

HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. NEW YORK CITY LAW FIRM - DAY

The camera pans over a sleek, bustling office. Left over Christmas holiday decor attempts to lighten the space but only seems to emphasize the sterile atmosphere.

CUT TO:

INT. JACK'S OFFICE - SAME

JACK WHITMAN (30s), clean-cut, tired but stubbornly focused, sits behind his desk. He's going over a contract, sighing at the fine print. A loud knock snaps him out of his thoughts.

JACK (TO HIMSELF)

Just ten more hours until the "most wonderful time of the year"...

The door opens, and his assistant, MEGAN (20s, perky, wearing a New Years hat), pokes her head in.

MEGAN

Hey, Jack, the partners are asking if you can join the office New Years Eve party for at least a minute.

JACK

I'd rather face a judge who's having a bad day. Tell them I'm on a call.

MEGAN

Jack, you haven't taken a real break in over a year. Come on, it's just non-spiked punch and small talk.

JACK

I'll pass. I'd rather spend the approaching New Year relaxing. You know, away from here.

Megan sighs, and then an idea sparks.

MEGAN

Alright, fine, but since you refused to plan something, we booked you a place to get out of the city.

Jack looks up, skeptical.

JACK

What are you talking about?

MEGAN

Maine. Cozy cabin, no Wi-Fi, limited cell service. Just snow and stars. Come on, think of it as a gift from the team.

JACK

Maine? Really?

MEGAN

Trust me, you need it. I already set up the car service. You leave tomorrow morning.

Jack sighs, realizing he's outnumbered.

CUT TO:

EXT. NYC STREET - NIGHT

Jack steps out of his office, adjusting his coat against the cold. He trudges through the streets, snowflakes beginning to fall. He stops to look at a the remaining blinking Christmas lights display in a storefront and the announcement of the New Year approaching.

He scoffs, unimpressed.

JACK

Happy holidays, I guess.

INT. O'HARE AIRPORT - DAY

Next morning, Jack stumbles sleepily off the plane, rubbing his eyes as he follows the line of passengers. He glances at his phone.

INSERT - PHONE SCREEN

"Welcome to Chicago!"

JACK
Chicago? Wait...no, I was supposed
to be in Portland...

Jack looks around, realizing he's landed in the wrong city.
But it's too late; his flight was overbooked, and he's stuck.

EXT. WINTRY STREET - CHICAGO - NIGHT

Jack finally arrives at a charming brick-lined apartment,
which looks like every other on the block. He stares at the
number, checking his phone for confirmation.

JACK
(this must be it)
Alright, Megan... I'll give you
points for quaint.

He digs out his key from the rental company's app, scanning
the lock. The door clicks open.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Inside, the apartment is eclectic—filled with local art,
hanging plants, and a small Christmas tree strung with quirky
ornaments. Jack raises an eyebrow at the decorations.

JACK
Guess they haven't gotten around to
switch from Christmas to New Years.
Cozy. And weirdly... personal.

Jack kicks off his shoes, drops his bag, and starts looking
around, picking up little trinkets and a framed photo.

He sets it down, yawns, and collapses onto the couch.

FADE TO:

INT. APARTMENT - LATER THAT NIGHT

EMMA BLAKE (30s, warm and witty with a down-to-earth charm)
bursts through the front door with an armful of groceries and
a bouquet of flowers. She freezes when she sees Jack sprawled
on the couch.

Jack bolts upright, eyes wide.

EMMA
Who... the heck are you?!

JACK
(lost)
I... think I'm in the wrong
apartment?

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Emma drops her groceries onto the floor, a few apples rolling away. She's still staring at Jack, who's looking equally bewildered.

JACK
I swear I'm not a burglar. Or a
stalker.

EMMA
Good to know, but that doesn't
explain why you're in my apartment.

Jack fumbles for his phone, pulling up his rental confirmation.

JACK
It's... it's supposed to be a
vacation rental. See? Apartment 12
on Oak Street. Keyless entry and
all.

EMMA
(suspicious)
Apartment 12, huh?
(checking the phone)
Okay, that's my
address... But this is my
apartment.

JACK
You don't rent it out?

EMMA
Uh, no. I live here. Full-time. And
I'm about to host a very real
party, so...

Jack looks around, now noticing more personal touches—her art supplies, the vintage guitar leaning against the wall.

JACK
(awkwardly)
So... you're saying this isn't a
rental.

EMMA
(dryly)
Bingo. And I don't usually let
random men crash on my couch, so...

Jack runs a hand through his hair, looking embarrassed.

JACK
I'm really sorry. Must be some kind
of mix-up. I'll... get out of your
way.

He starts to gather his things, clearly flustered.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Jack is bundling up to head out, layer after layer of
scarves, hats, and gloves.

JACK
(tugging on a second
scarf)
I'm starting to feel like the
Michelin Man.

EMMA
(snickering)
You realize it's only twenty
degrees out, right?

JACK
(shivering, defiant)
And every one of those degrees is
against me.

He steps outside and immediately slips on an icy patch, his
arms flailing. Emma, watching from the window, can't hold
back her laughter.

EMMA
(calling through the
door)
You got this, New York! Just... don't
try to walk!

EMMA (CONT'D)
(sighing)
Wait, wait.
(MORE)

EMMA (CONT'D)

It's New Year's Eve, there's a snowstorm, and this was obviously some tech screw-up.

She looks at him, sizing him up.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Tell you what. You can stay, just for tonight. But you'll have to keep a low profile while my friends are here. You good with that?

JACK

(shocked, relieved)

Yeah, yes, of course. Thank you.

EMMA

(grins)

Well, don't thank me yet. My friends are... a bit much.

EMMA (CONT'D)

I don't have anything for us to eat, so let me order a pizza. Does that sound good to you?

JACK

Gee, a Chicago pizza. How can I resist.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

The pizza is delivered and Emma invites Jack to sit on the floor, deep-dish pizza between them. Jack sizes up a particularly cheesy slice.

JACK

(boldly)

I'm a New Yorker. I can handle any pizza Chicago throws my way.

He takes a huge bite, only to find himself tangled in an absurdly long cheese pull. Emma laughs as he struggles.

EMMA

(laughing)

This isn't a slice—it's an experience. You're not in New York anymore.

Jack finally manages to swallow, looking mildly traumatized.

JACK
(breathless)
I... I think Chicago pizza just won.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - LATER THAT NIGHT

The living room is now filled with a small crowd of Emma's artist friends, all laughing, chatting, and wearing colorful outfits. Jack stands awkwardly off to the side, a glass of wine in hand, looking completely out of place.

Emma notices him and walks over, smirking.

EMMA
You're blending in really well, by the way. No one suspects a thing.

JACK
(whispers)
I feel like I wandered into a theater troupe.

EMMA
Welcome to my world.

One of Emma's friends, RACHEL (20s, bold, and vibrant), swoops in.

RACHEL
Emma! Introduce me to your...
(looking at Jack) dashing friend.

EMMA
Rachel, this is Jack. He's... a surprise guest.

RACHEL
Oh, I love surprises. (leans closer) So, Jack, how do you know Emma?

Jack and Emma exchange a glance, both scrambling for an answer.

JACK
Uh, well...

EMMA
He's actually from... New York.
Just visiting for the holiday.

Rachel narrows her eyes, intrigued.

RACHEL
(whispering to Emma)
And here I thought you'd sworn off
dating for the year.

EMMA
(not convincing)
It's not like that!

Rachel gives them both a knowing look and saunters away. Jack and Emma share an awkward laugh.

JACK
Nice save.

EMMA
(whispering)
Try not to blow your cover. I don't
think my friends would ever let me
live it down.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - LATER

As the party continues, Jack loosens up a bit, trying to join in on a conversation about art. Emma watches, slightly amused by how out of his element he seems.

ARTIST FRIEND
So, Jack, what do you think? Is
commercial art a sellout?

Jack, still getting used to the vibe, hesitates.

JACK
Uh... commercial art? I mean, sure,
it's... got its place.

Emma jumps in, helping him out.

EMMA
Jack's a lawyer. He deals with
commercial... cases, so he's just a
little out of his depth here.

The group laughs, and Jack chuckles too, finally relaxing a bit.

BUYER
Emma, your work is so expressive.
It's like you're capturing the
city's soul.

JACK
It's all her. She's been doing this
her whole life.

EMMA
(playfully)
Okay, let's not scare the buyers
away.

They laugh, but Jack's admiration for Emma is clear.

JACK
(good-naturedly)
Hey, I may not be an artist, but I
do know a thing or two about New
Year's resolutions.

Emma raises an eyebrow, curious.

EMMA
Oh really? And what's yours?

JACK
Honestly? To just... not think
about work for a few days. (pauses)
And maybe to try and figure out
what else there is besides
contracts and case files.

Emma looks at him, surprised by his honesty.

EMMA
Well, welcome to the artist's New
Year's then. You might just get
what you're looking for.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - MUCH LATER

The party winds down, and Emma's friends start trickling out.
Jack, now relaxed and a little tipsy, watches them leave.
Emma walks over, handing him a glass of water.

EMMA
You survived. Impressive.

JACK
I'm starting to think I needed this
more than I realized.

EMMA
Glad you did. I've never had an
unexpected roommate on New Year's
Eve before.

They share a quiet moment, smiling at each other, both feeling an unexpected connection.

EMMA (CONT'D)

So, what's next? Think you'll head out tomorrow?

Jack hesitates, looking out the window at the snow-covered streets.

JACK

If this storm lets up, yeah... but I'm not in any rush.

EMMA

(slightly flustered)

Well, goodnight then.

They share a lingering look before Emma heads toward her bedroom.

FADE IN:

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Jack wakes up groggily on the couch, blinking against the early morning light streaming in. He groans, rubbing his head, clearly feeling last night's wine.

Emma enters from her bedroom, already dressed in a cozy sweater and sipping coffee. She sees Jack struggling and smirks.

EMMA

Morning, Mr. Lawyer. How's that New Year's resolution going?

JACK

(stretching)

Surprisingly okay... other than the headache.

EMMA

Hang on. I've got just the cure.

She heads to the kitchen, rummaging around, and returns with a mug of dark, aromatic coffee and a small glass with something green in it.

JACK
(skeptical)
What's... that?

EMMA
Celery juice. Trust me, it works.

Jack eyes it warily, then downs it in one go, grimacing.

JACK
It tastes like punishment.

EMMA
It's supposed to.

They share a laugh. Jack looks outside and notices the thick blanket of snow covering everything.

JACK
Looks like I'm here for a while.

EMMA
Guess so. (pauses) Well, since you're officially stranded, how about I give you the full Chicago experience?

Jack looks surprised but intrigued.

JACK
Lead the way.

EXT. CHICAGO STREET - DAY

Emma and Jack walk side by side, bundled up against the cold. Emma points out quirky little shops and hidden street art as they pass. Jack listens, clearly out of his element but enjoying himself.

EMMA
Chicago isn't just skyscrapers.
There's a whole world beyond the Loop.

They turn a corner and stop in front of a small, unassuming ART GALLERY. Jack and Emma stroll through Chicago's vibrant art district, taking in the street murals and gallery displays. They stop at a mural Emma admires, and she reveals more about her art journey.

EMMA (CONT'D)
(gesturing to the mural)
That was the first mural I painted
when I moved here. It's how I fell
in love with this city.

Jack reaches for her hand, moved by her story.

JACK
I can see why you stayed. You
brought your heart with you.

They share a warm smile, the moment signaling Jack's deeper understanding of Emma's connection to Chicago.

INT. ART GALLERY - DAY

Emma leads Jack through the gallery, which features an eclectic mix of paintings, sculptures, and installations. She stops at one of her own pieces—a colorful abstract painting. Jack looks at it thoughtfully.

JACK
So... what does it mean?

EMMA
(laughs)
That's for you to figure out. Art
isn't about having all the answers.
Sometimes it's about letting
yourself feel without knowing why.

Jack nods, taking it in. He's genuinely moved but keeps it understated. He sees a blank canvas on a stand.

EMMA (CONT'D)
You want to try?

JACK
Sure, just call me Picasso.

Emma is helping Jack paint. Jack dips his brush in every color, creating a chaotic mess on the canvas.

JACK (CONT'D)
(enthusiastic)
Abstract art, right? It's all about
the... emotions?

Emma takes a step back, squinting.

EMMA
(teasing)
If "confused disaster" is an
emotion, you nailed it.

