goodbye to Matt as Rachel heads over to Nick, gloating.

RACHEL
So it looks like you two are becoming fast friends.

NICK
You think this means something?
This doesn't mean anything. I'm so far from losing, Jennings--you have no idea. This is just foreplay. I'm meeting his family this weekend.

RACHEL
I think you mean we're meeting his family.

NICK
(smiling)
Too late. I already told him you'll be visiting your sick mother in Tucson.

Rachel looks nervous. Nick has her on the ropes.

NICK (CONT'D)
It'll just be me and the Stone
family on a little schooner in the
middle of lake Michigan. No
supervision. It'll be like *Dead
Calm* meets *Meet the Parents*.

Nick struts over to his friends.

RACHEL
(calls after him)
It's not over yet, Darrow.

NICK
(to the crew)
We need to talk.

INT. NORTHWESTERN - WELSH-RYAN ARENA - DAY

A typically under-attended Northwestern basketball game. Nick scolds Charlie, Rob and Jake while they watch the Wildcats get beat up by Indiana. Charlie still has tissues stuffed up his bloody nose.

Everyone's wearing their lettered sweatshirts, as usual, and they're sitting in order, spelling out "CATS!"

NICK
What the hell happened out there?

JAKE
We won.

NICK
(annoyed)
I mean with Matt.

JAKE
We fucked with him.

CHARLIE
You and Rob basically blew him!

ROB
The guy's got a mean outside
jumper.
(Nick gives him a steely
look)
What? I'm not saying I want to be
friends with him.

JAKE
But it did feel good to finally
beat those hand-jobs.

KEVIN COBLE drives and dunks over Indiana's CENTER. The guys stand up and CHEER. Nick and Charlie barely notice.

CHARLIE

We need to fuck this guy up. We're being way too soft on him.

NICK

Luckily, I've got a back-up plan. I'm going to drop the BFF bomb on him.

ROB

(in disbelief)
No, you're not...

NICK

I am. I'm going to tell him he's my best friend. And I'm going to do it in front of his entire family. I'm meeting them this weekend.

CHARLIE

That's genius.

NICK

I'd literally be breaking four rules at once. No guy could stand that kind of awkwardness.

JAKE

But Matt's still going to play with us next week, right?

Nick sighs.

EXT. LAKE MICHIGAN - DOCKS - MORNING

Matt, Kate, and Matt'S MOM and Matt'S DAD load a schooner.

MATT'S MOM

So who's this friend of yours again?

MATT

He's not really a friend.

KATE

Yes, he is.

MATT

(gives Kate a look)
He's more of...this guy I hang out with sometimes who--

KATE

--thinks Matt's great and wants to meet his family. And I think he's a really nice guy.

MATT'S MOM

Well if Kate likes him, I'm sure we'll love him.

Matt's Dad notices some dark clouds on the horizon.

MATT'S DAD

Those clouds don't look too good.

MATT'S MOM

Oh, don't be such a baby, Mitchell. We only have the boat for the day.

Just then, Nick steps out of the schooner's cabin carrying two shopping bags, startling everyone.

NICK

And it's a beautiful day.

MATT

(surprised)

Nick--I didn't know you were already here.

Nick beelines straight for Matt's Mom and Dad.

NICK

Mr. Stone, Mrs. Stone. It's so good to finally meet you.

Matt's parents hold out their hands. Nick goes straight in for the hug, surprising them.

MATT'S MOM

And it's good to meet you...

NICK

Nick. And I just have to tell you two, you've got a really special guy here.

(throws an arm around Matt)

You did an amazing job with this one. Really.

MATT'S DAD

Oh. Well, thanks. Nick.

KATE

He's right, baby. You are special.

Kate takes Matt's hand and gently pulls him away from Nick, over to her.

NICK
What a great family you've got, Matt. I feel honored to be let into it. So I brought a little something to mark the occasion.

Nick pulls custom-made windbreakers out of the shopping bags. They all read: "Stone Family" and are followed by a number on the back: 1 for Matt's Mom, 2 for Matt's Dad, 3 for Matt, 4 for Nick, and 5 for Kate.

KATE
Why am I five?

NICK
Oh, the numbers are just random.

Kate stares at Nick as he stands there, grinning at Matt and his parents as everyone puts on their extra-large windbreakers. It's an extremely awkward moment.

NICK (CONT'D)
I didn't know everyone's size, so I just got extra-larges.

Nick tosses Kate his camera-phone.

NICK (CONT'D)
Hey Kate, would you mind just snapping a quick shot of us?

KATE
(a little annoyed)
Sure.

NICK
Let me just squeeze right in here.

Nick squeezes in right between Matt's Mom and Dad, and puts his arms around everybody. The awkwardness is almost unbearable. No one knows what to say.

MATT
Here, why don't I show you where to put your bags first.

Matt leads Nick to the cabin. Matt's parents sigh.

MATT'S DAD
(re: Nick)
Who is he again?

EXT. LAKE MICHIGAN - LATER

Nick talks incessantly to Matt and his parents. Kate, seasick, watches suspiciously as she tries not to throw up.

NICK

...and so the minute I met Matt
after that bar fight, I knew we'd
be friends for life.

MATT'S MOM

(accusatory, to Matt)
Bar fight?

Matt shrugs as Nick rolls on.

NICK

(to Matt's Dad)
You know how sometimes you just
have a feeling about someone,
Mitch?

MATT'S DAD

(staring at Nick)
Yeah, I'm starting to, Nick.

NICK

You don't mind if I call you Mitch,
do you?

MATT'S DAD

Um--

NICK

Well, that's how it was with Matt
and me. I think sometimes you just
know right away.

Things are peaking in terms of awkwardness. Nick knows he's just an hour or so away from driving Matt away, when...the boat ROCKS SHARPLY, THROWING everyone to the right.

They've hit the patch of storm clouds and the waves are KICKING UP, suddenly and violently ROCKING the boat.

MATT'S MOM

(terrified)
Oh my god, Mitchell, fix it!

Kate grabs Matt's arm and won't let go. As the waves crest, the boat TILTS sharply. Everyone has to grab hold of something to keep from going overboard.

KATE

Matt! What do we do?

MATT
Dad, grab the wheel, I'll set the
sails.
(Matt's Dad is frozen in
terror)
Dad! Now!

Matt's Dad does as he's told. Matt starts reeling down the headsail and simultaneously prepping the mainsail. He's moving swiftly and confidently. There's no look of fear, just a determined sense of purpose.

Nick watches, stunned. Where's this coming from? Who is this guy?

A huge wave SLAMS the deck, WHIPPING the cockstaff around, sending it FLYING right at Matt's Mom. Nick PUSHES her out of the way, saving her, but gets KNOCKED overboard. Everyone freaks out. Without thinking, Matt DIVES in after him.

In the churning water, Matt grabs Nick, and swims him back to the boat. Matt and his dad help lift Nick aboard.

KATE
He's not breathing!
MATT'S MOM
Does anyone know CPR?

MATT
I do.

Nick WRITHES and MOANS, unconscious on the deck. The whole thing suddenly feels vaguely sexual. Matt pauses.

MATT (CONT'D)
(quietly)
Oh, Jesus.

MATT'S MOM
Save him!

MATT
If he's moaning, he can breath.
(uncertain)
He'll be fine.

KATE
Matt, stop arguing!

MATT'S MOM
And just go down on him!

MATT
Mom, that's not how you--

KATE
Matt! Hurry!

Averting his eyes, Matt gingerly puts his lips to Nick's mouth just as...a HUGE WAVE SLAMS the deck, KNOCKING Matt into a "69" POSITION with Nick.

At that moment, Nick comes to, and SLAMS his head into Matt's crotch. Matt COLLAPSES. Now he's writhing and moaning.

Kate and Matt's Dad rush over to comfort Nick while Matt staggers over to the steering wheel and sails them toward calm water.

EXT. LAKE MICHIGAN - LATER

Nick recovers while Matt sails them back toward the dock. He watches Matt and it's as if he's seeing him for the first time. Yeah, the guy might be a little henpecked, but holy shit--he's kind of a secret badass.

NICK
Dude, I don't know how to say this
but...you kinda saved my life.

MATT
Ah, it was nothing.

NICK
Where'd you learn how to do that
stuff?

MATT
I was on the boating team in
college.

KATE
He was the captain.

Matt shrugs.

NICK
I thought you played basketball.

MATT
Yeah, I sort of did both, but it's
not a big deal. It was D-2.

NICK
It is a big deal. You should be
proud of that kind of stuff. I
would be.

Matt considers that.

KATE
(defensive)
Matt's just humble.

NICK
I'm just saying, you've got to own
who you are.

Matt really takes this in. Nick has a point. Kate immediately dislikes Nick. Matt docks the boat back at the Yacht Club.

MATT'S DAD
Come on, kids. Let's go get some
dry clothes.

