

EXT. BIG CITY - DAY

A bustling metropolis. Skyscrapers glint in the sun, traffic hums below, horns blare.

A bike courier weaves dangerously through cars. A street performer strums guitar and sings.

Crowds in business attire hurry along sidewalks, clutching coffee cups, briefcases, phones.

Snippets of conversation overlap:

"Quarterly report's late!"

"Did you call your mother?"

"Stocks are tanking!"

ETHAN and DARREN, mid-30s coworkers, step out of the office for lunch.

Darren is already talking, gesturing like a motivational speaker. Ethan trails behind, skeptical.

DARREN

(eyeing a stranger's tie)
See that? Power color. Guy's going places.

ETHAN

(flat)
Or... he just likes red.

They push through the deli door. The bell jingles.

INT. DELI - DAY

Busy but casual. Office workers line up, chatter fills the air, plates clink.

ETHAN and DARREN grab a booth, trays in hand. Ethan looks nervous, fiddling with his sandwich wrapper.

He drops a pickle. It bounces onto the floor. He sighs.

DARREN leans back, confident, smirking like he's the expert.

DARREN

Relax. This is a great idea. Trust me—it'll spice things up, bring you closer.

ETHAN

(uneasy, half laughing)
Closer? Or... blow everything up?

DARREN

(shrugs, biting into his sandwich)
Hey, fortune favors the bold. Worst case, she laughs.

Best case—you're a legend.

He gestures toward a bored couple at another table, both staring at their phones.

DARREN (CONT'D)

See that? Dead zone. No spark. You don't want to end up like them.

ETHAN fiddles with his napkin, tearing it into shreds.

ETHAN

(mutters)
Yeah... a legend.

INT. BUS - EVENING

ETHAN sits by the window, muttering lines under his breath.

ETHAN

(whispering)
Rachel... I've been wanting to run something by you...

A passenger stares. ETHAN coughs, pretends to hum along to his headphones.

INT. OFFICE ELEVATOR - EVENING

ETHAN stands alone, practicing in the mirrored wall.

ETHAN
 So, I've been thinking... maybe we
 should try something new...

The doors open. A coworker steps in, catching the tail end.

ETHAN blurts-too loud:

ETHAN (CONT'D)
 Spice things up!

The coworker presses a button, avoids eye contact. ETHAN forces a smile, mortified.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

ETHAN walks home, lips moving silently, hands gesturing like he's rehearsing a speech.

A couple passes. He accidentally says the line out loud.

ETHAN
 (blurting)
 A threesome!

The couple bursts out laughing, thinking he's hitting on them. ETHAN waves his hands, embarrassed.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - NIGHT

ETHAN rehearses outside his door, whispering. A neighbor walks past with trash, giving him a strange look.

ETHAN freezes, forces a smile, then slips inside quickly.

INT. ETHAN & RACHEL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Quiet. ETHAN paces nervously, rehearsing lines under his breath.

ETHAN
 Okay, Rachel... I've been wanting to
 run something by you.

No, too formal.

(tries again)

Hey, so, I've been thinking... maybe we should try something new.

Ugh, too vague.

He shakes his head, rubs his temples.

The bedroom door opens. RACHEL enters, holding a mug of tea.

RACHEL
(curious, casual)
What is it you want to run by me?

ETHAN freezes, deer in headlights.

ETHAN
(stammering)
Oh-uh-it's nothing. I mean, not
nothing, but... just an idea.

A... relationship idea.

RACHEL sits on the edge of the bed, watching him fumble.

RACHEL
(smiling faintly)
You're acting like you're about to
propose.

ETHAN
(nervous laugh)
No, no, not that. Just... something
Darren said.

RACHEL
(raising an eyebrow)
Darren? That already sounds like
trouble.

ETHAN swallows hard.

ETHAN
It's supposed to spice things up.

You know, bring us closer.

RACHEL tilts her head, intrigued but skeptical.

RACHEL
Okay... now you've got me curious.

What exactly are we talking about here?

ETHAN blurts—awkward, rushed, half-mumbled.

ETHAN
A threesome.

Beat. Silence. RACHEL blinks, processing.

ETHAN forces a smile, then immediately regrets it.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
(backpedaling)
I mean—forget it. Forget I said anything.

RACHEL sets her mug down, studying him.

RACHEL
(flat)
You've been listening to Darren again, haven't you?

ETHAN
(defensive)
He makes it sound... normal. Like everyone's doing it.

RACHEL
(scoffs)
Everyone? Or just Darren?

ETHAN shrugs, embarrassed. Silence stretches.

RACHEL finally exhales, shaking her head.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
You're lucky you're cute.

Otherwise I'd throw this tea at you.