Jack proudly holds up his "masterpiece," a colorful mess.
Emma bursts out laughing.

JACK
(playfully indignant)
Hey, you're just not seeing my
vision.

Emma hands him a paint roller.

EMMA
(smiling)
Here's a roller. Let's see if that
helps you "express" yourself.

JACK
You really love this, don't you?

EMMA
Yeah. I think it's one of the few
places I don't feel like I have to
be anything but myself.

EXT. CITY PARK - LATER

They continue their tour through a quiet, snow-covered park.
Emma notices Jack glancing at his phone out of habit, though
he quickly pockets it, embarrassed.

EMMA
You're having withdrawal, aren't
you?

JACK
What can I say? I'm used to being
on call.

EMMA
Maybe that's the problem. (pauses)
You ever think about just...
unplugging?

JACK
All the time. But it's not that
easy. When you've got people
depending on you...

Emma nods, understanding but unconvinced.

EMMA

Well, consider today a forced experiment. Just for one day, forget the outside world. Pretend you're just... a guy wandering through a strange city with no plan.

Jack laughs, genuinely entertained by the idea.

JACK

I think I can manage that.

EXT. HOT DOG STAND - LATER

Jack and Emma stand in line at a local hot dog stand. Emma grins, watching Jack try to order a "Chicago-style" hot dog, clearly confused by the number of toppings.

VENDOR

And no ketchup, right?

JACK

(skeptical)

No ketchup? What kind of barbarism is this?

Emma laughs, nudging him.

EMMA

Relax, it's a Chicago thing. You'll survive.

Jack takes a bite, surprised by the messy, flavorful hot dog.

JACK

Alright, I'll give you that. It's... unexpectedly good.

EMMA

(chuckling)

See? You just had to give it a chance.

EXT. JAZZ CLUB - NIGHT

That evening, they arrive at a cozy underground jazz club. They take a seat in the corner as a jazz band plays a soft, soulful tune. The warm, dimly lit room creates a romantic atmosphere.

Jack looks around, visibly charmed by the place.

JACK
I think I could get used to this.

EMMA
See? This is what you miss when
you're stuck in your office all the
time.

They sit in comfortable silence, watching the band. After a moment, Jack speaks, his tone more vulnerable.

JACK
I don't think I've actually slowed
down long enough to just... be. I
mean, since law school, it's been
one endless checklist. Get a job,
make partner... (trails off) But
sometimes I wonder if that's... all
there is.

Emma looks at him with empathy.

EMMA
Maybe that's why you ended up here.
Some kind of cosmic push to make
you rethink things.

They share a quiet, meaningful look.

JACK
So what about you? What's your plan
for the new year?

EMMA
Me? I'm just trying to figure
things out one day at a time. And
to keep creating, no matter what.

JACK
(sincere)
That's... brave. Braver than I
think I'd ever be.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - LATER THAT NIGHT

They return to her apartment, both visibly tired but with a sense of warmth and camaraderie between them.

Emma goes to turn on a lamp, but it flickers and dies. Jack, instinctively, pulls out his phone to turn on the flashlight.

EMMA
Still on-call, huh?

JACK
(smirking)
You're never off-duty with
technology. Just a fact of life.

They both laugh, and the laughter fades as they share a lingering look. For a moment, it feels like something more might happen.

Jack catches himself, clearing his throat.

JACK (CONT'D)
(awkwardly)
Thanks... for today. It was exactly
what I didn't know I needed.

EMMA
You're welcome, surprise roommate.
Just don't expect every day to be
like this.

She gives him a playful nudge, breaking the tension.

JACK
I think I'll survive.

They share one last, warm smile before saying goodnight.

FADE IN:

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - NEXT MORNING

Jack is up early, moving quietly in the kitchen as he makes coffee. He fumbles with Emma's vintage French press, clearly not used to anything less high-tech. He pours himself a cup, smiling as he tastes it, surprised it's good.

Emma enters, groggy, clearly not a morning person.

EMMA
You're... up already? And you made
coffee?

JACK
Figured it's the least I could do,
considering my "extended stay."

Emma smirks, accepting a cup.

EMMA

Well, don't get too comfortable.
Storm or no storm, I'll have you
know I usually don't let strangers
camp out in my living room.

JACK

Noted. (smiles) Guess I got lucky
with my... unconventional Airbnb.

They share a smile, sipping their coffee in silence.

EMMA

(suddenly)

Hey, want to see something cool?
It's a bit of a walk, but worth it.

Jack raises an eyebrow, intrigued.

JACK

Lead the way.

EXT. FROZEN LAKE MICHIGAN - DAY

Emma takes Jack to the shores of Lake Michigan, where the
frozen expanse stretches as far as the eye can see.
Snowflakes begin to fall, adding a magical touch.

Jack stares in awe.

JACK

I didn't know a lake could look...
like this.

EMMA

(first teasing, then
sincere)
Bet they don't have
anything like this in New
York. (softly) It's one
of my favorite places to
think.

They both stand in silence, watching the snow fall over the
lake. Jack's expression shifts, becoming more contemplative.

JACK

I envy that. Having a place where
you feel... at home.

EMMA

You don't have that? Not even back
in New York?

JACK

(sighs)

I guess... maybe I never tried to find it. There's always something next on the list. And I'm starting to wonder if... maybe I don't even want that life anymore.

Emma looks at him, her expression softening.

EMMA

Maybe you're not supposed to know all the answers right away. I mean, life's just one big question mark, right?

Jack chuckles.

JACK

I can't tell if that's reassuring or terrifying.

They laugh, the shared moment deepening their connection.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

They continue their walk back through the snowy streets, bundled up and talking easily.

JACK

You ever think about leaving Chicago?

EMMA

(laughs)

Once a week. But then I see things like that lake... or run into people I care about, and I think, "Yeah, maybe this is exactly where I'm supposed to be."

Jack nods, thoughtful.

EMMA (CONT'D)

What about you? You ever picture yourself outside New York?

JACK

Honestly? I don't think I ever allowed myself to. But now... I'm not so sure.

Emma gives him a sidelong glance, intrigued by his admission.

Jack spots a coffee shop and the two enter.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Jack is ordering coffee, overdoing his attempt at a Chicago accent.

JACK
(overemphasizing)
Yeah, I'll take a... caw-fee... "on the go," you know?

Emma stifles a laugh, nudging him.

EMMA
(smirking)
If you say "Da Bears" next, I'm walking out.

JACK
(mumbling)
Just trying to fit in... ya know?

The barista hands him his coffee, giving him a strange look, and Emma laughs, pulling him away.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - LATE AFTERNOON

Back at Emma's apartment, they warm up with mugs of hot chocolate. Jack is noticeably relaxed, a far cry from the workaholic who stepped into her apartment days earlier.

They sit on the couch, sipping in comfortable silence.

EMMA
You know, if you'd told me a week ago I'd be spending the holidays with a lawyer from New York, I'd have called you crazy.

JACK
Oh yeah? What would you have done instead?

EMMA
Honestly? Probably another solo New Year's Eve, Netflix, and a half-eaten pizza.

Jack chuckles.

JACK
Hey, don't knock it. I think that's
half my colleagues' dream New
Year's.

Emma grins, then looks thoughtful.

EMMA
But I don't know... maybe things
like this happen for a reason.

Jack meets her gaze, the lightness in his eyes replaced by
something more serious.

JACK
Maybe they do.

Their moment is interrupted by a loud BANG from outside—a car
slipping in the snow. They both laugh, breaking the tension.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Later that evening, Emma rummages through her closet and
pulls out an old board game.

EMMA
Alright, city boy, time to put your
lawyer skills to the test.

Jack raises an eyebrow as she sets up the game.

JACK
A board game? You're... serious?

EMMA
Oh, I'm serious. (grins) No better
way to get to know someone than
playing a cutthroat game of
Scrabble.

They laugh and start playing, quickly getting into it. As the
game goes on, they both reveal little quirks, trading playful
jabs and stealing glances at each other.

JACK
(admiring her competitive
spirit)
You don't go easy on anyone, do
you?

EMMA

Life's too short to play safe.
Besides, I have to keep you on your
toes.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - LATE NIGHT

The board game sits forgotten as they talk and laugh, the
connection between them unmistakable now.

Emma glances at the clock, surprised.

EMMA

Wow. Midnight already.

JACK

I guess time flies when... (pauses,
almost shyly) you're with good
company.

They share a lingering look, the distance between them
suddenly feeling smaller. Jack reaches out, tucking a strand
of hair behind her ear.

JACK (CONT'D)

Thanks for... everything. This
whole day, it was...

EMMA

(small smile)

Unexpected?

They both laugh softly, the tension simmering. For a moment,
it seems like they might kiss.

But then Emma pulls back slightly, breaking the spell.

EMMA (CONT'D)

(clearing her throat)

Well, um, we both better get some
sleep. I guess you'll be heading
out tomorrow if the roads clear.

JACK

Yeah. (hesitates) Right.

They exchange a final look before saying goodnight, each
feeling the weight of something unsaid.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Jack wakes up on the couch the next morning, noticing that the storm has passed. Emma is already up, looking slightly distant.

JACK

So... I guess this is goodbye.

Emma nods, managing a small smile.

EMMA

Guess so. It's been... fun.

Jack can see she's trying to brush off the connection they've shared. He stands there, torn, then finally picks up his bag and heads toward the door.

JACK

Take care, Emma.

Emma watches him go, her expression conflicted.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Jack steps out into the snow-covered street, taking a last look back at Emma's apartment. He hesitates, then shakes his head and keeps walking.

After a few steps, he stops, sighing, and turns back toward the apartment with determination.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Emma is staring out the window, lost in thought, when she hears a knock. Surprised, she opens the door to find Jack standing there.

JACK

One last thing. I can't leave
Chicago... not without seeing you
again. (pauses) If you'll let me.

Emma's face softens, a smile breaking through.

EMMA

Well, if you're offering, maybe I
can pencil you in.

They laugh, and the warmth between them is palpable.

FADE OUT.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Jack and Emma sit across from each other, sipping coffee. The comfortable silence speaks volumes, both aware of the lingering chemistry.

JACK

So, if you could do anything... go
anywhere... what would you do?

Emma smiles thoughtfully.

EMMA

Hmm. I'd probably take a trip
through Europe—see the art,
experience the culture. And maybe
find inspiration to create
something totally new.

JACK

What's stopping you?

EMMA

(sighs, shrugging)
Life, money, the usual. It's one of
those "someday" things, you know?

Jack nods, a thoughtful look in his eyes.

JACK

"Someday" always has a way of
getting further away.

Emma looks at him, surprised by his insight.

EMMA

Maybe it doesn't have to.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Emma and Jack walk together, snow crunching under their boots as they navigate through the bustling city. They're relaxed, enjoying each other's company.

They pass by a bakery with a display of pastries. Emma stops, pulling Jack over.

EMMA

Best croissants in Chicago. You
have to try one.

She buys a couple of pastries, handing one to Jack.

JACK
(biting into it)
Wow. Okay, you might be onto
something here.

EMMA
(laughs)
Welcome to the good side of life.

INT. BOOKSTORE - LATER

They wander into a small, cozy bookstore. Jack watches as Emma gets lost in the shelves, picking up a few art books.

Emma notices Jack browsing a self-help section and chuckles.

EMMA
Looking for answers?

JACK
(grinning)
Hey, maybe they're in here
somewhere.

Emma laughs, playfully nudging him.

INT. JAZZ CLUB - NIGHT

That evening, they find themselves in a cozy jazz club, sharing a table in the dimly lit room. A soft jazz tune fills the air, creating a warm, intimate atmosphere.

They sit close together, both enjoying the moment. Emma glances at Jack, sensing his relaxed demeanor.

EMMA
Who would've thought—Mr. New York
Lawyer unwinding in Chicago?

JACK
(sincere)
Maybe I needed this more than I
realized.

Their eyes meet, the connection between them undeniable.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Back at the apartment, they sit across from each other on the floor, sharing leftover pastries and sipping hot chocolate. They're relaxed, feeling closer than ever.

EMMA

This whole thing... it's been kind of surreal.

JACK

Yeah. I came here expecting... I don't even know. But I never thought I'd meet someone like you.

Emma's smile fades slightly as she looks at him.

EMMA

Maybe it's just the magic of the holiday.

JACK

Maybe. Or maybe... it's something real.

They share a long, meaningful look, the distance between them shrinking.