Matt's Mom, Matt's Dad and Kate step off onto the dock.

MATT
I think I'll just stay here. I kind
of feel like catching my breath for
a while.

NICK
Me too.

EXT. YACHT CLUB DOCK - LATER

Nick and Matt sit out on the deck, most of the way through polishing off a twelve-pack, watching the sun setting on Lake Michigan. A radio plays in the background.

The water's calm and beautiful. The guys are a little drunk.

MATT
You know, Kate's actually really
sweet. It's just that sometimes she
can be a little...

NICK
Overbearing?

MATT
I was going to say protective,
but...

Matt smiles as he finishes his beer and grabs another. He pauses for a moment.

MATT (CONT'D)
You know what? Fuck it--she can be
overbearing sometimes. I don't even
know why I'm telling you this, but
a few years ago, I had tickets to
game seven of the 2003 Yankees-Red
Sox playoff series.

NICK

Amazing game. Boone's homer in the bottom of the 11th won them the pennant.

MATT

(sadly)

Yeah. I know. So I busted my ass and got a pair of tickets--and a day before the game Kate surprised me with tickets to Paris for the weekend.

NICK

No. No...don't even say it.

MATT

I went to Paris.

NICK

How could she let you give up the tickets?

MATT

I didn't tell her.

NICK

(clutching his chest)
That hurts, man. That actually physically hurts me. I was at that game.

MATT

Are you serious?

NICK

Yeah, and I blew off a lecture to be there. I caught Boone's homerun ball.

MATT

(hangs his head)
Oh, man. I mean--that's amazing.

Matt drains his beer. Nick tosses him another--the last.

MATT (CONT'D)

So what's the deal with you and Rachel?

NICK

(caught off guard)
What do you mean? There's no deal.

MATT

Come on, man. I saw you two on the tennis court. It looked like... Klingon foreplay or something.

Nick relaxes, realizes Matt couldn't know about the bet.

NICK

You know, she comes into the department and thinks she knows everything about everything.

(remembers his lie)

And...uh...she's my girlfriend and I'm crazy about her, but she just thinks she's got everyone figured out--including me. Which is ridiculous.

MATT

Why? What if she does have you figured out? That doesn't have to be a bad thing. It's called intimacy.

NICK

Yeah, but you don't want someone just...poking around, trying to figure things out, knowing everything about you.

MATT

Because it makes you vulnerable.

Nick aggressively crushes a beer can. This is hard for him.

NICK

Yeah, I don't know.

It's getting late and the sun is setting. It's a beautiful scene. Journey's "Don't Stop Believin'" comes on the radio.

NICK (CONT'D)

I love this song!

ANDY

I love this song!

They look at each other. It's another connection.

NICK (CONT'D)

This song was playing in the car when I lost my virginity. Julie Palumbo.

MATT

This was the song that played over the video montage at my bar mitzvah. Your memory's a little cooler, but, fuck it, I still love this song.

They both laugh. Nick looks out at the tranquil water.

NICK
We've got to do this again.

MATT
Definitely.

Nick and Matt hum the melody. A bromance is born.

INT. UNITED CENTER - NIGHT

Nick's out with the crew at an Ultimate Fighting Championship match. In the cage, Lidell PUNCHES the TEETH out of Ortiz' mouth.

While the guys stand up and CHEER, Nick remains seated, humming "Don't Stop Believin'," surreptitiously TEXTING Matt.

INT. MATT AND KATE'S APARTMENT - SAME TIME

Matt fools around with Kate on the couch when he gets a text.

In mid-make-out, Matt slyly opens his cell and reads Nick's text. Then abruptly LAUGHS. Right into Kate's mouth.

KATE
(coughing)
What the fuck, Matt?

EXT. PARK - BASKETBALL COURTS - DAY

Nick and Matt play a pick-up basketball game. None of Nick's friends are there.

Matt sets a pick for Nick, then rolls to the hoop. Nick hits him with a perfect pass and Matt scores. Like clockwork.

MATT
Great look.

NICK
Great shot.

Matt steals the inbound pass and dishes to Nick, who scores.

MATT
You rock.

NICK
No, you rock.

They bump chests. They're in Man-Gri-La. One of their TEAMMATES turns to another.

TEAMMATE
I'm gonna kill myself if I have to
hear anymore of this shit.

Nick and Matt begin doing an EXTREMELY ELABORATE HANDSHAKE.

EXT. MICHIGAN AVENUE - DAY

Nick and Matt walk down Michigan Avenue. Matt stops to admire a cool LEATHER JACKET in a store window.

NICK
Get it, man.

MATT
Are you kidding? You could wear
that. I could never pull it off.

NICK
Sure you can. Just go in, pay for
it, and wear it out.

Matt looks like he's about to go for it, then pauses.

MATT
Kate would hate it.

NICK
So? She doesn't have to wear it.

Matt smiles: *why the fuck not?*

EXT. MICHIGAN AVENUE - MOMENTS LATER

Matt leaves the store wearing the cool leather jacket. Two WOMEN passing by check him out. Matt's happy. Nick's proud.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARK - BASKETBALL COURTS - DAY

Nick and Matt continue their EXTREMELY ELABORATE HANDSHAKE.

CUT TO:

INT. NICK'S LOFT - DAY

Nick and Matt are at Nick's bachelor pad, playing *Medal of Honor* on a huge flatscreen TV.

In the game, Nick gets pinned down by a sniper. Matt's character comes back to save him.

NICK

Dude, what are you doing? I'm dead.
It's every man for himself. We're competing.

MATT

No, we're not. We're a team.

Matt lobs a grenade, GRABS Nick, and DODGING enemy fire, risking his life, pulls him to safety. It's a BRUCKHEIMER MOMENT.

MATT (CONT'D)

Leave no man behind.

Nick looks at Matt with undisguised admiration. This is the opposite of Nick's own life philosophy, but it makes sense.

Matt holds out a fist to Nick. They bump fists.

Nick's slipping into this growing bromance like quicksand.

INT. DIVE BAR - NIGHT

Nick and Matt SLAM a round of tequila shots, then another. Matt almost slips off his stool. They're TRASHED.

NICK

(drunkenly toasting)
To you...

MATT

No, to you...

They clink glasses...too hard. The glasses SHATTER.

BARTENDER

Alright. I'm cutting you two off.

Nick pulls Matt away from the bar.

NICK

Come on. Let's drink at your place.

INT. MATT AND KATE'S APARTMENT - LATER

Nick and Matt stumble into Matt's apartment, drunkenly shushing each other.

They stop when they notice Kate passed out on the couch beneath a pile of legal briefs.

They look at each other.

CUT TO:

Matt shakes with UNCONTROLLABLE SILENT LAUGHTER as he SPRAYS SHAVING CREAM into Kate's hand while Nick tickles her face.

But instead of scratching her face, Kate scratches her butt, smearing shaving cream all over her pants. Nick and Matt collapse into a fit of SILENT GIGGLES.

They're in their own world of drunken little boy mischief.

MATT
(whispers)
Holy shit--I've got a genius idea.

Matt starts to take off his pants.

NICK
Okay, I think it's time for me to go.

MATT
Wait--wait, just watch...

Matt squats over Kate and smiles.

NICK
Dude, no...

MATT
(slurring)
I've always wanted to do this to her.

Matt "TEA-BAGS" his sleeping fiancée--we can't see it but we know his balls are on her face. Nick doubles over with laughter.

MATT (CONT'D)
(still tea-bagging Kate)
Seriously, sometimes I see her working at her desk, looking all proper, and I just want to--

Kate suddenly wakes up. KATE'S POV: Her vision is dominated by something abstractly FLESHY and HAIRY.

She SWIPES at it, startled. Matt YELPS in pain, then FALLS off the couch. Nick rolls on the floor, laughing. Still half-asleep, Kate RUNS into the bedroom and SLAMS the door.

KATE (O.S.)
Matt, YOU ASSHOLE!

Matt lays on the floor, cupping his injured balls.

MATT
(to Nick)
It was so worth it.

EXT. HOUSE OF BLUES - NIGHT

Nick and Matt walk out of a concert and head down a crowded street.

NICK
If you told me a few weeks ago I'd be spending a Saturday night with a dude instead of two chicks, I'd have tea-bagged you.

Matt laughs.

MATT
Wait--did you and Rachel break up?

NICK
(caught, ad-libs)
Oh, right...Rachel...no, it's just I've just never been a 'relationship' kind of guy. I'm more into girls, in the plural.

MATT
What do you mean?

NICK
Nothing. I think I'm used to being independent, not having to answer to anyone, you know?

MATT
Yeah, I mean, it's easy to keep your guard up around everyone, but if you don't pick some people you can trust, you end up old and alone--with a big empty apartment and a fridge with two oranges and a bottle of champagne in it.

NICK
Have you been going through my fridge?

MATT
Seriously, though, you should give it another shot with Rachel instead of just walking away. She's special, man. I can tell just watching you together.