ETHAN buries his face in his hands.

INT. LIVING ROOM - FRIDAY NIGHT

ETHAN and RACHEL sit side by side on the couch, glow of the TV flickering.

RACHEL shifts slightly, tone casual but deliberate.

RACHEL
I've been thinking about what you asked...

You know, about the threesome.

ETHAN's eyes widen, grin spreading.

ETHAN
Wait, really? You mean it?

RACHEL smiles, reassuring.

RACHEL
Yeah. I think I'm ready.

ETHAN laughs nervously, rubbing his hands together.

ETHAN
Oh man, this is gonna be amazing...

The front door creaks open. KEVIN enters.

RACHEL
(gesturing warmly)
This is Kevin. He's the other
person.

ETHAN's smile collapses.

ETHAN
(stammering, panicked)
No, no, no, that's not what I
meant!

I meant—two women! Two women!

KEVIN
(cheerfully oblivious)
Hey, man. Big night, huh?

ETHAN
(throws up his hands,
sputtering)
No big night! Cancel the night!

RACHEL sips her tea, unbothered.

RACHEL
(deadpan)
Well, you should've been more
specific.

ETHAN buries his face in his hands.

KEVIN shrugs, grabs a beer from the fridge like he lives there.

KEVIN
(to Rachel, casual)
Still keeping the IPA in the bottom
shelf?
(to Ethan, casual)
You want one?

ETHAN glares, stunned.

KEVIN (CONT'D)
(grinning, oblivious)
Rachel said you were cool with
this.

Honestly, I think it's awesome you guys are so open.

ETHAN
(openmouthed, stunned)
Open?

KEVIN
(cheerfully)
Yeah. I mean, Rachel and I... we've
hung out before.

I figured this was just the next step.

ETHAN's face drains. He looks at RACHEL.

She sips her tea, calm, unreadable.

ETHAN groans.

KEVIN raises his beer in a toast.

KEVIN (CONT'D)
To new beginnings!

ETHAN collapses onto the couch, defeated.

EXT. NEW APARTMENT - MORNING

A small U-Haul idles at the curb.

ETHAN hauls one last box inside, shoulders slumped.

INT. NEW APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Boxes stacked against the wall.

ETHAN sets down a dog bowl. MAX trots over.

ETHAN
 (soft smile, voice
 breaking slightly)
 At least I still have you.

Beat of sincerity. He pats MAX's back, then walks toward the couch.

SFX: LOUD THUD. MAX collapses off screen. The bowl rattles.

ETHAN freezes. Silent stare. His face drains of hope.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
 (deadpan)
 ...Guess it's just me now.

He turns back, picks up the dog bowl, sets it on the counter, and stares at it.

FADE OUT.

INT. OFFICE - MORNING

ETHAN enters, disheveled-wrinkled shirt, crooked tie, hollow eyes. He clutches a travel mug like life support.

Max's leash dangles from his wrist, though there's no dog.

DARREN
 (cheerful)
 Hey man, how was your weekend?

ETHAN
 (flat, deadpan)
 ...Eventful.

DARREN
 (grinning)
 Nice! Did you finally convince
 Rachel about that threesome?

ETHAN freezes, coffee halfway to his lips.

ETHAN
 (quietly)
 ...Not exactly.

The BOSS strides in, brisk.

BOSS
 Glad you're here. We need you sharp
 today—big client meeting.

ETHAN nods. His phone buzzes: text from Rachel. *Kevin says hi.*

He winces, pockets the phone.

COWORKER #2
 (nosy)
 Hey, where's Max? You always bring
 pictures.

ETHAN stares at the photo taped to his monitor.

ETHAN
 (mutters)
 ...He's... resting.

Coworker chuckles, misreading it as "doggie spa."

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER

ETHAN tries to present slides. The projector cable sparks and dies.

ETHAN
 (sighs)
 Figures.

BOSS
 Don't worry, we'll improvise.

Laptop wallpaper pops up—Max. Silence. ETHAN slams the laptop shut.

INT. BREAK ROOM - LATER

ETHAN stares at a vending machine.

ETHAN
 (mutters)
 At least I still have you.

The machine eats his dollar, dispenses nothing.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
(deadpan)
...Oh come onnnn!

This is bullshit.

INT. OFFICE - LATER

The laughter dies down. ETHAN sits slumped at his desk, staring at the monitor.

DARREN leans over, conspiratorial.

DARREN
Look, man. Forget all this. You
need a reset.

ETHAN
(flat)
A reset?

DARREN
Yeah. Fresh air, no distractions.
I've got a cabin-rural, quiet.

We'll head out this weekend. Clear your head, process everything.