EMMA

(whispering)

We're probably just caught up in the moment.

Jack reaches out, brushing a strand of hair behind her ear.

JACK

Maybe. But it's a pretty good moment.

They lean in, finally sharing a soft, lingering kiss.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - NEXT MORNING

Jack and Emma share breakfast, the air between them warm and easy.

JACK

So... what now?

Emma shrugs, smiling a little sadly.

EMMA

Back to real life, I guess.

Jack looks at her, conflicted.

JACK

Maybe real life doesn't have to mean goodbye.

Emma studies him, a flicker of hope in her eyes.

INT. AIRPORT - DAY

Jack stands at the airport, looking at his boarding pass, then back at the exit doors. He's conflicted, wrestling with his emotions.

He takes out his phone, typing a quick message:

TEXT MESSAGE TO EMMA

JACK (V.O.)
I don't think I'm ready to say
goodbye.

He waits, his heart pounding.

TEXT FROM EMMA

EMMA (V.O.)
Then don't.

Jack smiles, pocketing his phone and turning back toward the exit.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Jack and Emma reunite on a snowy Chicago street, both smiling as they meet.

EMMA
(smirking)
Didn't think you'd actually come
back.

JACK
Turns out, I'm not ready for
"someday" to keep getting further
away.

They share a laugh, their hands finding each other's as they walk into the snowy night.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Jack and Emma are relaxing on the couch, sharing a pizza and talking about everything from travel dreams to quirky stories. The warmth and chemistry between them are undeniable.

A loud knock interrupts the moment. Emma stands, a little surprised.

EMMA
(half-joking)
Are you expecting company?

JACK
Only if you are.

Emma walks to the door, opening it to reveal RYAN (30s, confident, casually attractive), holding a bouquet of flowers. His eyes light up as he sees her.

RYAN
Emma! Thought I'd surprise you.

Emma freezes, caught off guard. Jack stands up, watching the interaction unfold.

EMMA
Ryan... what are you doing here?

Ryan looks past her, noticing Jack. His smile fades, replaced by a hint of jealousy.

RYAN
Didn't realize you had company.

Jack steps forward, offering a polite smile but feeling a little defensive.

JACK
Jack Whitman. I'm, uh... visiting.

Ryan's eyebrows raise as he takes Jack in, clearly assessing him.

RYAN
(to Emma, a little
possessive)
We need to talk. Alone?

Emma looks at Jack apologetically.

EMMA
Jack, would you mind...?

JACK
Not at all.

Jack grabs his coat, looking a little hurt as he heads out the door.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Jack walks through the snow, hands in his pockets, a mix of emotions on his face. He's confused and frustrated, wondering if he's reading too much into Emma's reaction.

He sits down on a bench, looking back at her apartment building.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Emma and Ryan sit on the couch, Ryan looking at her with a familiar warmth.

RYAN
It's been too long, Emma. I've been
doing a lot of thinking... and I
miss you. I miss us.

Emma sighs, clearly conflicted.

EMMA
Ryan, we broke up for a reason. I
thought we'd both moved on.

RYAN
That's what I thought, too. But
seeing you here... I just feel like
maybe we made a mistake.

Emma shifts uncomfortably, feeling the weight of his words.

EMMA
(softly)
Ryan, I'm... seeing someone. Kind
of.

Ryan glances at the door where Jack left, his expression hardening slightly.

RYAN
The New York lawyer?

Emma nods, her emotions clear but conflicted.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Jack paces outside, debating whether to go back in. He finally takes a deep breath, deciding to confront the situation.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jack re-enters to find Emma and Ryan sitting on the couch, both looking up in surprise.

JACK
Sorry, couldn't stay away. Thought
I'd see if everything's okay.

Ryan stands, the tension in the room thick.

RYAN
Guess I should head out. (to Emma)
Think about what I said, okay?

He leaves, giving Jack a lingering, almost challenging look.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Emma and Jack stand in awkward silence after Ryan leaves.

JACK
Ex-boyfriend?

Emma nods, looking a little embarrassed.

EMMA
Yeah. I didn't expect him to show
up like that.

Jack smiles, trying to hide his jealousy.

JACK
Well, he certainly has good taste.

Emma laughs, the tension breaking slightly.

EMMA
Jack... about Ryan—

Jack holds up a hand, shaking his head.

JACK
You don't owe me an explanation.
It's just... you know, complicated
timing.

They share a look, both realizing how much this encounter stirred feelings they didn't expect.

EMMA

You're right. But... I think it's pretty clear what I want.

She steps closer to Jack, her eyes meeting his, and they share a meaningful, lingering look.

INT. ART GALLERY - DAY

The next day, Jack and Emma are at an art gallery. They wander through the exhibits, their conversation filled with easy banter.

Jack notices Emma glancing at her phone occasionally, clearly distracted.

JACK

Still thinking about Ryan?

Emma looks at him, surprised but not defensive.

EMMA

A little. It's just... strange, having someone from my past show up like that.

Jack nods, understanding.

JACK

Makes sense. I just... I want to make sure you're here because you want to be, not because I happened to crash your New Year's.

Emma smiles, reaching out to squeeze his hand.

EMMA

Jack, I'm exactly where I want to be.

They share a smile, the tension between them easing.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jack and Emma cook dinner together, both laughing as they navigate the small kitchen. Jack is chopping vegetables, while Emma tries to stir a sauce, accidentally splattering some on him.

JACK
You're a menace in the kitchen!

Emma laughs, playfully flicking more sauce at him.

EMMA
You signed up for this, lawyer boy.

They share a laugh, both enjoying the simplicity and warmth of the moment.

Jack and Emma sit together, the comfortable silence between them reflecting a deeper intimacy. Jack looks around, taking in her artwork, each piece echoing her personality.

JACK
(slightly conflicted)
You've built something
incredible here, Emma.
This whole life... it's
uniquely yours. (pauses)
It's different from
anything I've ever known.
Emma smiles, reaching for his hand.

EMMA
(smiling warmly)
It wouldn't be the same without
you.

They share a moment, but Jack looks down, hesitating.

JACK
For so long, I thought New York was
the only place I could make
something of myself. (looking at
her) But here... here, I feel like
maybe I was wrong. Like maybe
there's more for me here.

EMMA
(gentle reassurance)
You don't have to decide everything
right now, Jack. Let's just... see
where this takes us.

Jack nods, visibly relieved, his hand tightening around hers as he realizes he doesn't need all the answers just yet.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

After dinner, they sit on the couch, Emma resting her head on Jack's shoulder. The cozy silence is broken by a soft knock at the door.

They exchange a look, and Emma gets up to answer it.

Standing in the doorway is Ryan, holding a bouquet of flowers, looking apologetic.

RYAN

Emma, can we talk? Just one last time?

Emma glances back at Jack, who gives her a small nod.

JACK

Go ahead. I'll be here.

Emma steps outside with Ryan, leaving Jack alone in the apartment, his thoughts conflicted.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Emma and Ryan stand on the steps, Ryan looking at her earnestly.

RYAN

Emma, I know I messed up. But I'm here now. I want us to try again.

Emma sighs, looking down.

EMMA

Ryan... I cared about you. I still do. But I've moved on, and I think you should, too.

Ryan's shoulders slump, his expression heartbroken but understanding.

RYAN

Guess I just needed to hear that.
(smiles sadly) Take care, Emma.

Emma nods, watching as he walks away into the snowy night.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Emma returns to find Jack sitting on the couch, looking up expectantly.

EMMA

It's over. I told him goodbye.

Jack stands, a look of relief and affection on his face.

JACK

So... does this mean we have a chance?

Emma smiles, walking over to him.

EMMA

I think we do.

They share a warm, tender kiss, both realizing they've found something special.

FADE OUT.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Jack is making breakfast, looking more comfortable and at ease in Emma's kitchen. Emma walks in, surprised to see him cooking.

EMMA

Is this the same guy who struggled with my French press?

Jack laughs, flipping a pancake.

JACK

Hey, I'm a quick learner. Figured I'd start repaying you with breakfast in bed. Or... breakfast at the counter.

Emma smiles, touched by the gesture, as she sits down.

EMMA

Well, if you keep this up, I might have to keep you around.

Jack looks at her, his eyes softening.

JACK

I wouldn't be opposed to that.

They share a warm smile, both feeling the depth of their connection growing.

INT. CITY PARK - DAY

Emma and Jack take a stroll through the park, now covered in a fresh layer of snow. Children are sledding, couples are holding hands, and there's an undeniable holiday magic in the air.

Jack watches a family building a snowman nearby, a thoughtful expression on his face.

JACK

I've been so focused on work, I
can't remember the last time I
actually slowed down to enjoy
something like this.

EMMA

Well, you're doing a pretty good
job of it now.

He grins, picking up a snowball and tossing it at her playfully.

EMMA (CONT'D)

(shrieking, laughing)
Oh, it's on!

They engage in a playful snowball fight, laughing and dodging each other's throws. The carefree moment is both liberating and full of chemistry.

INT. EMMA'S ART STUDIO - DAY

Emma leads Jack to her art studio, a small, bright room filled with canvases, paints, and sketches. Jack looks around, taking it all in.

JACK

This... this is amazing. I had no
idea you'd done so much.

EMMA

(smiling)
It's a little chaotic, but it's
home.

Jack stops at a canvas she's been working on, a partially abstract landscape of Chicago in winter.

JACK

Is this... new?

EMMA

Yeah, started it a few days ago.
Inspired by someone who reminded me
to look at my own city with new
eyes.

Jack meets her gaze, the unspoken connection clear.

JACK

Can I... try?

EMMA

(surprised)

Paint? You?

JACK

What, you think lawyers can't have
an artistic side?

She laughs, handing him a paintbrush. Jack dips it in paint
and starts awkwardly adding to her canvas.

They both laugh as he makes a mess of the paint, his strokes
clumsy.

EMMA

Okay, okay—points for effort, but
maybe stick to contract law.

INT. CHICAGO DINER - NIGHT

They head to a cozy, old-school diner, settling into a booth
as they look over the menus.

JACK

Alright, what's the best thing
here?

EMMA

(challenging)

The deep-dish pizza, obviously.

Jack raises an eyebrow, smiling.

JACK

I've heard New Yorkers aren't
supposed to love Chicago pizza.

EMMA

Well, consider this your Chicago
initiation.

The waiter arrives, and Emma confidently orders the deep-dish pizza. As they wait, they talk and laugh, sharing stories of their childhood and past dreams.

JACK

You know, if someone told me I'd be spending the week eating pizza and painting with a stranger, I'd have thought they were crazy.

EMMA

Who says I'm not a little crazy?

Jack chuckles, admiring her.

JACK

I think that might be my favorite thing about you.

Emma looks at him, touched by his words.

INT. DINER - LATER

They finish their pizza, both looking full and satisfied. Jack leans back, smiling.

JACK

Okay, Chicago pizza... it's good. I'll admit it.

Emma laughs, mockingly triumphant.

EMMA

Welcome to the right side of history.

Jack playfully rolls his eyes, and they share another laugh.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

They walk back to Emma's apartment, bundled up and arm in arm, as snow begins to fall softly around them.

JACK

It's hard to believe this all started because I got on the wrong flight.

EMMA

Sometimes the best things happen by accident.

They share a look, both realizing just how much they've changed each other's lives in such a short time.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

They settle onto the couch, talking quietly as the lights dim. The conversation drifts to more personal topics.

EMMA

You ever think about... what you really want, beyond work?

Jack hesitates, then nods.

JACK

Lately, yeah. I've been thinking a lot about it. And I realized... I don't want to wake up one day and wonder why I never took a chance.

Emma looks at him, her expression tender.

EMMA

What kind of chance?

Jack smiles softly.

JACK

This. You. Everything we've shared this week.

He reaches out, taking her hand.

JACK (CONT'D)

I don't want this to be just a holiday memory.

Emma squeezes his hand, her eyes shining.

EMMA

Then don't let it be.

They share a soft, heartfelt kiss, the promise of something real and lasting.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Jack is packing up his suitcase, ready to leave. Emma stands nearby, both of them a little sad.

EMMA

So... back to New York?

Jack nods, sighing.

JACK

Yeah. But... I think I'll be coming
back to Chicago sooner than you
think.

Emma smiles, hopeful.

EMMA

I'll hold you to that.

INT. JACK'S OFFICE - NEW YORK CITY - DAY

Jack is back at his office, sitting at his desk, but he's not
focused. He's looking out the window, his mind clearly
elsewhere.