NICK
I don't know.

MATT
We can even do another double-date.
You won't be out there on your own.
I'll be there with you.

NICK
(embarrassed)
I'll think about it.

MATT
Just go ask her out.

EXT. NORTHWESTERN - MAIN QUAD - DAY

Bands play on several stages at a big, raucous party that's taken over the quad. Drunken UNDERGRADS mingle with GRAD STUDENTS and ADMINISTRATORS. It's the annual Northwestern Dillo Day festival.

Nick and his crew have a table to themselves. Nick looks distracted, thinking about Matt's advice, while the crew bullshits.

JAKE
That's completely retarded. If you gave your bum Phenobarbital right before a bum-fight, he'd be a mess.

CHARLIE
But he wouldn't feel any pain. He'd be like Drago in *Rocky 4*, but crazy. He'd be like a crazy fighting machine.

JAKE
Dude, he'd crap his pants and eventually fall asleep. Methamphetamines are what you want before a fight.

CHARLIE
Darrow, a little help here.

NICK
(distracted)
What?

ROB
Barbs or meth?

NICK
No thanks, man.

The guys look at Nick quizzically for a moment.

CHARLIE

Dude, where have you been lately?

ROB

Yeah, you haven't missed this many
nights out since you got mono
Sophomore year.

NICK

(covering)

It's just this thing with Rachel.
It's been eating up all my time.

CHARLIE

But you said you'd be done with
Matt by now.

NICK

I am--will be...soon.

Charlie looks suspicious.

CHARLIE

Hey--let's have a night tonight.
Hit the spots, get trashed, grab
some girls. We'll do it old-
school...

The guys all get pumped just as Nick sees Rachel over by the concession stand.

NICK

(stands up)

Hold that thought. I'll be right
back.

Irritated, Charlie watches Nick walk over to Rachel just as a tall, handsome COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYER hits on her.

NICK (CONT'D)

(to Rachel)

Can I talk to you for a sec?

(to Football Player)

Sorry. Official school business.

The College Football Player shrugs and walks off.

RACHEL

Wait--did you just cock-block me? I
think you did.

NICK

(a little embarrassed)

Yeah, well, maybe I just saved you
from a very painful date-rape.

(MORE)

NICK (CONT'D)
(off her look)
Or at least an R Kelly video. You
can thank me later.

RACHEL
You're just full of surprises,
Darrow.

Rachel grabs a fully-loaded chili-dog from the concession stand and starts wolfing it down.

NICK
So are you. I'm impressed.
(re: her perfect body)
Where do you put it?

RACHEL
I'm just one of those girls who can
eat whatever she wants and never
gain weight.
(beat)
Because I boot everything right up.

Nick laughs.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
I'm just really lucky that way.

Charlie calls out to Nick from the table--

CHARLIE
Darrow, grab us some wings while
you're over there.

NICK
In a minute.

Nick's on a mission. He can't leave yet.

RACHEL
So I read your notes on the boat
trip. Sounds like Matt was kind of
impressive.

NICK
Yeah, I had no idea he could do all
that stuff.

RACHEL
It almost seems like you're
starting to like the guy.

Rachel's joking, but the joke cuts to Nick's own insecurity.

NICK
Listen, the guy's a...This is work,
okay? This isn't fun for me.

Rachel realizes she's hit a sensitive spot.

RACHEL

Okay, fine. I believe you.

NICK

Good. Fine.

Nick pauses, takes a breath, tries to follow Matt's advice.

NICK (CONT'D)

(this is hard for him)

Look, I came over here to...because
I wanted to see if, tonight, if you
wanted to...

(he gives up)

...I'm seeing Matt later, so you
should come. Because you're my
'girlfriend.'

RACHEL

Okay...thanks, I guess.

Despite herself, Rachel's a little touched that Nick asked
her out---sort of. So she immediately tries to hide it.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

As long as it's not a date.

NICK

That's your word, not mine.

RACHEL

Great. Because this is just work.

NICK

Obviously.

A little embarrassed, Nick heads back over to his crew just
as Charlie returns to the table with a round of drinks.

CHARLIE

Perfect timing, Darrow. Ready to
start the night early?

Amped, Charlie, Jake and Rob all hold out glasses to Nick,
waiting for him to pick up his. But he doesn't.

NICK

Guys, I'm really sorry. I've got to
bail on tonight.

CHARLIE

What? Why?

NICK
(lying again)
Desmond. He's making us work on our
next presentation. I can't get out
of it. Sorry.

Nick walks off. Charlie watches him, even more suspicious.

INT. KARAOKE BAR - NIGHT

Nick, Matt, Rachel and Kate enter a fun raucous karaoke bar.
Matt's wearing his new leather jacket.

KATE
(re: his leather jacket)
Sweetie, why did you have to wear
that out? You don't look like you
in it.

MATT
Well, I like it.

RACHEL
(shrugs)
I do too.

KATE
(annoyed at Rachel)
I think it smells.

NICK
Alright, who's up for tequila
shots? First round's on me.

MATT
I'm in.

KATE
I hate tequila.

RACHEL
I love tequila.

NICK
Me too.

Before Kate can suggest something else, Nick, Matt and Rachel
are clinking glasses at the bar and downing their shots.

NICK (CONT'D)
Let's do another.

RACHEL
You sure you can handle that,
Darrow?

NICK

Alright, Jennings. Let's see what you've got.

Nick signals to the BARTENDER as Kate pulls up a stool next to them, but she might as well be invisible.

KATE

(to the Bartender)
Kettle One Martini.

BARTENDER

We're out of Kettle.

KATE

(annoyed)
Just forgot it.

The Bartender pours the tequila shots. Nick slides him his credit card.

NICK

I've got it.

Rachel puts down her own credit card on top of his.

RACHEL

No, I've got it.

The Bartender's immediately smitten with Rachel. Beautiful, confident, smart--she's hard to resist.

BARTENDER

(flirtatious)
Wrong. I've got it.

Territorial, Nick roughly takes the shots from the Bartender.

MATT

That was so cool.

Kate's starting to get properly irritated.

KATE

Come on, sweetie, let's do a song together.

Kate grabs Matt's hand and pulls him up to the stage. Nick slides over to Rachel. Everyone seems happy. The double-date appears to have regained its balance.

Until...Matt glances through the songbook and sees the Journey song "Don't Stop Believin'."

MATT
(calls out to Nick)
Darrow, I've got three words for
you.

CUT TO:

INT. KARAOKE BAR - MOMENTS LATER

Nick and Matt rock out onstage.

NICK AND MATT
Don't stop believin'!

It's off-key, but they're having so much fun they don't even notice. They pose and mug for the video camera taping them.

Meanwhile, Kate and Rachel sit awkwardly far apart at the bar. Rachel claps and cheers. Kate's starting to look more jealous than irritated.

RACHEL
It's amazing they just met a month ago, isn't it?

KATE
Actually, it's been three weeks.

RACHEL
It seems like they've known each other forever.

KATE
(snaps)
Well, they haven't, okay?

Onstage, Nick and Matt lean into the mic and belt out the chorus.

NICK AND MATT
Hold on to the feelin'!

Rachel watches Nick onstage with Matt, having so much fun, relaxed, completely lacking his normal bravado swagger.

RACHEL
(quietly realizes)
I knew he liked him.

Onstage, Nick cracks up while Matt does an air-guitar solo as they finish their song to APPLAUSE.

The hostess hands Nick the videotape of the session as he and Matt head back over to the girls. Just as Mandy, the cute bimbo from the opening scene, heads over to their table.

Nick freezes when he sees her. Bubbly as usual, Mandy kisses him on the cheek and squeezes into his chair.

MANDY

Hey, Nick! I don't think I've seen you since--

NICK

(before she can finish)
Oh, hey, Mandy. What are you doing here?

MANDY

I come here all the time. I think we've even hung out here before.

(when Nick doesn't introduce her)

Hi, I'm Mandy, by the way.

Rachel immediately feels jealous and simultaneously annoyed for feeling jealous.

NICK

Right. Uh...guys, this is friend my Mandy--I mean Mandy, my friend. And this is Matt and Kate, his girlfriend--

KATE

Fiancée.

NICK

Right. And this is...

RACHEL

Rachel.

(quietly, to Nick)
I guess you weren't kidding about the 19-year-olds.

Nick looks embarrassed.

MANDY

(to Nick)
Come on, I want to dance.

RACHEL

Actually, I've got this one.

Mandy shrugs and heads off to the dancefloor. Nick and Rachel follow a step behind, leaving Matt alone with Kate.

MATT

(drunk)
Let's dance.

KATE
I thought you don't like dancing.

MATT
Yeah, but I feel like it now.

Before Kate can respond, Matt drags her out on the dancefloor. He starts dancing loose and sexy with her. The music's loud. Matt's not "himself." Kate's out of her element.