He picks up his phone, scrolling through photos he took with
Emma over the last week.

With a sudden determination, he stands, grabbing his coat.

EXT. AIRPORT - CHICAGO - NIGHT

Emma is at the airport, seeing off a friend, when she hears
someone call her name. She turns to see Jack standing there,
smiling.

JACK

Told you I'd be back.

Emma's face lights up as she runs to him, hugging him
tightly.

EMMA

I was starting to think it was just
a holiday fling.

JACK

Not even close.

They share a warm, lingering kiss as snow begins to fall
around them.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. JACK'S OFFICE - DAY

Jack is back in New York, sitting at his desk, attempting to work. The city's noise hums in the background, but he looks distracted, occasionally glancing at his phone, checking for messages from Emma.

Finally, a message comes through. He opens it, and it's a picture of Emma holding up a cup of coffee with a note: "Wish you were here."

Jack smiles, then sighs, leaning back in his chair as he contemplates.

INT. NEW YORK CITY RESTAURANT - EVENING

Jack meets with his mentor, LUCAS (60s, sharp, insightful), who observes Jack's distracted demeanor over dinner.

LUCAS

You seem... elsewhere. Trouble in paradise?

JACK

(smiling, trying to mask it)

Not exactly. Just... I met someone over the holidays. Back in Chicago.

LUCAS

Ah, the Chicago artist. You've mentioned her. What's stopping you?

Jack hesitates, looking out the window at the bustling New York street.

JACK

My life is here. Everything I've worked for. It's... not an easy thing to just walk away from.

LUCAS

Sometimes, you've got to take a risk. Life isn't just about checking boxes on a to-do list.

Jack absorbs this, clearly impacted by his mentor's advice.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Meanwhile, in Chicago, Emma is hosting an art workshop for a few friends. She's animated and focused, but she glances at her phone now and then, waiting for a text from Jack.

Finally, it pings, and her face lights up as she reads his message:

TEXT FROM JACK

Jack: Miss you. Counting the days.

Emma smiles, trying to hide her longing as she goes back to her friends.

INT. JACK'S OFFICE - NEW YORK CITY - DAY

Jack receives an email from Emma, a snapshot of a painting she recently completed—an abstract of a cityscape in winter, inspired by their time together.

Jack stares at the image, moved, realizing that he's never felt this connection with anyone before.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT

Jack walks through Central Park, his mind clearly on Emma and Chicago. The noise and energy of New York feel different, less enticing. He pauses, watching couples walking together, and pulls out his phone.

After a moment's hesitation, he dials a number.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Emma's phone rings, and she answers, smiling when she sees it's Jack.

EMMA

Well, if it isn't Mr. New York himself.

JACK

(smirking)

Chicago's got nothing on New York, but... I think I'm starting to see the appeal.

EMMA
Are you now?

JACK
I'm thinking... maybe I'll come out
there for a few days. See if
Chicago really is as magical as you
claim.

EMMA
(softly)
You have no idea how happy that
makes me.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jack packs his suitcase, looking at the familiar New York skyline through his window. There's a hint of anticipation and excitement as he zips up his bag.

EXT. CHICAGO - DAY

Jack arrives in Chicago, greeted by a flurry of snow. He steps out of the airport, smiling as he spots Emma waiting for him, bundled up and waving.

They embrace, sharing a warm, lingering kiss.

EMMA
Welcome back to the Windy City.

JACK
Glad to be back.

They walk together, holding hands, clearly happy to be reunited.

MONTAGE - JACK AND EMMA'S TIME TOGETHER IN CHICAGO:

They visit various Chicago landmarks, laughing and taking photos.

Jack meets some of Emma's artist friends, initially feeling out of place but slowly warming up to their unique personalities.

They stroll along Lake Michigan, bundled up, sharing stories and dreams, their connection deepening.

They enjoy a cozy dinner at a small Chicago restaurant, where Jack listens intently to Emma's stories about her art journey.

The montage ends with them sharing a quiet, intimate moment at Emma's apartment, both realizing the depth of their feelings.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jack and Emma sit together, a comfortable silence between them. Jack looks around at Emma's artwork, admiring the creativity that fills her space.

JACK

You've got a world here, Emma. A life that's so... you. I've never seen anything like it.

EMMA

(smiling)

Well, it wouldn't be the same without you here.

They share a smile, but Jack looks conflicted.

JACK

You know, I've spent my entire life thinking New York was the only place I could make something of myself. But being here... it makes me wonder if maybe I was wrong.

Emma reaches for his hand.

EMMA

You don't have to decide everything right now. Let's just see where this takes us.

Jack nods, relieved and grateful.

INT. NEW YORK CITY LAW FIRM - DAY

Back in New York, Jack is sitting with Lucas, the senior partner.

LUCAS

Chicago? Are you serious?

JACK
I'm considering it. Just...
exploring the possibility.

Lucas looks at Jack, surprised but thoughtful.

LUCAS
I'll be honest, Jack. It'd be a
loss for us, but if it's what you
need to be happy... don't let us
stand in your way.

Jack nods, feeling the weight of the decision but encouraged
by his mentor's words.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jack is packing up his things, preparing for another trip to
Chicago. He glances around his apartment, realizing that it
feels more like a temporary place than a home.

He picks up a small painting Emma gave him as a gift—a simple
piece, but meaningful. He smiles, placing it in his suitcase.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Emma is on a video call with Jack, both of them looking
excited and a little nervous.

EMMA
So... any big plans for this trip?

JACK
(smiling)
I don't know yet. Just... wanted to
see you. That's reason enough.

Emma smiles, her face lighting up.

INT. CHICAGO AIRPORT - DAY

Jack arrives in Chicago, and Emma is there to greet him. They
embrace, both looking thrilled to be together again.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jack and Emma sit down together, talking over a quiet dinner.

JACK
I'm actually considering making
this permanent. Moving to Chicago.

Emma's eyes widen in surprise, a mixture of excitement and fear.

EMMA
Jack... are you sure?

JACK
I don't know. I think so. I've
spent my whole life following a
plan, and for once, I want to
follow my heart. And my heart...
(smiling) it's here.

Emma looks deeply moved, reaching for his hand.

EMMA
Well, then... welcome to Chicago.

They share a smile, and Jack leans in, their kiss a symbol of his commitment.

INT. JACK'S NEW OFFICE - CHICAGO - DAY

Jack is settling into a new office space in Chicago, a fresh start but one that feels right. Emma stops by, bringing him coffee and a plant for his desk.

EMMA
You officially feel like a
Chicagoan yet?

JACK
(smiling)
Getting there.

They share a laugh, both feeling excited for the future.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jack and Emma sit together on the couch, both content and at peace.

EMMA
I'm so glad you decided to stay.

JACK
Me too. I don't know what I was so
afraid of.

They share a smile, both realizing they've found something truly special.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. JACK'S NEW APARTMENT - CHICAGO - DAY

Jack is unpacking boxes in a modest but cozy new apartment. He places books on a shelf, pausing to look around and adjust to the space. The apartment is simpler and more relaxed than his place in New York.

There's a knock on the door. Jack opens it to find Emma holding a small housewarming plant and a bag of takeout.

EMMA

Thought I'd help you settle in.
Also, welcome to your first Chicago
deep-dish initiation dinner.

Jack grins, taking the bag from her.

JACK

This must be serious if it's an
official initiation.

Emma laughs, stepping inside and taking in the place.

EMMA

I like it. Feels very... you.

Jack looks around, almost surprised to hear that.

JACK

Guess I never really thought about
what "me" looked like before.

INT. CHICAGO BAR - NIGHT

Jack sits across from Emma, eyeing a shot of Malört suspiciously. Emma watches, trying to contain her laughter.

JACK

(glancing at the glass)
You're sure this is a "Chicago
thing"? It smells like... paint
thinner.

EMMA
(grinning)
It's the ultimate Chicago
initiation. Just... don't ask
questions. Bottoms up!

Jack steels himself and takes the shot, immediately grimacing
as the bitter taste hits him.

JACK
(coughing)
What... was that?! Is this some
kind of prank?

Emma bursts out laughing, patting his shoulder.

EMMA
(smirking)
Congratulations. You're officially
a Chicagoan now.

Jack gives her a playful glare, the humor in his expression
clear as he recovers.

JACK
(sighing)
Okay, if that's the price of entry,
consider me hazed.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - LATER

They sit on the floor, surrounded by open boxes, eating deep-
dish pizza straight from the box. Emma playfully teases Jack
as he tries to get used to the gooey texture.

JACK
This is... intense. Good, but
intense.

EMMA
Chicago deep-dish isn't for the
faint of heart. Consider yourself
officially initiated.

Jack and Emma sit together on the couch, flipping through an
old photo album he brought back from his recent trip to New
York. Each photo prompts a humorous or sentimental memory,
allowing both of them to share pieces of their past with each
other.

JACK
(laughing)
This one—my mom insisted I wear
that bow tie for the entire year.

EMMA
(smirking)
I like the look, actually. It's
very "serious lawyer-in-training."

They laugh, enjoying the casual comfort of the moment.

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Jack is meeting his new colleagues in Chicago. The office is smaller and has a different vibe than his previous firm in New York. A colleague, JENNIFER (30s, friendly), greets him, showing him around.

JENNIFER
Welcome to the team, Jack! So, what
brings a New York lawyer to the
Midwest?

JACK
(half-joking)
A girl... and a change of scenery.

Jennifer laughs, giving him a nod of understanding.

JENNIFER
Good reasons. Just don't bring any
of that New York rush into this
office—we take things a little
slower here.

Jack smiles, taking in the laid-back atmosphere.

EXT. CHICAGO STREET - NIGHT

Jack and Emma walk through the bustling downtown area, enjoying the city lights and the hum of people. They pause at a street performer playing saxophone, and Jack watches, entranced by the music.

JACK
Chicago has a different energy.
Less intense but... I like it.

EMMA
It grows on you. Give it time.

They continue walking, comfortable in each other's presence.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Jack and Emma are sitting at a cozy coffee shop, sipping coffee and talking.

JACK

So... you ever think about what's next for you?

Emma looks thoughtful, playing with her coffee cup.

EMMA

Sometimes. I mean, I love what I do, but... I don't know, maybe I'd like to have my own gallery someday. A place where artists like me can just... be.

Jack smiles, clearly admiring her vision.

JACK

That sounds incredible. You'd be amazing at that.

Emma blushes, touched by his support.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jack and Emma are painting together, laughing as they make a mess. Jack's technique is clumsy, but Emma playfully guides him.

EMMA

Okay, so maybe finger-painting isn't your strength.

Jack laughs, pretending to be offended.

JACK

Hey, I'm a quick learner. (dipping his finger in paint) See? I'll just stick with abstracts.

They both laugh, feeling more relaxed and connected.

MONTAGE - JACK ADJUSTING TO CHICAGO LIFE:

Jack struggling to make his way through a Chicago winter, slipping on ice but laughing as he catches his balance.

Jack at a small Chicago Cubs game with Emma, both cheering and getting into the spirit.

Jack joining Emma and her artist friends for a gallery opening, feeling out of place at first but slowly warming up.

Jack and Emma cooking dinner together, laughing as they navigate Emma's small kitchen.

The montage ends with Jack and Emma sitting together on his balcony, watching the Chicago skyline in comfortable silence.

INT. JACK'S OFFICE - DAY

Jack is meeting with Jennifer and a few colleagues, discussing a new case. He's clearly enjoying the more personal, collaborative environment compared to the high-pressure atmosphere of his previous job.

JENNIFER

You're fitting in here pretty well,
Jack. I have to say, I didn't
expect you to adjust so quickly.

Jack smiles, feeling genuinely happy.

JACK

I didn't either. But... I think I
found something worth changing for.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jack and Emma are watching a movie, cozied up on the couch with popcorn. Suddenly, Jack's phone buzzes. He glances at the screen and sees a call from LUCAS, his mentor.

He hesitates, then steps into the kitchen to answer it.

JACK

Hey, Lucas. What's up?

LUCAS

Jack, I know you're settling in
Chicago, but we've got a major
client asking specifically for you.
They want you back here in New
York... just for a little while.

Jack's expression shifts, conflicted.

JACK
(sighing)
I... I'll have to think about it.

Jack hangs up, returning to the living room where Emma waits, sensing something's off.

EMMA
Everything okay?

JACK
Yeah... just something from the New
York office. Nothing major.

Emma looks at him, concerned but not wanting to pry.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Jack is sitting alone, deep in thought, weighing the decision to temporarily return to New York. He glances around the Chicago coffee shop, feeling the tug between his two worlds.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jack finally tells Emma about Lucas's call.

JACK
They want me back in New York...
just for a while. It's a big
client, and... it feels like an old
part of me still wants to prove
something there.

Emma listens, a flicker of disappointment crossing her face, but she nods supportively.

EMMA
I get it. You've got a whole life
in New York, Jack. And maybe... you
need to see if it's really
something you're ready to let go
of.

JACK
(sighing)
It's just... complicated. But I
don't want to leave you behind.

Emma smiles, placing a hand on his.

EMMA

We'll figure it out. Do what you need to do.

INT. JACK'S NEW YORK OFFICE - DAY

Jack is back in New York, meeting with the big client. The high-energy atmosphere is familiar, but something feels different to him.

He glances around, feeling like an outsider in a place that once felt like home.

INT. LUCAS'S OFFICE - DAY

Jack sits across from Lucas, who congratulates him on the successful meeting.

LUCAS

You've still got it, Jack. This client loves you. We could really use you here, full-time.

Jack looks down, feeling the pull between his old life and his new one.

JACK

I... appreciate that. But I've started something in Chicago, something that feels real. I don't think I'm ready to give that up.

Lucas looks at him, understanding but disappointed.

LUCAS

Well, whatever you decide, know that this door will always be open for you.

Jack nods, feeling both grateful and resolute.

EXT. NEW YORK STREET - NIGHT

Jack walks through New York, taking in the city lights and energy. He pauses at a familiar spot, looking out over the skyline, but instead of feeling at home, he feels like he's ready to move forward.

INT. AIRPORT - DAY

Jack heads back to Chicago, his face filled with a sense of purpose and excitement.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jack surprises Emma, knocking on her door. She opens it, surprised and thrilled to see him.

EMMA
You're back! So... what's the
verdict?

Jack smiles, stepping inside.

JACK
Chicago. You. This is where I want
to be.

Emma beams, hugging him tightly.

MONTAGE - JACK AND EMMA BUILDING A LIFE TOGETHER IN CHICAGO:

They host a small dinner party with friends, laughing and enjoying each other's company.

Emma helps Jack decorate his apartment, adding her artistic touch to his space.

They take a weekend road trip, exploring nearby areas, taking photos, and making memories.

Jack cheers on Emma as she unveils her artwork at a local gallery show.

They cook together, share quiet evenings, and explore new parts of Chicago.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - CHICAGO - MORNING

Jack is making breakfast, humming to himself, visibly more relaxed and at ease than ever before. Emma walks in, surprised to find him up early.

EMMA
Look at you, Mr. Early Bird.

JACK
Consider it part of my "new Chicago
life" routine.

Emma laughs, grabbing a mug of coffee. They share a warm look, both clearly happy.

INT. EMMA'S ART STUDIO - DAY

Emma is working on a new series of paintings inspired by her relationship with Jack. Her friend KARA (30s, fellow artist) stops by to check on her progress.

KARA

Wow, Em. This new work is...
different. There's so much heart in
it.

Emma smiles, glancing at a canvas with a painted Chicago skyline.

EMMA

It's funny... sometimes, life
surprises you in the best way.

Kara smirks, clearly understanding.

KARA

Well, he seems like a good
surprise.

Emma blushes, focusing back on her painting, but her smile speaks volumes.

INT. JACK'S LAW OFFICE - DAY

Jack meets with a new client, visibly enjoying the more personal, community-focused cases he's taking on. After the meeting, he sits back, thinking about how his life has changed.

JACK

(to himself)

Guess Chicago's growing on me.

EXT. CHICAGO RIVERWALK - EVENING

Jack and Emma stroll along the Riverwalk, bundled up and laughing together. They pause to look out over the water, the city lights reflecting in the river.

JACK

I never thought I'd feel at home
anywhere but New York. But here I
am.

EMMA

Chicago has a way of working its charm.

Jack looks at her, taking her hand.

JACK

Or maybe it's just you.

They share a sweet kiss, both feeling the depth of their connection.

INT. COMMUNITY ART CENTER - NIGHT

Emma hosts a small workshop at a local art center, teaching kids the basics of painting. Jack watches from the back, admiring her ease and passion.

After the workshop, Emma joins Jack, who's clearly impressed.

JACK

You're amazing with them. Have you thought about doing this more often?

EMMA

(smiling)

Maybe. I always wanted to give back to the community that inspired me.

Jack looks at her, admiration clear in his eyes.

JACK

You're incredible, Emma. Really.

Emma blushes, touched by his words.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jack and Emma are having a cozy dinner when Jack's phone rings. It's his mom, MRS. WHITMAN (60s, warm but sharp). He answers, and Emma overhears snippets of the conversation.

MRS. WHITMAN

Jack! How's my big-city lawyer doing in the Midwest?

JACK

(laughing)

It's good, Mom. Really good.

MRS. WHITMAN's voice grows more serious.

MRS. WHITMAN
So... are you bringing someone home
for Christmas?

Jack glances at Emma, caught off guard but smiling.

JACK
Actually... yeah, I think I might
be.

Emma raises an eyebrow, amused and touched.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - WHITMAN FAMILY HOME - DAY

Jack and Emma arrive at his family's home in New York for the holidays. His mother greets them warmly, clearly sizing up Emma but in a friendly, approving way.

MRS. WHITMAN
Emma, welcome! We've heard so much
about you.

Emma smiles, a bit nervous but charmed.

EMMA
Thank you, Mrs. Whitman. It's great
to finally meet you.

INT. WHITMAN FAMILY HOME - NIGHT

Jack and Emma sit around the dinner table with his family, sharing stories. Jack's mom subtly peppers Emma with questions, clearly curious about her.

MRS. WHITMAN
So, Chicago, hmm? Quite a change
for Jack.

EMMA
(smiling)
I think we both surprised each
other.

Jack smiles at Emma, the warmth between them obvious. His mother notices, clearly touched.

INT. JACK'S OLD ROOM - NIGHT

Jack and Emma are in his childhood bedroom, surrounded by posters and old trophies. Jack looks around, feeling nostalgic.

JACK

I used to think this room held
everything I'd ever need. Now... it
feels like a different lifetime.

EMMA

Life has a way of changing us.
Sometimes in ways we don't expect.

Jack nods, looking at her with gratitude.

JACK

Thanks for being part of that
change.

They share a quiet, heartfelt moment.

INT. JACK'S OFFICE - CHICAGO - DAY

Back in Chicago, Jack is meeting with clients and enjoying
the simpler, more grounded approach to his work. Jennifer
pops in, noticing his new approach.

JENNIFER

You're like a different person,
Jack. Whatever Chicago's doing to
you, it's working.

JACK

(smiling)

It's surprising, even to me.

EXT. CHICAGO - WINTER DAY

Emma invites Jack to a small, quirky holiday market, filled
with handmade crafts and unique gifts. They stroll through
the stalls, buying small trinkets and enjoying the festive
atmosphere.

At one booth, Jack buys a small, silver ornament shaped like
the Chicago skyline.

JACK

For our first Chicago Christmas.

Emma smiles, touched by the gesture.

EMMA

First of many, I hope.

They share a soft kiss, surrounded by the bustling market.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jack and Emma decorate his apartment for Christmas, laughing and joking as they hang ornaments and set up a small tree. Jack places the silver Chicago ornament at the top.

They step back, admiring their work.

JACK

Not bad for our first attempt.

EMMA

I think it's perfect.

They sit together on the couch, holding hands and enjoying the quiet moment.

INT. EMMA'S ART STUDIO - DAY

Emma is preparing for her first solo art show, excited but nervous. Jack watches her from the doorway, admiring her determination.

JACK

You're going to be incredible. You know that, right?

Emma smiles, looking both grateful and a little anxious.

EMMA

I hope so. It feels like a big step... but a good one.

INT. ART GALLERY - NIGHT

The gallery is buzzing with people, and Emma's art is displayed prominently. Jack watches proudly as people admire her work.

Emma approaches him, her face glowing with happiness.

EMMA

I still can't believe this is real.

JACK

You deserve this, Emma. Every bit of it.

They share a proud, joyful moment.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

After the art show, they celebrate back at Jack's place with champagne. They toast to Emma's success.

JACK
To you. For following your dream
and inspiring me to follow mine.

They clink glasses, a mix of love and admiration in their eyes.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - DAY

The following morning Jack stands by the window, watching heavy snow blanket the streets outside. His phone buzzes, and he reads a text from Emma: "Welcome to your first Chicago snow-in! Got supplies?"

Jack chuckles and types back, "Granola bars and coffee. Am I good?" Just then, there's a knock at the door. He opens it to find Emma holding a bag of groceries.

EMMA
(grinning)
You're gonna need more than granola
if you want to survive a Chicago
winter.

She steps in, setting down bags of pasta, sauce, and fresh bread. Jack watches, touched by her thoughtfulness.

JACK
(smiling)
This definitely beats takeout.

As they cook together, they share easy laughter and warm glances, the snow piling up outside creating a cozy backdrop.

CUT TO:

Later, they sit on the couch, enjoying their pasta. Jack looks around his apartment, now filled with the warmth of Emma's presence.

JACK (CONT'D)
(sighing contentedly)
You know, I never imagined a night
like this back in New York. But...
I don't think I'd trade it for
anything.

EXT. CHICAGO STREET - NIGHT

On New Year's Eve, Jack and Emma walk through the city, which is lit up with lights and bustling with people. They pause by the lake, watching the fireworks.

EMMA

So... what's your resolution this year?

Jack looks at her, his face softening.

JACK

To be right here. With you.
Wherever this takes us.

Emma smiles, her eyes glistening.

EMMA

I think that's my resolution, too.

They share a kiss as the fireworks light up the sky, marking the start of a new year and a new chapter in their lives.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Jack sits at a table with Emma and her artist friends, looking slightly out of place among their eclectic outfits and creative conversation. LISA, a quirky painter. 30-something, hands him a folded pamphlet titled, "Chicago Art Scene Survival Guide."

JACK

(glancing at the
pamphlet)
What's this?

LISA

(smiling)
Your manual for surviving the art world here. Tips for avoiding pitfalls, like never asking an artist, "What does it mean?"

Jack chuckles, flipping through the guide.

JACK

(reading)
"Don't say 'starving artist,' avoid the word 'synergy,' and nod a lot... intriguing."

EMMA
(laughing)
Nodding really does work wonders.

Jack gives an exaggerated nod, trying to fit in, and the whole table laughs, feeling him relax and become part of their world.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Jack is sitting with Emma, sharing an old photo of him and his mom from childhood.

JACK

She was always there for me when I was a kid, even if we didn't agree later. I think I just took for granted that she'd always be around.

Emma listens, encouraging Jack to share more.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY (SECOND VISIT)

Jack is back at the hospital, his sister beside him. They share stories of their childhood, gradually breaking down the years of silence.

JACK
(sighing)
I think... I could have done more.
I could have been a better son.

MRS. WHITMAN
And I... could have been a little
less hard on you.

They share a bittersweet smile, beginning to forgive each other. Jack sits beside his mother, Mrs. Whitman, who looks frailer but reaches for his hand, her grip surprisingly strong.

MRS. WHITMAN (CONT'D)
(sincere, soft)
Jack... I want you to know, I'm so
proud of you. And... I wish I'd
told you sooner.

Jack squeezes her hand, his eyes full of emotion.

JACK
(slightly choked up)
Mom...
(MORE)

JACK (CONT'D)

I'm sorry for not always being there. I thought I had to prove myself... to be something more. But now I see it was never about that.

She smiles, tears glistening in her eyes.

MRS. WHITMAN

I just wanted you to be happy, Jack. And now... (glancing meaningfully at him) it seems like you've found it.

Jack nods, his face softening as he leans forward.

JACK

Thank you, Mom. For everything. I... I wish I could have told you that sooner, too.

They share a look of mutual understanding, finally letting go of years of tension in a moment of peace and closure.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jack and Emma discuss their future over wine and takeout.

EMMA

If you could do anything, with anyone... what would it be?

Jack considers, realizing that his answer is building a life with her.

EXT. ART GALLERY - NIGHT

Emma's art show is in full swing, with Jack helping introduce her to potential buyers. They share proud glances across the room, each knowing they're there to support each other.