KATE
Sweetie, let's go home. I have a headache.

MATT
C'mon, I want to stay. This is fun.

KATE
Well, I'm leaving...

MATT
(dancing over to Mandy and the others)
Okay...I'll catch up with you later.

KATE
Matt, are you really going to make me go home alone?

But Matt's already drifted further out on the dancefloor.

KATE (CONT'D)
Matt!

Furious, Kate storms out. Rachel dances with Nick. Mandy slides over and grinds with Matt.

MATT
Whoa--what are you doing down there?

MANDY
Look at you. You're so stiff.
(hands on his hips)
Relax this.

He tries to. He can't.

MANDY (CONT'D)
(laughing)
Okay, watch me. Just do everything I do.

She starts writhing on the dancefloor like the pro that she is, running her hands all over Matt's body, getting him to move his hips more.

Matt's starting to get it. He's mimicking her pretty well. But he's dancing like a stripper.

MANDY (CONT'D)
Okay, but now do it like a guy.

He pulls her close and they start grinding. There's immediate chemistry.

MANDY (CONT'D)
You're a fast learner.

MATT
You're a good teacher.

INT. KARAOKE BAR - LATER

Nick's still dancing with Rachel and Mandy's still grinding with Matt, but everyone's much, much drunker.

NICK
I think you just got jealous back there.

RACHEL
What I did was save you from an embarrassing statutory rape charge.
(lying badly)
Anyway, you're not my type.

NICK
So what kind of guys do you normally go out with?

RACHEL
Honestly, I don't. Most of the guys I meet are intimidated by me. And the ones who aren't are usually lab-rats with questionable social skills.

NICK
And which group do I fall into?

They dance a little closer. Rachel leans into him.

RACHEL
You're your own category, Nick.

NICK
I'll take that as a compliment.

RACHEL
You should.

They're inches apart--drunk on tequila and each other.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
I'd ask you about your
relationships, but you don't seem
like a relationship kind of guy.

NICK
That's not true. I had a long-term
relationship with the Bears until
they traded Harbaugh. And now I'm
in a rocky relationship with the
Bulls. They're just not very
giving. I feel like it's always me
doing all the work, you know?

RACHEL
It's always a joke with you,
Darrow.

They dance in silence for a moment. There's something Nick
wants to say, but whatever it is, it's not easy.

NICK
Since we're being honest, there's
something I've been wanting to tell
you...I'm, uh...I...

RACHEL
Just say it. It's okay.

NICK
(really softly)
I...like Matt.

RACHEL
I know, Darrow. I know.

Rachel puts her head to his chest. For a moment, Nick's whole
tough-guy facade softens. He's finally letting her in.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Eventually, you're going to have to
tell everyone the truth.

NICK
I know.

We PAN OVER TO: Matt and Mandy SLOPPILY MAKING-OUT--hands
GROPING, tongues SLOBBERING.

It's as if Matt just got to go to prom after being home-
schooled all his life.

RACHEL
Is he going to be okay?

NICK
I'd better break this up.

INT. CAB - MINUTES LATER

Nick, Rachel and Matt ride home in a cab. Everyone's trashed. Rachel's laying on Nick. Matt's freaking out.

MATT
She took advantage of me. I fucked up! I've never cheated on anyone in my life.

NICK
(to Rachel, mouths)
Jesus...
(to Matt)
Alright, calm down. It's okay. And, you know, getting to first isn't really cheating.

MATT
Yes, it is!

Nick and Matt look at Rachel.

RACHEL
It sort of is.

NICK
I mean, technically, yeah, but it's not cheating cheating.

MATT
It wasn't my fault. Things with Mandy were just so...easy. It's so different with Kate.

NICK
(thinking)
Right. It's not just your fault. This is about Kate too.

MATT
I'm a terrible person.

NICK
No, you're not. Rachel, help me out here.

RACHEL
(slurring a little)
You're not a bad person, you just
did a bad thing.

MATT
Jesus! What am I going to do?

NICK
(to Rachel)
Thanks.
(to Matt)
I'll tell you what you're going to
do. You're going to go home and
tell Kate...tell her I made you do
too many shots and you...you shat
yourself a little.

MATT
What? She'd never believe that!

NICK
Dude, who would lie about something
like that?

RACHEL
He's right. It's way too
embarrassing to make up.

MATT
Okay...You're right.. I can do this.

NICK
Just don't do something guilty like
get her flowers. Act normal.
Remember, nothing happened.

The cab pulls up outside Matt and Kate's apartment.

MATT
Right. Just...act normal.
(steadyng himself)
Thanks, man--I appreciate this.

NICK
No problem. Remember, nothing
happened.

Matt takes a breath, then steps out of the cab.

RACHEL
He shat himself?

Nick shrugs. There's an pregnant pause.

NICK

So, you want to go back to my place?

RACHEL

(very drunk)

Please. I'm not that drunk.

(to the cab driver)

Take us to my place.

Rachel grabs Nick and they start furiously making out.

CAB DRIVER

Okay, but I don't know where your place is.

INT. MATT AND KATE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Kate sits in the dark, eating the shit out of a plate of raw vegetables when... Matt stumbles into the apartment.

KATE

I can't believe you let me go home alone!

(Matt's silent)

Are you even going to say anything?

MATT

(way too fast)

Nick-made-me-do-shots-and-I-shat-myself-a-little.

KATE

What? That's disgusting. But that's not the point. You chose him over me!

Matt's so relieved Kate doesn't suspect anything, he fully capitulates.

MATT

I did. You're right. I was wrong. I'm really, really sorry. I shouldn't have done that to you--choosing Nick, I mean.

KATE

And, you know, your birthday's coming up. You're going to be thirty. You can't keep doing this kind of stuff--hanging out with your friends all night, drinking.

MATT

But I never get to do that kind of stuff.

(MORE)

MATT (CONT'D)
(off Kate's look)
But, I mean, you're right. Of
course.

KATE
I can't stay mad at you.
(she hugs him)
You're my baby.

Matt lets her hug him, not thrilled about being called a
"baby."

INT. RACHEL'S APARTMENT - LATE NIGHT

Nick and Rachel stumble into Rachel's apartment, making out,
as they grope their way toward the bedroom.

They're at the point of late-night drunkenness where you can
almost fall asleep standing up.

RACHEL
We shouldn't be doing this.
(taking off her dress)
We work together.

NICK
Definitely not.
(pulling off his pants)
Big mistake.

Rachel stops him.

RACHEL
Wait--I think I'm being serious.

NICK
I think you're being a pussy.

She play-shoves Nick. He trips over the sofa and falls.

NICK (CONT'D)
Ouch.

RACHEL
Who's being a pussy now?

They stagger into Rachel's bedroom.

INT. RACHEL'S APARTMENT -- BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Rachel pushes Nick onto her bed, then just flops down on top
of him. Neither can keep their eyes open.

RACHEL

Take my bra off, Darrow. Or I'll tell Desmond you sexually harassed me.

NICK

You know, that's harassment too.

He struggles to get up, but he's too dizzy. He lays back and falls off the bed onto the floor.

RACHEL

Hey, where are you going?

Rachel rolls off after him. Now they're laying on top of each other, barely awake, on the floor.

NICK

We need to get back on the bed.

RACHEL

Right.

Neither of them move. They're too drunk.

NICK

(half-passed out)
This isn't happening. I've been waiting for this since the minute I met you.

RACHEL

(also half-passed out)
Me too.

NICK

Really?

RACHEL

Hmmmm.

Rachel passes out.

NICK

This is the best worst night of my life.

Nick passes out too.

INT. RACHEL'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - MORNING

They're asleep in the exact same position--on top of each other on the floor next to Rachel's bed.

Hungover and groggy, Rachel squints at the clock. It's 10AM.

RACHEL
Shit! We have a department meeting.

She jumps up, accidentally stepping on Nick.

NICK
Hey!

Nick notices the time too.

NICK (CONT'D)
Shit.

INT. RACHEL'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Rachel quickly brushes her teeth. Nick hurries in, pulling on his jeans.

RACHEL
I think you threw up a little bit
in my mouth last night.

She hands him the toothpaste. He starts brushing his teeth beside her. It's a very domestic moment.

NICK
This is weird. I usually don't stay
around for this part.

RACHEL
(teasing)
Well since nothing happened, there
was no reason to run.

NICK
What are you talking about?
Something happened. We came back
here to have sex.

RACHEL
But we didn't.

INT. NICK'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Nick zig-zags through traffic while Rachel does her make-up in the rear-view.

NICK
That doesn't matter. It's like with
drugs--intent to sell is the same
as actually selling. We intended to
sleep together. So we might as well
pull over for a quickie right now.

RACHEL

I think it's more like committing suicide. The fact that you don't go through with it is totally meaningful.

INT. NORTHWESTERN - PSYCH BUILDING - HALLWAY - LATER

Nick and Rachel rush the down hall.