JACK

(to a buyer)

Emma's work is some of the best I've seen. She puts her whole heart into it.

Emma overhears, touched.

EXT. CHICAGO WINTER FESTIVAL - NIGHT

Jack and Emma attend a lively winter festival, enjoying games and local crafts. They watch as a giant Christmas tree lights up, basking in the warmth of the moment.

JACK
(quietly)
You were right. I didn't realize
how much I needed this... this
city, and you.

Emma smiles, squeezing his hand as they look to their future together.

FADE IN:

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jack and Emma are sitting on the couch, surrounded by the warmth of holiday decorations, enjoying a quiet evening together.

EMMA
Have you thought about... maybe
talking to your mom again? Really
talking, I mean.

Jack looks down, his expression thoughtful.

JACK
I have. It's just... so much was
left unsaid. And for a long time, I
convinced myself it was easier that
way.

Emma takes his hand, giving him a reassuring smile.

EMMA
Sometimes, the hardest things are
the ones worth doing.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY (THIRD VISIT)

Jack is back at the hospital with his mother, who looks frailer but is happy to see him.

MRS. WHITMAN
Jack, I'm glad you're here. I...
wanted to tell you something,
something I should have said a long
time ago.

Jack leans forward, listening intently.

MRS. WHITMAN (CONT'D)

I always wanted you to have someone
in your life. Someone who
understands you, who'll be there
for you when I'm gone. And I
worried... maybe I pushed you away
from finding that.

Jack squeezes her hand, moved by her words.

JACK

I know you meant well, Mom. And...
I think I've found that someone.

His mother's face softens with a hint of relief and joy.

MRS. WHITMAN

(slight smile)

Then bring her to see me, Jack. Let
me meet the one who's finally
stolen your heart.

(Pause)

MRS. WHITMAN (CONT'D)

Jack, when you were little, you'd
always talk about how you'd conquer
the world. (smiling) I think you
might have done that... but love is
just as important.

Jack squeezes her hand, visibly moved. Jack nods, deeply
touched, knowing he's ready to make this step.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jack returns to Emma's place, carrying a small, thoughtful
gift—an ornament with her initials painted on it, a quiet
symbol of his commitment.

JACK

There's something I wanted to ask
you. My mom... she'd like to meet
you.

Emma's eyes widen with surprise and warmth.

EMMA

Are you sure?

JACK

Yeah. I've never been more sure
about anything.

Emma smiles, her eyes full of emotion, and she takes his hand.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Jack and Emma enter the hospital room together, Jack holding her hand. His mother smiles as they approach, visibly touched by Emma's warmth and kindness.

MRS. WHITMAN

You must be Emma. Jack has told me
so much about you.

EMMA

(smiling warmly)

It's wonderful to finally meet you.

They exchange a warm, knowing look, both feeling the significance of this moment. Mrs. Whitman gestures for Emma to sit beside her, and they engage in a heartfelt conversation.

INT. JACK'S FAMILY HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Jack's mom sits with Emma, who is visibly nervous. Mrs. Whitman leans in, eyes twinkling.

MRS. WHITMAN

So, Emma, are you serious about my
son? I mean, he can be stubborn...
and a bit of a workaholic... and
sometimes his sense of style...

EMMA

(giggling)

Don't worry, Mrs. Whitman. I've got
plenty of experience taming his
"unique" habits.

Jack overhears this and enters, pretending to be offended.

JACK

(scoffs)

"Unique" habits? Really?

Mrs. Whitman laughs, patting Emma's hand.

MRS. WHITMAN
I like her already.

MRS. WHITMAN (CONT'D)
Thank you, Emma. For making my son
so happy.

Emma's eyes glisten as she squeezes Jack's hand, fully understanding the weight of Mrs. Whitman's words.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - LATER

Jack and his mother share a quiet moment after Emma steps out to give them some privacy.

MRS. WHITMAN
Jack... she's wonderful. I can see
how happy she makes you.

JACK
I think I finally understand what
you always wanted for me. Someone
who feels like... home.

His mother smiles, a sense of peace washing over her.

MRS. WHITMAN
Then I can rest easy, knowing
you've found it.

Jack holds her hand, his expression one of love and gratitude.

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jack and Emma return to her apartment, both visibly moved by the experience. They settle onto the couch, sharing a quiet moment of reflection.

JACK
Thank you, Emma. I don't know if I
could have done that without you.

Emma rests her head on his shoulder, her hand gently interlaced with his.

EMMA
I think we're both right where
we're meant to be.

MONTAGE - JACK AND EMMA BUILDING THEIR FUTURE TOGETHER:

Jack and Emma decorate his apartment together, laughing as they place meaningful items around, creating a space that represents both of them.

Emma opens her own small gallery, with Jack helping her set up for the grand opening, both beaming with pride.

Jack spends time with his family, reconnecting and making up for lost time, now fully committed to his life in Chicago.

EXT. CHICAGO WINTER FESTIVAL - NIGHT

Jack and Emma walk hand-in-hand through a bustling winter festival, enjoying the holiday lights and the warmth of the crowd. They stop by a large Christmas tree, decorated with ornaments from different local artists.

JACK

You know, if someone told me a year ago that I'd be here, building a life with you, I wouldn't have believed them.

Emma smiles, her eyes full of love.

EMMA

Well, life has a funny way of leading us exactly where we're supposed to be.

They share a tender kiss beneath the Christmas lights, fully embracing their future together.

INT. JACK'S NEW OFFICE - DAY

Jack hurries down the hall, trying to adjust to the slower pace of his Chicago office. He rushes to greet Jennifer, who is moving at a relaxed pace.

JACK

(breathless)

Hey, Jennifer, did we ever get that report from legal?

JENNIFER

(amused)

Jack, you've got to ease up. You're not in New York anymore. Around here, we breathe between meetings.

JACK
(chuckling, awkward)
Right... breathing. I'll add that to
my to-do list.

Jennifer smirks, patting him on the back.

Scene 1: Jack's Integration with Emma's Artist Friends

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Jack sits with Emma and her artist friends, all of whom are dressed in eclectic, colorful outfits. He looks slightly out of place in his casual-yet-still-somehow-formal attire. LISA, a quirky artist, hands Jack a printed "Chicago Art Scene Survival Guide."

LISA
(smiling)
Here, Jack. Consider this your
manual for navigating the Chicago
art world.

Jack flips through it, his eyebrows rising as he reads.

JACK
(reading)
"Never say 'starving
artist. Don't ask what
the art 'means'... and
avoid using the word
'synergy'?"
(Pause)
I'm going to need a
translator.

Emma chuckles, nudging him playfully.

EMMA
Just stick with "intriguing" and
nod a lot. It works wonders.

The table laughs as Jack nods thoughtfully, then overdoes it with an exaggerated nod, earning more laughs.

INT. EMMA'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Emma and Jack stand in the kitchen, surrounded by ingredients for a Chicago classic: Italian beef sandwiches. Jack is reading a recipe, looking perplexed.

JACK

So... we're supposed to dip the
entire sandwich in this sauce?
Doesn't that just make it... soggy?

EMMA

(smiling)

It's called "juicy." And trust me,
you don't just eat it; you
experience it.

Jack gives her a dubious look but attempts it anyway. As he
dips the sandwich, he loses his grip, and the whole thing
falls apart into the sauce. Emma laughs, grabbing a fork to
help him fish out the soggy pieces.

JACK

(mumbling)

Chicago food isn't for the faint-
hearted.

EMMA

(laughing)

Maybe next time we'll try something
simpler. How about a hot dog? But
no ketchup allowed.

Jack groans, shaking his head as Emma playfully pats his
shoulder.

EXT. CHICAGO STREET FAIR - DAY

Jack and Emma walk through a lively Chicago street fair,
passing by food stalls, craft booths, and street performers.
Jack stops at a vendor selling Chicago-themed hats and picks
up one that says, "I'm Not From Here." He smirks and puts it
on.

JACK

(blending in, clearly
sarcastic)

How do I look? Authentic?

Emma laughs, adjusting the hat on his head.

EMMA

Maybe tone it down just a bit. We
don't want them to know you're a
transplant immediately.

A vendor overhears, grinning as she hands Jack a small magnet
with a Chicago flag on it.

VENDOR

Welcome to the city, hon. If you're
with her, you're in good hands.

Jack grins, tipping his new hat to the vendor.

JACK

(thankful, to Emma)

I think this city is starting to
like me.

They share a smile, walking hand-in-hand through the fair.

INT. JACK'S NEW APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jack stands by his window, looking out at the Chicago
skyline, lost in thought. He dials his phone, calling his New
York mentor, LUCAS.

LUCAS

(on the phone)

Jack! How's life in the Windy City?

JACK

(chuckling)

It's... different, Lucas. In a good
way. You know, I thought I'd miss
the rush, the noise, the constant
movement... but it turns out, I
actually like having some quiet.

Lucas laughs on the other end.

LUCAS

So you're saying you've gone soft
on us?

JACK

(sighing, with a smile)

Maybe. I'm just... happy, Lucas.
There's a sense of peace here I
don't think I ever had in New York.

Lucas pauses, sensing Jack's contentment.

LUCAS

Well, that's all I ever wanted for
you, Jack. Just don't forget where
you started, all right?

JACK

Never. (glancing at Emma's photo
nearby)

(MORE)

JACK (CONT'D)

But I think I'm where I'm supposed
to be.

He hangs up, smiling to himself.

EXT. CHICAGO HOLIDAY MARKET - NIGHT

Jack and Emma walk through the bustling Chicago holiday market, surrounded by stalls with handmade crafts and holiday treats. Jack stops to inspect a tiny, hand-carved wooden ornament of the Chicago skyline.

JACK

(smiling)

It's perfect for our first Chicago
Christmas.

He buys the ornament, and Emma watches, touched. As they move to the next stall, Jack tries to haggle with a vendor selling scarves.

JACK (CONT'D)

So, how about a little discount?
You know, holiday spirit and all?

The vendor raises an eyebrow, unimpressed.

VENDOR

This isn't a New York flea market,
buddy.

Emma bursts out laughing, pulling Jack away.

EMMA

Rule number one of Chicago holiday
markets: no haggling.

JACK

(muttering)

Fine. Lesson learned.

They walk away, both laughing as Jack rolls his eyes in playful defeat.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - DAY

Jack is setting up his Chicago apartment when his phone rings. It's his mom, MRS. WHITMAN. He answers, smiling.

JACK

Hey, Mom. How's it going?

MRS. WHITMAN

Oh, just making sure Chicago hasn't
swallowed you up yet. Have you
learned to layer up properly?

JACK

(reluctantly)

I'm... getting there. It's a work in
progress.

MRS. WHITMAN

(smirking)

And how's Emma? When do I get to
meet this girl who convinced my son
to leave New York?

Jack's face softens as he glances at a photo of him and Emma
on his shelf.

JACK

Soon, Mom. I think you're going to
love her.

They share a warm moment before hanging up, Jack feeling both
nervous and excited for his mom to meet Emma.

INT. EMMA'S ART STUDIO - DAY

Emma is painting, completely immersed in her work. Jack walks
in, carrying a cup of coffee and a small bag of her favorite
pastries.

JACK

Bringing you the essentials for
inspiration.

Emma looks up, pleasantly surprised, and accepts the coffee
with a grin.

EMMA

You're starting to understand the
artist life.

JACK

(looking at her painting)

It's beautiful, by the way. I don't
think I've seen you work on this
one before.

Emma looks at the canvas, then back at him.

EMMA

It's a piece of Chicago. (smiling)
Inspired by someone who's showing
me a new side of the city.

Jack beams, feeling truly at home in her world. They share a quiet moment, each feeling the depth of their connection.

EXT. WINTER FESTIVAL ICE RINK - NIGHT

Jack and Emma are ice skating at the winter festival, surrounded by festive lights and holiday music. Jack, not the most coordinated on the ice, stumbles, flailing his arms to keep his balance.

JACK

(slightly panicked)
I don't think New York prepared me
for this!

Emma laughs, gliding over effortlessly and taking his hand.

EMMA

It's all about balance. Just relax
and let it happen.

Jack takes her advice... and immediately slips, pulling Emma down with him. They both fall onto the ice, laughing as they untangle themselves.

JACK

(mumbling)
Yep. Totally natural.

EMMA

(smiling, teasing)
Maybe I should've put "skating
lessons" in your Chicago Survival
Guide.

They share a laugh, surrounded by the festive holiday energy, clearly in sync despite the mishap.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jack and Emma are decorating Jack's small Christmas tree together. Jack is trying to hang a string of lights but keeps getting tangled, while Emma is attempting to place ornaments without knocking over the tree.

JACK
Who knew a little tree could be so
much work?

EMMA
(smiling)
It's worth it. Our first Christmas
tree in Chicago.

They finish decorating and step back to admire their work,
which is slightly crooked but filled with charm.

JACK
(softly)
I think it's perfect.

They share a tender look before Jack reaches into a bag,
pulling out the Chicago skyline ornament they bought at the
holiday market.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT CONTINUOUS

Jack hands Emma a small, wrapped box. She opens it to reveal
a delicate silver ornament shaped like the Chicago skyline.

EMMA
(touched)
Jack... it's beautiful.

JACK
(smiling)
For our first Christmas here. I
thought it could be... a symbol of
us, starting something real.

Emma looks at him, her eyes glistening with emotion. She
reaches out, placing the ornament on the small Christmas tree
in his apartment. They step back, admiring it, hand in hand.

EMMA
(softly)
It's perfect. Thank you, Jack.

They share a quiet, heartfelt moment, realizing they're
creating a home together in Chicago.

JACK
(to Emma)
For us.

Emma smiles, touched, and places the ornament on the tree.
They stand together, holding hands, fully embracing their new
life.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - DAY

Emma's phone rings, and she answers a video call from her family. Her mom, DAD, and younger brother TIM appear on the screen, all talking over each other in excitement.

DAD
So, you're the one who convinced
Emma to stay in Chicago?

JACK
(smiling)
Or maybe she convinced me. I think
it was mutual.

TIM
(eying Jack suspiciously)
Are you prepared to take on a real
Chicago winter?

Jack glances at Emma, who laughs, and nods confidently.

JACK
I've been training. Got my puffy
coat, thermal socks, and
everything.

The family laughs, and Emma's dad gives Jack a warm nod.

DAD
Well, son, welcome to the family.
And remember, around here, family
comes first.

Jack nods, grateful for the acceptance.

EXT. CHICAGO PARK - DAY

Jack and Emma walk through a snow-covered park, bundled up against the cold. Emma suddenly scoops up some snow, forming a snowball.

EMMA
(pretending to be
innocent)
What? Just getting the full Chicago
experience.

Jack grins, ducking as she throws the snowball. He quickly retaliates, and they engage in a playful snowball fight, laughing and dodging each other's throws.

After a few minutes, they both stop, panting, with Jack grinning in triumph.

JACK
For the record, I totally won.

EMMA
(smirking)
Only because I went easy on you.

They laugh, sharing a quick, stolen kiss in the cold winter air.

Scene 12: Jack's "First Snowed-In" Moment

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jack looks out the window as heavy snow starts falling, covering the city. He receives a text from Emma: "Hope you stocked up! Welcome to your first Chicago snow-in. "

Jack laughs and texts back: "I've got coffee and a box of granola bars. Good enough?"

A few minutes later, there's a knock at his door. Jack opens it to find Emma holding a bag of groceries and a loaf of fresh bread.

EMMA
(smiling)
You're gonna need more than granola bars if you want to survive Chicago winters.

She steps in, unpacking ingredients to make a cozy pasta dish. Jack watches, clearly touched by her thoughtfulness.

JACK
(reminded of New York)
This beats takeout any day.

They cook together, sharing an unspoken warmth as the snow continues to fall outside.

EXT. LOCAL DINER - DAY

Jack sits alone in a classic Chicago diner, lost in thought. An older man, CHARLIE (70s, salt-of-the-earth Chicagoan), sits down at the counter next to him, noticing Jack's contemplative look.

CHARLIE

You look like someone who just moved to the city. I can spot that look a mile away.

JACK

(smiling, surprised)
Is it that obvious?

CHARLIE

(smiling back)
Son, I've been here my whole life. Chicago has a way of pulling people in. It's not easy, but if you give it a chance, it'll grow on ya.

Jack nods, taking it in. This moment of candid advice gives him a newfound sense of confidence.

JACK

Thanks... Charlie, right? I think I get it now.

They share a nod before Charlie leaves, leaving Jack smiling.

EXT. CHICAGO WINTER STREET FESTIVAL - DAY

Jack and Emma wander through the bustling street festival, the air filled with the scent of roasted chestnuts and cinnamon. Vendors sell handmade crafts, and holiday music fills the air.

Jack pauses at a booth selling quirky Chicago-themed hats, picking one that reads, "I'm Not From Here." He places it on his head with a smirk.

JACK

(grinning)
Think I blend in now?

EMMA

(laughing)
Maybe tone it down a little.

They continue walking, until Emma bends down, scoops up some snow, and hurls a snowball at Jack.

JACK

(startled)
Oh, you did not just do that.

He scoops up a handful of snow, and they engage in a playful snowball fight, laughing as they dodge each other's throws.

Finally, they stop, breathless and laughing, with Jack pulling Emma in for a quick kiss, their faces flushed from the cold.

JACK (CONT'D)
(smiling)
Okay, snowball fights are
officially a Chicago win.

INT. ART GALLERY - NIGHT

Emma stands in the center of her gallery exhibit, a mix of excitement and nerves on her face as people browse her paintings. Jack stands nearby, watching her interact with admirers of her work.

A visitor approaches Jack.

VISITOR
You seem pretty proud of her.

JACK
(grinning)
More than I can put into words.

Jack watches as Emma engages with a buyer, her face lighting up with pride as she discusses her art. After the conversation, she catches Jack's eye, and they share a quiet, heartfelt smile from across the room.

EXT. CHICAGO RIVERWALK - NIGHT

Jack and Emma walk along the Chicago River, lit up by city lights reflecting on the water. Jack pauses, gazing at the skyline and taking a deep breath as the cold wind blows around them.

JACK
You know... this place doesn't feel
like a stopover anymore. It feels
like... (searching for the word)
home.

Emma smiles, clearly moved.

EMMA
(squeezing his hand)
I think you were meant to find your
way here, Jack.

They share a look, the moment charged with unspoken emotions, as they continue their walk along the Riverwalk.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - NEW YEAR'S EVE

Jack and Emma sit by the window with glasses of champagne, watching fireworks explode over the Chicago skyline as the clock strikes midnight.

JACK
To new beginnings... and unexpected
places.

They clink glasses, both of them caught up in the moment.

EMMA
And to taking risks, even when
they're a little terrifying.

JACK
And who would believe how this all
got started? Me getting on the
wrong plane and ending up in your
apartment. Thank God you didn't
have a gun.

They share a laugh, but the look in their eyes says more,
hinting at their growing bond.

Scene 17: Jack's Chicago "Fashion" Moment

INT. CHICAGO CLOTHING STORE - DAY

Emma has taken Jack shopping for his first real Chicago winter coat. He's trying on a massive, puffy jacket, looking slightly ridiculous but also hilariously bundled up. Emma tries not to laugh as she takes in his appearance.

EMMA
(laughing)
That's... certainly a look.

Jack raises his arms, struggling with the bulk of the coat.

JACK
I feel like I'm wearing a sleeping
bag.

Emma playfully straightens his collar, smirking.

EMMA
Welcome to Chicago. Function over
fashion, every time.

Jack chuckles, accepting his fate and admiring himself in the mirror.

Scene 18: Emma and Jack Make a Chicago "Bucket List"

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jack and Emma are sitting on the floor, writing out a "Chicago Bucket List" on a piece of paper. It's filled with typical Chicago experiences, some checked off and others circled in bold.

JACK
(reading aloud)
"Eat a true Chicago dog,
no ketchup." (laughs) I
guess I did survive that
one.

EMMA
(grinning)
But you still have to try
Malört. It's... (grimacing)
an experience.

JACK
(sighing)
Does Chicago hazing ever end?

They laugh, continuing to add items to their list as they playfully debate what Jack should experience next.

Scene 19: Jack Tries Malört

INT. CHICAGO BAR - NIGHT

Jack, encouraged by Emma, takes a shot of the infamous Chicago liquor, Malört. He winces, barely managing to swallow it, while Emma laughs at his reaction.

JACK
(coughing)
What... is... that?

EMMA
(laughing)
It's Malört. The true Chicago test.

Jack shakes his head, trying to regain his composure.

JACK
Okay, I think I've officially
earned my Chicago badge now.

Emma smirks, patting him on the back as they share a laugh over his "initiation."

Scene 20: Jack's Winter Workout

EXT. CHICAGO PARK - MORNING

Jack decides to go for a run, but he's not fully prepared for the frigid Chicago winter. He's bundled up but still clearly freezing. His breath fogs up as he jogs past Emma, who is watching from a bench, sipping hot coffee.

EMMA
(smiling)
How's the workout?

JACK
(breathless)
It's... brutal. I'm convinced Chicago
is just trying to weed me out.

Emma laughs, holding up a thermos of hot coffee.

EMMA
You'll survive. And in the
meantime, here's some coffee for
motivation.

Jack gratefully accepts, wrapping his hands around the warm thermos, appreciating the support.

Scene 21: Reflecting on the Year Together

INT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jack and Emma sit on the couch, looking through photos they took throughout the year: street festivals, winter markets, art shows, and quiet evenings. They smile, reminiscing about each moment.

JACK
It's hard to believe I was a total
outsider when I first got here. Now
it's like... I can't imagine being
anywhere else.

EMMA
(softly)
Maybe that's because you found a
home here, Jack. Not just a city,
but... people who make it feel like
home.

They share a look, the weight of their connection clear. Jack reaches out, taking her hand.

JACK

Thank you for showing me a life I
never even knew I wanted.

Emma smiles, their closeness undeniable as they share a quiet moment together.

EXT. LAKE MICHIGAN - DAY

Jack and Emma stand by the frozen lake, looking out at the expanse of water. Jack takes a deep breath, his expression contemplative.

JACK

You know... sometimes life throws us
into unexpected places. And we
think it's just a detour or a
mistake, but... maybe those are the
moments that lead us exactly where
we're supposed to be.

Emma looks at him, touched by his words.

EMMA

I think sometimes, the best things
happen by accident.

They share a long, meaningful look, both realizing how much they mean to each other.

INT. ART GALLERY - DAY

Emma is tidying up the gallery when she notices a red sticker on one of her paintings—a sign that it's been sold. She's surprised and thrilled, trying to find out who the buyer is.

She approaches the gallery manager, who hands her a small note with the buyer's name: "Jack Whitman."

Emma smiles, deeply touched.

CUT TO:

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jack has hung the painting prominently in his living room. Emma walks in, seeing her work displayed and looking at him with a mix of gratitude and warmth.

EMMA
(slightly choked up)
I can't believe you bought it.

JACK
(smiling)
Couldn't let someone else take it.
Besides, now I have a part of you
here with me, every day.

They share a warm look, and Emma reaches for his hand, feeling the depth of their connection.

INT. LOCAL PIZZA PLACE - NIGHT

Jack and Emma sit across from each other, each holding a slice of Chicago-style deep-dish pizza. They're in the middle of a playful argument.

JACK
I'm just saying, in New York, pizza
doesn't require a knife and fork.

EMMA
(grinning)
You're just jealous you didn't
think of it first. Real pizza
should have depth.

JACK
(chuckling)
Depth or... a full day's worth of
calories?

Emma rolls her eyes, both of them laughing as they continue to eat.

EMMA
Admit it—you love it.

Jack sighs, taking another bite, realizing she's right.

JACK
Okay, fine. But only because it's
the "Chicago thing" to do.

They share a laugh, Emma clearly winning the pizza debate.

EXT. SOLDIER FIELD - DAY

Jack and Emma stand in the crowd outside Soldier Field, surrounded by enthusiastic (if slightly frustrated) Bears fans. The stadium buzzes with energy, despite the winter chill. Jack looks around, taking it all in.

JACK

(amused)

So... tell me, how do Chicago fans
handle a season like this?

Emma shrugs, wrapped up in her Bears gear with a beanie and scarf, looking very much the part.

EMMA

Oh, you know, we're tough. We
survive the winters, we survive the
Bears.

They head inside, finding their seats as the game gets underway. Jack tries to get into the spirit, but as the Bears miss a critical pass, he winces, shaking his head.

JACK

I'm just saying, back in New York,
I at least had a few teams to
switch to when one of them was
crashing and burning.

Emma gives him a mock glare, crossing her arms.