NICK

Are you comparing having sex with me to dying?

RACHEL

Not in a bad way.

They pause right outside the seminar room to catch their breath.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Okay, let's stagger.

NICK

Right.

Rachel straightens her dress and enters first.

Nick counts to ten, then follows her in.

INT. NORTHWESTERN - SEMINAR ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Nick steps in and sits as far away from Rachel as possible. They studiously avoid eye-contact, but can't help smiling to themselves about their night.

And everyone notices.

CHARLIE

Dude, what's wrong with you two?

NICK

What?

RACHEL

Nothing.

An assistant looks at Nick as she whispers in Desmond's ear.

DESMOND

Darrow, are you wearing the same clothes you wore yesterday?

NICK
(realizes he is)
Yeah...but so what?
(off everyone's look)
What? I'm a guy. I do that
sometimes.

JAKE
Did you two...with each other?

It's suddenly a smirky, awkward workplace for Nick and Rachel. A few UPTIGHT PROFESSORS sit in the corner, complaining.

UPTIGHT PROFESSOR
Desmond's turned the goddamn
department into his own social
psych experiment.

PRISSY PROFESSOR
I'd never have to deal with this at
Yale.

But, in general, the room is buzzing.

RACHEL
Okay, fine. We were working late
and Nick slept at my place last
night, but--

NICK
--but nothing happened.

Everyone's silent for a moment. Then everyone CRACKS UP. Various stodgy professors roll their eyes.

NICK (CONT'D)
What? It's true.

This elicits even more LAUGHTER.

JAKE
Right, Darrow. You just wanted to
cuddle.

NICK
(thinking)
Okay, think about it. If I slept
with her last night, I'd have been
a dick to her this morning and
she'd be mad at me.

The laughter quiets a bit. He has a point.

NICK (CONT'D)
Are you mad at me, Jennings?

RACHEL
No more than usual.

There's a collective sigh of disappointment, but the writers accept that. Everything goes back to normal.

Except for Charlie, who notices Rachel reach into her bag and hand Nick a video tape. Charlie strains to listen.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
(quietly, to Nick)
You left this at my place.

Nick and Rachel trade a knowing look. Charlie elbows Jake. He can barely contain his excitement.

INT. NORTHWESTERN - PSYCH BUILDING - NICK'S OFFICE - LATER
Charlie, Rob and Jake search around in Nick's empty office.

CHARLIE
I feel like such a dick. I was so wrong about Darrow. He hasn't changed at all. He's even more of a cocksmitth than I thought. Not only did he bone the competition--

Charlie finds the tape and slides it into the VCR.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
--but he's got it on tape!

Jake closes the blinds.

ROB
Is it gay that we're about to see Nick's balls?

CHARLIE
No, because we're also going to see Rachel's vagina.

The guys all wait expectantly. The tape starts. And it's Nick and Matt at karaoke--singing their hearts out, goofing off.

Rob and Jake look surprised. Charlie looks sick.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
What the FUCK is this?

This tape is much more pornographic to Charlie than the sex tape he was hoping to watch. It contains naked bromance.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Are you guys not seeing this?

ROB
Seeing what?

CHARLIE
That motherfucker's cheating on us!

INT. CHICAGO PUBLIC LIBRARY - DAY

Nick sits opposite Matt at the Chicago Public Library, daytime haunt of SENIOR CITIZENS, the HOMELESS, and FREE-LANCERS. Several web design books lie open beside Matt's laptop while they eat lunch.

MATT
Dude, ever since...that night
Kate's been driving me crazy about
this birthday thing. I just want to
ignore it.

NICK
Whenever I'm bummed on my birthday
I just get a bunch of junk food,
hole up and watch porn. It's the
male equivalent of ice cream and a
Lifetime movie.

MATT
Only instead of crying you...

NICK
Exactly.

A few HOMELESS people take seats flanking Nick.

NICK (CONT'D)
So how is this better than just
working in your apartment?

MATT
Are you kidding? I'm there all day.
Anything's better.

Just as Nick takes a bite of his burger, a HOMELESS WOMAN shambles over and SNATCHES it away.

MATT (CONT'D)
(stifles a laugh)
Sorry, man.

NICK
I think I just lost my appetite.

Nick pauses for a moment, suddenly a little embarrassed by what he's about to do.

NICK (CONT'D)

Anyway...let's not make a big deal about this, but I got you a little something for your birthday.

Nick takes out a small cardboard box.

NICK (CONT'D)

I know it's a few days early but...

Matt opens it. It's a baseball. Matt's jaw drops.

MATT

Is this--

NICK

Boone's homerun ball. Yeah. I already got to catch it once. I figured...it was your turn.

MATT

I...I don't know what to say.

NICK

I know you're bummed about getting older, but you've got a lot to celebrate, man. You're a lot more...you than when I first met you.

Matt gets choked up, which gets Nick choked up.

NICK (CONT'D)

And you don't have to say anything.

(quietly)

You're my best friend.

MATT

I'm your best friend?

Matt looks away, eyes welling up.

MATT (CONT'D)

You're mine too.

NICK

Dude, are you crying?

MATT

(crying)

No. No...I guess I'm just really glad we're friends.

Nick realizes how much his friend cares about him. Moved, Nick starts to cry.

Crying in front of another man is the closest two straight guys ever come to having sex. So the moment they're done, they want to get the hell away from each other.

NICK

I'm glad we did this. But let's never, ever tell anyone about what just happened here.

MATT

Agreed.

They go in for the most elongated, awkward man-hug ever. Nick starts to leave, then turns back.

NICK

Happy birthday, man.

INT. NICK'S LOFT - NIGHT

Nick enters his loft to find...Charlie, Rob and Jake already there.

NICK

What are you guys doing here?

CHARLIE

I used your emergency key because this is an emergency.

(beat)

We know about Matt.

NICK

(suddenly uncomfortable)
What are you talking about?

CHARLIE

Don't play dumb, Darrow. We know you've been seeing him behind our back.

JAKE

We saw the karaoke tape.

NICK

You mean you snuck into my office and stole it?

CHARLIE

Ha! So you don't deny it!

NICK

You've been spying on me?

CHARLIE

You've been lying to us! And it's
gone on long enough.

Charlie motions for Nick to have a seat. Nick doesn't move.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

(with gravity)
This is an intervention. We're here
to deprogram you.

NICK

(thinks it's a joke)
Okay, I get it. Ha, ha. You got me.

But no one's laughing.

CHARLIE

You're like one of those undercover
cops who just went too deep. You
forgot who you are. And we're going
to do whatever we have to to bring
back the old Nick.

NICK

(to Jake and Rob)
Guys, what is this?

Rob and Jake look away, uncomfortable with the emotionality
of the whole situation.

CHARLIE

If we have to, we'll tape open your
eyes and make you watch *Band of
Brothers* over and over until your
balls drop again. Whatever it
takes.

NICK

Charlie, are you retarded?

CHARLIE

We've known each other forever.
You're just not the same guy
anymore. You're not even gay. It's
like you're a lesbian.

Nick turns to Jake and Rob, exasperated.

NICK

Guys, come on--want to step in
here?

(no response)
Do you agree with him?

JAKE
I mean you have been a little...
different lately.

NICK
Different how?

JAKE
I...you're...this isn't right, man.
We're guys. We don't have to 'talk
things out.'

NICK
No, finish.

JAKE
(trying)
It's...you know, it's just...
Charlie feels like you...
(it's too hard)
This feels fucked up. Like you're
touching me in my bathing suit
area.

This is only making things worse. Nick turns to Rob, a little
desperate now. His crew is imploding around him.

NICK
Rob, you've always been the
sensible one. Just come clean.

ROB
I don't know what you're talking
about.

NICK
(getting in his face)
Talk to me.

ROB
You all need to take it easy.

NICK
Tell me what's going on.

Rob looks like he might actually say something.

NICK (CONT'D)
Just say it! Let it out!

ROB
Fine. I'm fucking gay!

There's silence.

CHARLIE

Fucking way to go, Darrow. Are you happy now? You made Rob come out.

JAKE

You dick. Now we can't be casually homophobic around him.

ROB

No, you can still make gay jokes. It doesn't change anything. You guys all kind of knew anyway.

CHARLIE

Ah, it's not the same now that we're talking about it.

NICK

Rob, man, I didn't mean to...

The guys all turn to leave, glaring at Nick.

JAKE

The old Nick never would have done that.

Jake walks off with Rob, comforting him, leaving just Charlie and Nick.

NICK

You know I didn't mean to...

CHARLIE

It's not just about you now. You're fucking up the crew too.

Nick's crushed. His crew is turning on him. And it's his own fault.

NICK

Charlie, wait--tomorrow let's have an old-school, crew-only day. I'll meet you at the Wildcats game, we'll grab some beers, go to Finnegans.

Charlie considers it for a moment. Nick goes in for the kill.

NICK (CONT'D)

(teasing)

Come on. You can strike out with every waitress there. It'll be like old times.

CHARLIE
(tentatively assents)
I hope so, Darrow. I don't know how
much more of this shit I can take.

Charlie leaves Nick's loft. Nick's completely alone.

NICK
FUCK!

EXT. ADULT VIDEO STORE - DAY

A happy Matt exits an adult video store holding a brown paper bag full of videos.

EXT. KFC - LATER

Matt exits a KFC with a bucket of fried chicken, smiling.

INT. MATT AND KATE'S APARTMENT - LATER

Matt enters his apartment with the fried chicken and adult videos.

MATT
(singing to himself)
Happy birthday to me. Happy
birthday to me...

He heads into the bedroom and shuts the door.

We hear porno music come on, followed shortly by the rhythmic creaking of bed-springs.

We slowly PAN OVER to...the front door. Kate enters silently with Matt's parents, his friends from New York and Kate's girlfriends. Kate's holding a birthday cake and Matt's Mom has balloons and party-favors.

MATT'S MOM
(whispers)
Where is he?

Kate hears the TV in the bedroom.

KATE
(whispers)
He's in the bedroom.

They all creep toward the bedroom.

INT. MATT AND KATE'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - SAME TIME

The bedsprings creak more rigorously as Matt gets into the video, when suddenly the bedroom door FLIES OPEN.

EVERYONE
SURPRISE!

At the exact moment Matt COMES. He spins around in shock and SHOOTS A LOAD...onto HIS OWN MOTHER'S FACE.

Matt SCREAMS! Matt's Mom FAINTS into the birthday cake. Everyone's horrified.

Matt quickly covers himself with the bucket of fried chicken. Matt's Dad ushers everyone out.

INT. MATT AND KATE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Kate and Matt's friends mingle awkwardly while Matt's Mom compulsively wipes her tongue with a napkin.

The bucket of fried chicken sits conspicuously next to the mashed-up birthday cake.

MATT'S MOM
(to Matt's Dad)
At least when he was younger he
used to lock the door and turn on
the shower.

Meanwhile, Matt's in the kitchen with Kate, still mortified.

MATT
I told you I didn't want a party.

KATE
(tries for a joke)
Well now I know why.

Matt doesn't laugh.

KATE (CONT'D)
Come on. It's not...that bad.

MATT
(a little too loud)
Really? My mom basically blew me.

Guests try not to look over.

MATT (CONT'D)
I feel like I'm in a fucking Todd
Solondz movie.

INT. NORTHWESTERN - PSYCH BUILDING - SEMINAR ROOM - SAME TIME

Nick and Rachel prepare for their bi-weekly presentation while assorted members of the psych department talk shop.

Nick's wearing his "C" Cats lettered sweatshirt and he looks like shit, like he hasn't slept at all. He checks his watch nervously, takes out his tickets. Rachel notices.

RACHEL
(whispers)
Are you okay?

NICK
(whispers back)
The guys found the karaoke tape.
They know about Matt.

RACHEL
(trying to cheer him up)
More importantly, now they know
you're tone-deaf.

NICK
This isn't funny. I yelled at Jake.
I outed Rob.

RACHEL
Rob's gay?

NICK
That's not the point. This whole
thing is fucking up my life.

A SNOBBY PROFESSOR looks at him. Nick glares until he looks away.

RACHEL
Nick, I'm really sorry.
(beat)
But maybe there's a bright side.

NICK
A bright side?

RACHEL
I just mean at least you don't have
to lie anymore.

NICK
Are you serious? Did you hear what
I just said? Things with my friends
are fucked.

RACHEL

I know, but now that things are out
in the open, you can start to fix
them, right?

(off Nick's look)

You can't just keep lying to
everyone--especially Matt.

NICK

(getting angry)

Yeah, I can.

A few GRAD STUDENTS look over at them. This time Rachel and Nick both glare.

RACHEL

Nick, I'm just trying to help.

Now the entire psych department is listening.

DESMOND

Darrow, what's going on?

NICK

Hold on a second, Desmond.

Desmond's so flabbergasted, he's momentarily speechless.

RACHEL

Okay, you want to do this here?
Fine. I know you, Darrow, and I
know deep down you want to tell
Matt the truth.

NICK

You don't know anything about me. I
haven't been myself since you
showed up.

RACHEL

And I've watched you change these
last few weeks. I know how much you
care about Matt.

NICK

The last few weeks were a mistake.

DESMOND

Is there something I should know?

RACHEL

(ignoring him)

You know something? You're right--
maybe this has been a mistake.

(MORE)

RACHEL (CONT'D)
You're still the same emotionally shut-down, developmentally-stunted man-boy you were when I first met you.

This hurts Nick, but he tries not to let it show.

NICK
You know what? I don't have time for this. I'm late for the game.

RACHEL
Great. Maybe you can lie to your friends about why you're late!

NICK
Maybe I will!

Nick and Rachel both get up and STORM out at the same time.

DESMOND
Did I just get Punk'd?

INT. NORTHWESTERN - WELSH-RYAN ARENA - SAME TIME

Charlie, Rob and Jake watch the Northwestern game. They're all wearing their lettered sweatshirts...only Nick's not there. So now they read: "ATS!"

In an adjacent row, a LITTLE GIRL looks over at them.

LITTLE GIRL
Go ats?

CHARLIE
What the fuck, man?

The Little Girl cowers. Charlie turns back to the dudes.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
This is bullshit! He promised he'd be here! What the hell is going on?

JAKE
Don't worry, man. He was probably in an accident or something.

ROB
Yeah, he may have changed a little, but he wouldn't just forget.

CHARLIE
He didn't forget. He made a choice. He's with that fuck-face Matt!

Rob and Jake trade a look re: Charlie.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
(freaking out)
We've let this go on too long. It's
like Nick's sick and he needs our
help.

ROB
Charlie, you need to stop this.

JAKE
It's like when Marissa Katz broke
up with you Junior year and you
used to take shits outside her dorm
room.

CHARLIE
No, this is different. Nick's
priorities are screwed up. And
we're being shitty friends by not
doing anything about it. We have to
put a stop to this now.

INT. NICK'S CAR - SAME TIME

Nick SPEEDS through traffic, heading to the Northwestern
game. His takes his frustration out on his car-horn.

INT. MATT AND KATE'S APARTMENT - SAME TIME

Matt's party is in full-swing, but Matt's no happier. Kate
stands up and clinks her glass, quieting the room.

MATT
(quietly, to Kate)
Please, no toast. I can't take
anymore...attention.

KATE
You'll love this. I promise. I
wanted it to be a surprise.
(to the room)
Everybody, I have amazing news. I
just got another promotion.
(everyone claps)
In the New York office. I'm on
track to make partner in three
years.

Everyone APPLAUDS and congratulates her. Kate gives Matt a
huge hug.

KATE (CONT'D)
Happy birthday, baby.

She realizes Matt's not hugging her back.

KATE (CONT'D)
What's wrong? I thought you'd be happy.

MATT
What--happy that you turned my party into a press conference?

KATE
But, sweetie, I know you never really wanted to move here. And it was so sweet that you did it for me, but your whole life's back in New York. You'll be happier there.

MATT
But I'm happy here. Now.

Kate realizes everyone's watching and she's getting embarrassed. She sits next to Matt and goes into mommy-mode.

KATE
Matt, can we talk about this later?

MATT
I think right now's a good time.
I'm not getting any younger.

Kate looks around. The guests pretend not to be listening.

KATE
This is a great opportunity. Can't you at least be happy for me?

MATT
It's always about you. Your job. Your needs. You know what? I have needs too. I need respect. I need my space. And I need you to be okay with me spending time with my friends. This is my relationship too--it's not just yours.

KATE
This is for us. It's not about me.

MATT
Well, we're not moving.

KATE
You're deciding that for both of us, just like that?

MATT
I'm deciding it for me.

MATT'S MOM

Matt, you're embarrassing yourself.

MATT

No, I'm not. You're the one embarrassing me.

MATT'S MOM

Matthew--

KATE

Baby, what's gotten into you lately? Where are you getting all this? Is this coming from Nick?

MATT

It's coming from me.

KATE

If we're going to stay together, you have to come back with me to New York.

MATT

No, I don't. And we're not moving back to New York because I already moved once for you and I like it here now. And you're not going to break up with me because I'm a good boyfriend and you know it.

Kate's shocked. Matt feels like a man.

KATE

But baby--

MATT

That's the end of this discussion. And stop calling me baby. Call me 'big dick' or 'papi' or 'daddy' or... 'Dong Juan,' but not fucking baby!

The buzzer sounds. And it doesn't stop. It's like someone's leaning on it.

MATT (CONT'D)

What the fuck?

Matt and Kate both go over and open the door. It's Charlie. He bounds in, totally drunk and manic.

MATT (CONT'D)

Charlie? What are you doing here?