EMMA

Oh really? So, a fair-weather fan,
huh? Newsflash, Mr. New York—here,
we stick with our team, no matter
what.

JACK

(smiling, playing along)

Sure, sure, but we had options!
Giants, Jets, heck, even the Bills
if we were desperate.

Emma rolls her eyes as the Bears fumble again, and the crowd around them lets out a collective groan. She nudges him, laughing.

EMMA

Well, welcome to the one-team city.
Chicago loyalty is fierce, Jack.
You're either all-in, or... (teasing)
maybe you should've packed your
Giants jersey.

JACK
(smirking)
If I wore a Giants jersey in this crowd, I don't think I'd make it out alive.

They share a laugh, and Jack raises his hot dog, joining in as the crowd cheers half-heartedly for a minor gain.

JACK (CONT'D)
(leaning in)
Okay, confession—I'm actually kind of impressed by how die-hard you all are.

Emma grins, clearly pleased with his acceptance.

EMMA
Good, because once you've survived a Bears season, you're officially a Chicagoan.

They continue watching, laughing and cheering, and Jack finally starts to join in, getting swept up in the crowd's energy despite the Bears' missteps.

Jack and Emma are in the crowd at Soldier Field, bundled up against the cold, surrounded by passionate Bears fans. Jack cheers hesitantly as the Bears fumble the ball.

JACK
(grimacing)
So... how do Chicago fans survive this every season?

Emma laughs, wrapped up in Bears gear, looking every bit the true fan.

EMMA
We're tough. Surviving the winters, surviving the Bears— it's all the same.

Jack raises his hot dog in a mock salute, trying to fit in.

JACK
All right, here's to Chicago loyalty. One team, no matter what.

They laugh, Jack caught up in the energy, feeling for the first time that he's truly part of this city.

CUT TO LATER:

The Bears make a minor play, and Jack stands up, yelling alongside the fans.

JACK (CONT'D)
(half-joking)
Hey, they're not so bad. Just a...
few rough edges, that's all.

Emma bursts out laughing, nudging him as they sit back down.

EMMA
See? Now you're starting to get it.
Stick with us through thick and
thin—especially thin.

They share a warm look, clearly enjoying the camaraderie and the little initiation into Chicago sports fandom.

EXT. CHICAGO STREET - NIGHT

Jack and Emma walk through the snowy streets, arm in arm, as snowflakes drift around them. Christmas lights and holiday decorations line the storefronts, adding to the magic of the night.

EMMA
(whispering)
If you could be anywhere right now,
where would you want to be?

Jack stops, looking at her earnestly.

JACK
Right here. I wouldn't change a
thing.

They share a quiet moment, the city lights reflecting in their eyes as they lean in for a gentle, heartfelt kiss.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - DAY

Jack's mom, MRS. WHITMAN, and his sister visit him in Chicago for the first time. Jack shows them around his apartment, giving them a taste of his new life.

MRS. WHITMAN
(smiling)
It's so different from New York.
But I can see why you stayed.

JACK
(sincerely)
Thanks, Mom. It really does feel
like home here.

Mrs. Whitman nods, looking at Emma, who joins them, holding out cups of coffee. She shares a knowing look with her son, clearly seeing how happy he is.

EXT. CHICAGO WINTER FESTIVAL - NIGHT

Jack and Emma are back at the winter festival, this time sharing it with Jack's family. They ride the Ferris wheel, and Jack points out the Chicago skyline to his mom and sister as they take in the view.

At the top of the ride, Jack turns to Emma, who's gazing out at the city.

JACK
(grinning)
So, when are we going to add
"Ferris wheel proposal" to the
Chicago Bucket List?

Emma laughs, her face lighting up with surprise.

EMMA
Are you serious?

Jack smiles, pulling out a small charm in the shape of the Ferris wheel.

JACK
I'm serious about you, Emma.
(smiling) But we can take our time.

Emma laughs, shaking her head and playfully hitting him on the arm, both of them laughing as they share a quiet moment, looking out at the city together.

INT. JACK'S CHICAGO OFFICE - DAY

Jack receives a call from Lucas, his old mentor in New York.

LUCAS
(sighing)
So, no coming back to New York
after all?

JACK
(smiling)
I think Chicago's won me over,
Lucas. And for once, I'm actually
happy right where I am.

Lucas chuckles, a bit sad but understanding.

LUCAS
Well, Jack, just know you'll always
have a place here if you change
your mind.

Jack nods, looking around his Chicago office, feeling a sense of closure.

JACK
Thanks, Lucas. For everything.

They hang up, and Jack feels a sense of peace about his decision, ready for his new life.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jack and Emma sit on the couch, gazing out the window at the city lights.

JACK
So... are we staying right here for a
while?

EMMA
(smiling)
Right here. With you.

They share a warm, lingering look, knowing they've found a home in each other.

INT. ART GALLERY - NIGHT

It's the night of Emma's first solo art show, a big moment for her. The gallery is filled with people admiring her work, and Jack is there, looking on proudly. Emma makes her way over to him, beaming with excitement.

EMMA
I still can't believe this is
happening. All these people... here
for my work.

JACK
(sincerely)
They're here because you're
amazing. You've put your heart into
every one of these pieces.

They share a look, and Emma squeezes his hand, both savoring the moment.

CUT TO LATER:

The gallery is clearing out, and Jack and Emma are alone in the main room. Jack has been fidgeting, clearly gathering the courage for something. He takes a deep breath, then turns to her.

JACK (CONT'D)
Emma, I... there's something I've
been wanting to say. (pausing)
Actually, something I've been
wanting to ask.

Emma looks at him, curious but starting to sense what's happening.

EMMA
Jack...?

Jack pulls out a small box from his pocket and opens it to reveal a simple but elegant ring.

JACK
Emma, moving to Chicago was the
biggest leap I've ever taken. But
it's you who made it feel like
home. And now I can't imagine my
life without you in it.

Emma's eyes fill with emotion as she takes in his words.

JACK (CONT'D)
(smiling, sincere)
So, here in your world, surrounded
by your art, in this city that's
become ours... Emma, will you marry
me?

Emma laughs, half-crying, and nods, clearly overjoyed.

EMMA
Yes, yes! Of course, yes!

They share a warm embrace, and Jack slips the ring onto her finger, both of them laughing and teary-eyed as they hold each other in the quiet gallery.

EXT. LAKEFRONT PARK - DAY

It's a beautiful spring day, and friends and family are gathered in a scenic Chicago park by the lake to celebrate Jack and Emma's engagement. Tables are set up with food and drinks, and festive decorations are scattered around, creating a warm, lively atmosphere.

Emma and Jack are mingling with their guests. Jack's mom, MRS. WHITMAN, and his sister, SARAH, are there, chatting with Emma's friends, and Emma's artist friends are joking around with Jack. Jack's old mentor, LUCAS, has even flown in from New York to join the celebration.

LUCAS

(grinning)

Well, look at you, Jack. I always thought you'd find your way back to New York, but here you are, a true Midwesterner.

JACK

(chuckling)

Chicago's got its charm, Lucas. Besides, I'm right where I need to be.

They share a knowing smile, and Lucas pats him on the back, looking genuinely happy for him.

INT. PARTY TENT - DAY

Everyone has gathered under a small tent set up for the speeches. Jack and Emma stand together, surrounded by their loved ones. Mrs. Whitman steps up first, holding a glass of champagne.

MRS. WHITMAN

(teary-eyed)

(MORE)

MRS. WHITMAN (CONT'D)

I'll keep this short,
because otherwise, I
won't get through it.
(smiling at Jack) Jack,
I've watched you take on
challenge after challenge
in New York. And I
worried, I'll admit it,
when you said you were
leaving. But seeing you
here... (looking at Emma)
with Emma... I know you've
found happiness. You two
bring out the best in
each other.

Emma wipes a tear as everyone
raises their glasses, cheering.
Jack's sister Sarah steps up next,
playfully nudging him.

SARAH

(grinning)
And just to add, Jack,
now that you're a Chicago
guy, I fully expect you
to stay loyal to the
Bears. No more talk of
the Jets, the Giants, or
even the Bills.
(laughing) We're a one-
team city here, so get
used to it.

Jack laughs, nodding, as everyone
clinks glasses in good-natured
support.

As the party continues, Jack takes Emma's hand, leading her
to a spot overlooking the lake. The Chicago skyline is
visible in the distance, sparkling in the late afternoon
light.

JACK

(taking a deep breath)
(MORE)

JACK (CONT'D)

I know everyone's been making toasts, but there's something I want to say. (turning to everyone) When I moved here, I was just looking for an escape. Somewhere to clear my head. And I thought I knew exactly what my life was supposed to look like. (pauses, smiling at Emma) But meeting you, Emma, changed everything. You taught me that sometimes, the best plans are the ones you didn't make.

EXT. LAKEFRONT PARK - DAY

Jack stands with a glass of champagne in hand, addressing their gathered friends and family. Emma stands beside him, holding his hand.

JACK

(looking around, then at Emma)
When I first came to Chicago, I thought I knew exactly what my life was supposed to look like. I had a plan, one that didn't leave room for detours or surprises. (smiling at Emma) But then I met you, Emma, and everything changed.

Emma smiles, her eyes filling with emotion.

JACK (CONT'D)

(to everyone)

Thank you, all of you, for being here to celebrate... not just this engagement, but the way life surprises us with exactly what we didn't know we needed.

He raises his glass, his gaze meeting Emma's.

JACK (CONT'D)

To Chicago, to unexpected detours, and to the love of my life—Emma.

Everyone cheers as Jack and Emma share a kiss, surrounded by their friends and family.

Emma smiles, squeezing his hand, visibly touched by his words.

JACK

So, here's to Chicago, to unexpected detours, and to you, Emma... for showing me that "home" is wherever we're together.

Everyone cheers, and Emma pulls him into a hug, both of them laughing and teary-eyed.

As the sun sets, fireworks light up the sky over the lake, adding a magical touch to the celebration. Jack and Emma sit on a picnic blanket, gazing up at the display, surrounded by their friends and family.

EMMA

(whispering)

So, what's next, Mr. Whitman?

JACK

(grinning)

Well, Mrs. Whitman-to-be, I was thinking we'd tackle that "Chicago Bucket List" again. Maybe even add a few new items.

(pauses, looking at her)

And one day, maybe... our own gallery. Together.

Emma's eyes light up, surprised but overjoyed.

EMMA

Are you serious? I'd love that.

They share a smile, the excitement of the future stretching before them. The fireworks continue, casting a warm glow over them as they sit together, feeling completely at peace.

Scene 36: Final Montage - Building a Life Together

INT./EXT. VARIOUS LOCATIONS - MONTAGE

INT. SMALL GALLERY - NIGHT

Jack and Emma are hosting their first joint gallery show, filled with friends, family, and Emma's art, as they greet visitors with proud smiles.

EXT. CHICAGO WINTER FESTIVAL - NIGHT

They stroll through the winter festival, bundled up and laughing, holding hands as they revisit the spot where they first began their Chicago journey together.

INT. COZY COFFEE SHOP - DAY

They sip coffee, sharing easy laughter as Jack talks about a recent case and Emma doodles sketches on napkins, clearly at ease in each other's company.

INT. JACK AND EMMA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

They decorate a Christmas tree together, each adding ornaments that represent their time together, including a silver Ferris wheel ornament Jack bought as a reminder of his proposal.

EXT. LAKE MICHIGAN SHORELINE - NIGHT

Jack and Emma sit together, wrapped in a blanket as they watch fireworks explode over the lake, their faces illuminated by the colorful bursts.

JACK

(quietly)

You know, I never
expected any of this.
Chicago, you... (pauses,
looking at her) but I
wouldn't change a thing.

Emma rests her head on his
shoulder, a contented smile on her
face.

EMMA

(smiling softly)

Sometimes, the best things happen
by accident.

They share a lingering look, the fireworks reflecting in their eyes, knowing they've found their home together in this city, in this moment.

FADE OUT.

INT. JACK AND EMMA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jack and Emma are sitting on the couch, cuddled up under a blanket, watching a movie. The city lights twinkle through the window, casting a warm glow around the room. Jack leans over, kissing the top of Emma's head.

JACK
(whispering)
Best detour I ever took.

Emma smiles, resting her head on his shoulder, her eyes shining with love.

EMMA
Me too.

They sit in contented silence, knowing they've found a true home in each other as the movie plays softly in the background.

FADE OUT.