CHARLIE
(blurts it out)
You may think Nick's your best
friend--I mean, yeah, he's funny
and charming and cool--but he's
just been using you.

MATT
What?

CHARLIE
For research for an experiment. He
doesn't even like you.

Matt's stunned. Kate processes, not unhappily. The guests
look uncomfortable but riveted. It's a train-wreck. No one
can look away.

MATT
Come on. Is this a joke? Nick, are
you out there?

CHARLIE
And you know what, man? You deserve
it for fucking things up in the
crew. You're like the other woman
except...you're a dude. You're the
other dude, dude.

Charlie turns to leave.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Think about it. It all adds up.

He storms out. Kate looks at Matt expectantly. The rest of
the guests look away.

MATT
This is bullshit.

But the seed of doubt has been planted.

INT. NORTHWESTERN - PSYCH BUILDING - HALLWAY - LATER

Matt rushes through the psych office. A man on a mission.

MATT
Where's Nick Darrow's office?

UNDERGRAD
Sixth floor.

Matt SPRINTS down the hall, narrowly missing Rachel as she
steps out of the seminar room.

RACHEL

Shit.

She reaches for the cell, hesitates, then dials.

INT. NICK'S CAR - SAME TIME

Nick SLAMS on his horn, stuck in Welsh-Ryan Arena traffic. His cell rings. It's Rachel. He hesitates, then answers.

NICK (INTO PHONE)

I don't want to talk to you. I'm so late for the game--

RACHEL (ON THE PHONE)

Shut up.

NICK (INTO PHONE)

--and it's your fault--

RACHEL (ON THE PHONE)

Darrow, would you shut up!

(beat)

Matt's in the office.

Nick's stunned for a moment, then pulls a WICKED U-TURN, CUTTING across FOUR LANES OF ONCOMING TRAFFIC.

NICK (INTO PHONE)

(terse)

Thanks. I--

RACHEL (ON THE PHONE)

I'm not doing this for you. I'm doing this for Matt.

Rachel hangs up. Nick GUNS it back to the psych building.

INT. NORTHWESTERN - PSYCH BUILDING - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Matt stomps through the sixth floor hallway, ducking into offices, looking for Nick with single-minded intensity.

Breathless, Rachel catches up to him.

RACHEL

Matt, what are you doing?

MATT

(intense)

Did you know about this?

RACHEL

Matt...it changed. It wasn't--

Even angrier now, Matt just steps around her and RUSHES on. He grabs an ASSISTANT as she steps out of the bathroom.

MATT
Where's Nick Darrow's office?

ASSISTANT
(frightened)
Two hallways over, on the right.

EXT. NORTHWESTERN - PSYCH BUILDING - SAME TIME

Nick's car pulls up outside the Psych building. Nick jumps out and SPRINTS inside.

INT. NORTHWESTERN - PSYCH BUILDING - LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Nick RUNS past the crowded elevator banks and hits the stairwell, taking the stairs four-at-a-time.

INT. NORTHWESTERN - PSYCH BUILDING - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Winded, Nick finally makes it to his office. The door's closed, lights off. Exactly as he left it. He lets out a sigh of relief as he steps in--

INT. NORTHWESTERN - NICK'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

--to find Matt, sitting in the dark, all the research materials in plain sight: a chart of the dates Nick's had with Matt; the 'rules'; expense reports.

NICK
(reeling)
Matt--what are you doing here?

Nick begins hastily erasing the 'rules' off a whiteboard.

MATT
I'm an idiot. Charlie told me everything. And I didn't believe him.

NICK
It's not what you think.

MATT
Really? Then what the fuck is this?

NICK
It's...I mean, it started the way you think, but--

Matt turns and walks out of Nick's office.

INT. NORTHWESTERN - PSYCH BUILDING - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Nick catches up and gets in front of Matt.

MATT

You liar! I trusted you!

NICK

It's not like that.

Everyone in nearby cubicles is watching now.

MATT

I was new in town. I didn't know anyone and you took advantage of me!

NICK

Matt, come on. Let's just talk in my office.

MATT

(realizes everyone's watching)

What's the difference? Everyone here knows about it already!

NICK

I was going to tell you.

MATT

When? After you published your findings? You lied to me! You used me!

NICK

I didn't use you. It started that way but then it became real.

MATT

You...you fucked me!

People in the office GASP!

GRAD STUDENT

(to an assistant)

I thought Darrow was fucking Jennings.

NICK

I didn't! I'd never--

(quietly)

--fuck you.

Matt PUNCHES Nick in the face. Nick staggers, stunned. Matt walks out.

INT. FINNEGAN'S BAR - NIGHT

Nick storms over to Charlie, Rob and Jake, sitting at their usual corner table.

NICK

What the fuck were you thinking?

CHARLIE

You don't have to thank me, man. I had your back.

NICK

Thank you? You just fucked up my life.

ROB

(to Charlie)

Dude, what did you do?

CHARLIE

(to Nick)

You were fucking up ours!

NICK

I didn't do anything to you.

CHARLIE

We made a date! You didn't show up!

NICK

I was on my way. Something came up.

CHARLIE

Darrow, come on. I've known you since we were eight. You haven't been yourself lately. You've become...a huge pussy. You know I'm right. I know what you need, man, and you need to just man-up.

Nick starts to walk away, then turns back and PUNCHES Charlie. The guys are shocked.

NICK

There. I'm all manned-up.

Nick turns and walks out onto the street, alone.

FADE TO:

INT. MATT AND KATE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Matt and Kate finish packing up their mostly empty apartment. Matt tears up ticket stubs of events he's gone to with Nick.

KATE

Hurry up, sweetie. The cab's coming in ten.

MATT

Almost done.

As Matt throws away the remainders of Nick's coffee-break gift bag, "Don't Stop Believin'" comes on.

Matt grabs his cell, thinking that Nick's calling, but he disappointedly realizes that the song is coming from the TV in the kitchen. Kate walks over and shuts it off.

KATE

I hate that song.

MATT

Yeah. Me too.

Alone in the room now, Matt still has his cell out. He goes to Nick's entry on his phone. For a moment, it looks like Matt's finally going to call Nick when...

KATE (O.S.)

You have to start bringing those boxes outside.

MATT

(snapping out of his reverie)

Right.

Matt deletes Nick's entry and grabs a box. As he's edging out the front door, Nick's birthday present baseball rolls out. Matt tries, but he just can't throw it away.

INT. CAB - LATER

Matt and Kate sit in a cab on their way to the airport. Matt's still holding the baseball, looking troubled.

KATE

I was thinking we could start looking in the east 60s. Do any of your friends live up there? Matt?

MATT

What?

The cab is coming up on Nick's street. Matt looks down at the baseball.

MATT (CONT'D)
(to the driver)
Could you just pull over here?

The driver pulls the cab to the curb outside Nick's place. Kate immediately looks concerned.

KATE
Baby, what are you doing?

MATT
I just have to drop something off.

KATE
But...we're going to be late.

MATT
It'll only take a minute.
(he kisses Kate)
I promise. Okay?

KATE
Okay, but hurry.

Matt gets out of the cab and heads to Nick's building.

INT. NICK'S BUILDING - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Matt approaches the front door of Nick's loft. He hesitates over the buzzer, then turns to go...and runs smack into Charlie.

CHARLIE
What are you doing here?

MATT
I was just...dropping something off
before I left.
(hands him the baseball)
Can you give this to Nick? It's
his.

CHARLIE
Where are you going?

MATT
Back to New York.
(beat)
Look, don't tell Nick I was here.
Not that you would.

Matt sadly heads back outside. Charlie looks at the baseball and opens the trash-chute...then pauses for a moment.

He has a decision to make. He can throw away the baseball and never have to see Matt again. Or he can be a good friend to Nick and tell him Matt's leaving town.

INT. STRIP CLUB - DAY

Nick drains a drink while getting a lap-dance. He's unshaven and red-eyed--looks like he hasn't slept in days.

Nick reaches for another drink when Charlie RUSHES into the strip-club and over to him.

CHARLIE
(out of breath)
Darrow, I've been looking all over
for you. I just saw Matt.

Nick downs his drink.

NICK
So?

CHARLIE
He's moving back to New York. He's
on his way to the airport right
now.

For a moment, Nick seems poised for action, then he catches himself.

NICK
Yeah, well, I hope he likes it more
than Chicago.

CHARLIE
He wanted you to have this.

Charlie hands Nick the baseball. Nick looks at it, choking back emotion.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
We have to leave right now to catch
up with him.

NICK
He doesn't want me to.

CHARLIE
Jesus, Darrow. Would you stop being
such a stubborn fucking pussy and
go get him back.

This snaps Nick out of his relapse. All of a sudden, he realizes how much he lost, how much Matt means to him.

NICK
Let's go. But there's something I
need to do first.

INT. NORTHWESTERN - PSYCH BUILDING - SEMINAR ROOM - LATER

Desmond addresses Rachel in front of the entire department.
Nick and Charlie are conspicuously absent.

DESMOND
As much as it pains me to say this,
Jennings, since you lost the bet,
I'm going to have to ask for your
resignation--

Nick and Charlie BURST into the seminar room.

NICK
(blurts out to Rachel)
Matt's leaving town and if I don't
go to the airport this second I'm
going to lose him forever.

Everyone's stunned.

DESMOND
What the hell?

NICK
(to Rachel)
You were right about everything. I
was wrong.
(to Desmond)
I lost the bet. If you're going to
fire anyone, you should fire me.
Rachel's a great researcher and she
deserves the position more than me,
anyway.

DESMOND
Fine. You're fired.

NICK
What?

RACHEL
If you fire him, you fire me, and
then you don't have anyone for the
open professorship.

DESMOND
(frustrated)
Am I the only one here who
remembers how a bet works?

NICK

(to Rachel)

I need to go get Matt now. I need to make things right. But tell me you're still going to be here when I get back. I need you to... Screw it--I just need you.

Rachel takes it in all in for a moment. She looks Nick. He's earnest and vulnerable.

RACHEL

(smiling)

Fuck that. I'll drive.

Nick, Rachel, and Charlie race out of the room.

DESMOND

What the hell is going on here?

(beat)

Well, Charlie's definitely fired.

EXT. O'HARE AIRPORT - DEPARTURES - LATER

Rachel's Prius SCREECHES to the curb. A TRAFFIC COP immediately begins waving them off. Nick and Charlie look at Rachel.

RACHEL

Screw it.

They all HOP out of the car and RACE inside. TRIUMPHANT MUSIC KICKS in. It's interrupted when...

TRAFFIC COP

I'm going to have this car impounded, ma'am.

They all stop running.

NICK

Just park it. Meet us inside.

RACHEL

(running back to her car)
See you in five.

INT. O'HARE TERMINAL - MOMENTS LATER

Nick and Charlie SPRINT through the terminal. Triumphant music blares.

INT. O'HARE SECURITY CHECK - CONTINUOUS

They fly to a stop at the security gate, where a FEMALE SECURITY AGENT checks a SENIOR TOUR GROUP's tickets.

The Seniors HURL EXPLETIVES at Nick as he cuts the line.

NICK
(breathless)
Excuse me. I know this sounds crazy, but I need to get through here or I'm going to lose the best friend I've ever had.

FEMALE SECURITY AGENT
Wow--this is like a chick-flick. Go right ahead.

NICK
(amazed)
Really?

FEMALE SECURITY AGENT
Of course. Your personal life is much more important than homeland security.
(beat)
And you also need a ticket, Romeo.

INT. O'HARE TERMINAL - MOMENTS LATER

Nick and Charlie SPRINT back through the terminal toward the ticket counter. More triumphant music.

NICK
I need a ticket for the next flight to New York.

MEATHEAD TICKET AGENT
Sure. But the line starts over there.

Nick turns to look. The line snakes all the way around the corner. Nick's getting a little frantic now.

NICK
Come on, man. I'm desperate. You've got to help me out here.

Rachel rushes over to them, and leans seductively across the ticket counter.

RACHEL
(flirtatious, to Meathead
Ticket Agent)
(MORE)

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Hey, you look amazing. Do you work
out?

CUT TO:

INT. O'HARE TERMINAL - MOMENTS LATER

Nick, Charlie and Rachel, sweaty and winded, RUSH back to the security gate. Nick hands his ticket to the Female Security Agent and takes off, adrenaline PUMPING.

CUT TO:

NICK, CHARLIE AND RACHEL GOING SUPER-SLOWLY THROUGH SECURITY

Adrenaline still pumping, but they're at a standstill.

Charlie being frisked--and giggling because he's ticklish.

Nick taking off his shoes and belt.

Rachel being scanned by a metal-detector wand.

INT. O'HARE TERMINAL - DEPARTURES - MOMENTS LATER

Nick tries to run while putting his shoes back on. Rachel and Charlie are just behind him.

People are watching now. Triumphant music kicks back in.

INT. O'HARE TERMINAL - DEPARTURE GATE - LATER

Nick, Charlie and Rachel finally get to the departure gate, panting, and...there's a huge line of people waiting for stand-by tickets.

Nick looks around frantically and spots Matt and Kate already on line to board the plane.

NICK
Wish me luck, guys.

RACHEL
You don't need luck.

CHARLIE
Go get him.

Nick HOPS over the standby line rope and a FLIGHT AGENT immediately steps in front of him.

FLIGHT AGENT

I'm sorry, sir. You can't board until you confirm there's a seat available.

NICK

I'm not trying to board. I just need to talk to that guy over there.

FLIGHT AGENT

I'm sorry, sir. That's against regulations.

NICK

(emotions catching up with him)

But...there's got to be something you can do. There's always something. Come on, honey. Can't you just make an exception and let me through?

FLIGHT AGENT

I'm sorry, sir.

NICK

Oh, look, he's coming over here.

The Flight Agent turns to look and Nick DARTS around her.

FLIGHT AGENT

(into walkie-talkie)

We have a security situation at gate 9!

Matt and Kate are at the front of the line, handing over their tickets to board the plane when--

NICK

Matt! Wait! Don't go!

Nick rushes toward him, several SECURITY GUARDS right behind him. Matt's shocked. Kate is just unhappy.

NICK (CONT'D)

You can't go. I know I fucked up, but that doesn't mean we can't be friends.

Matt is momentarily excited, then remembers he's still mad at Nick.

MATT

Our friendship was bullshit. It was all for your experiment.

Several more SECURITY GUARDS come at Nick head on. He head-fakes to the left and DARTS around them, starting a lap of the boarding area. All the other passengers turn and watch.

NICK

That's not true. I mean, at first it was--but each rule I broke made us better friends.

Two security guards DIVE for Nick. He JUMPS out of the way just in time.

NICK (CONT'D)

And before I met you I didn't even know how to be a friend. I thought all you did was chase girls together and play video games.

With more guards on his tail, Nick runs even faster.

NICK (CONT'D)

You were right when you said I needed to grow up. But you didn't realize you were the one helping me do it.

Matt just listens, impassive, still poised to board the plane right next to Kate, as Nick completes a lap and keeps running.

NICK (CONT'D)

And because of that I finally have a shot at being in a relationship with a woman that lasts more than a night.

Nick fakes his way past another guard, but security's closing in. Nick's running out of space and running out of wind.

NICK (CONT'D)

And even if you never accept my apology, I'll always owe you for that--

ZAP! Nick gets TASERED by four security guards at once. Shuddering on the ground, he simultaneously throws up and shits himself.

Matt turns to Kate. She knows what's coming.

MATT

Look, you're a great person and we've had an amazing run, but I just...look, it's not going to work out between us.

KATE

Matt, I totally understand.

MATT

I'm glad to hear you say that. That makes this so much easier

KATE

Hey--we're not right for each other. I see that now.

MATT

And it's really important to me that we can still be friends--

Kate DECKS him. He goes down.

FADE TO:

INT. O'HARE - INTERROGATION ROOM - LATER

Nick's slumped in a chair in an interrogation room, unconscious, covered in vomit, and black and blue.

Rachel's next to him, holding an ice-pack on his face.

NICK

(groggy, waking up)
I lost my best friend. And it's my fault.

RACHEL

Nick, you didn't--

NICK

I screwed everything up.

Before Rachel can respond, Matt walks in.

MATT

Not everything.

Matt's covered in coffee, and has a black eye and torn shirt.

NICK

Matt, I can't believe--
(to Rachel)
Is he here or is this part of my concussion?

MATT

I'm here.

NICK

Why didn't you leave?

MATT
I broke up with Kate.

He gestures to his black eye and torn shirt.

MATT (CONT'D)
She actually took it well
considering...she's Kate.

NICK
You look like shit.

MATT
So do you.

They both smile. Nick spits out a tooth.

NICK
I'm really glad you came back.

MATT
Me too.

EXT. O'HARE AIRPORT - DEPARTURES - DAY

Nick, Matt, Rachel, and Charlie limp out of the airport.

RACHEL
So what are you going to do now?

MATT
I don't know. For the first time in
my life I don't have anyone telling
me what to do. And I'm okay with
that. I'm actually really okay with
that.

Matt straightens out his torn shirt.

MATT (CONT'D)
I think I might give Mandy a call.

NICK
You totally should.

RACHEL
She's pretty hot.

Rachel helps Nick limp toward her car.

MATT
(to Nick)
What about you? What are you going
to do now?

NICK

Well there's one thing I need to do
right away.

Nick leans in to kiss Rachel. She stops him.

RACHEL

You know, we still work together.
And there are rules about workplace
relationships.

NICK

Fuck the rules.

Nick kisses her.

FADE OUT.