ETHAN
(skeptical)
A cabin? With you?

DARREN
(grinning)
Trust me. Nothing heals like
nature.

And hey-no Wi-Fi. Just trees, beer, and perspective.

ETHAN hesitates, weighing the disaster Darren already caused.

He exhales, defeated.

ETHAN
(reluctant)
Fine. Maybe... maybe I do need to get
away.

DARREN
 (claps him on the back)
 That's the spirit! Cabin trip, man.
 You'll thank me.

EXT. CITY STREET - MORNING

A battered pickup idles at the curb. A boat trailer rattles behind it, paint chipped, one strap barely holding.

DARREN leans out the window, sunglasses on, grinning like he's about to change ETHAN's life.

DARREN
 Hop in, man. Time for a reset.

ETHAN approaches, suitcase in hand, wary. He eyes the boat.

ETHAN
 (flat)
 Why is there a boat?

DARREN
 (grinning)
 Therapy on water. Best cure there
 is.

You'll thank me.

ETHAN sighs, tosses his bag in the bed, climbs in.

INT. PICKUP TRUCK - DAY

The truck rattles down the highway, boat swaying behind.

DARREN drives one-handed, animated. ETHAN stares out the window, hollow-eyed.

DARREN
 Here's the plan. Cabin in the
 woods. Fishing trip.

Couple beers, couple laughs. You'll forget all about Rachel.

ETHAN
 (deadpan)
 Or remember her every time the boat
 almost tips.

DARREN
 (laughing)
 Come on, man. Fresh air, no Wi-Fi.

You'll be a new man by Monday.

The truck jolts over a pothole. ETHAN clutches the dash.

ETHAN
 (sarcastic)
 Yeah. Nothing says healing like
 whiplash.

DARREN
 (ignoring him)
 We'll hike, fish, maybe meet some
 locals.

You'll see--this is the fix.

ETHAN exhales, resigned.

ETHAN
 (reluctant)
 Fine. But if this goes south, I'm
 blaming you.

DARREN
 (grinning)
 Deal.

EXT. COUNTRY HIGHWAY - LATE AFTERNOON

The pickup rattles down a two-lane road, boat swaying behind it.

Golden light spills across rolling fields.

They pass through a small town:

- A diner with a neon "OPEN" sign flickering.
- Kids tossing a football in a yard.
- A man sweeping the sidewalk outside a hardware store.
- A church bell tolling faintly in the distance.

ETHAN stares out the window, taking it in. DARREN hums along to the radio, oblivious.

DARREN
See? Peaceful. No traffic, no
stress.

Just good old-fashioned country living.

ETHAN
(flat)
And mosquitoes. And probably ticks.

DARREN
(grinning)
Adds character. Builds immunity.

EXT. LAKE - CONTINUOUS

The truck rolls past a wide, shimmering lake.

Fishermen cast lines from the dock.

A family unloads a cooler at the boat ramp.

Teenagers splash each other near the shore.

ETHAN watches, wistful. DARREN points proudly at the water.

DARREN
That's our playground.

Tomorrow-sunrise fishing. You'll thank me.

ETHAN
(deadpan)
Or drown. Either way, problem
solved.

DARREN laughs, slaps the steering wheel.

EXT. CABIN - SUNSET

The truck pulls into a gravel drive.

A log cabin sits nestled among tall pines-rustic but
well-kept.

Smoke curls from a stone chimney.

A porch swing creaks gently in the breeze.

Crickets chirp. A dog barks faintly in the distance.

DARREN hops out, stretching like he owns the place.

ETHAN climbs out slower, eyeing the cabin with suspicion.

DARREN
Home sweet home.

Smell that? Fresh pine. Healing energy.

ETHAN
(sniffs, unimpressed)
Smells like mildew.

DARREN
(laughing)
That's the charm.

They haul their bags toward the porch.

Warm light glows inside, the lake visible through the trees beyond.

EXT. BOAT RAMP - EARLY MORNING

Mist curls off the lake. The sun breaks the horizon, painting the water gold.

DARREN backs the pickup down the ramp, boat swaying gently on the trailer.

ETHAN stands at the edge, clutching a thermos of coffee, watching skeptically.

DARREN hops out, grinning, unhooks the straps.

DARREN
Moment of truth.

Together they ease the boat into the water. It slides off the trailer with a soft splash.

The lake is still, serene—only birds and the lapping water.

ETHAN climbs in, settling at the bow. DARREN pushes off, hopping aboard.

For a beat, they drift in silence, surrounded by morning calm.

ETHAN
 (quiet, almost surprised)
 It's... peaceful.

DARREN
 (smiling)
 Told you. Best therapy there is.

EXT. LAKE - EARLY MORNING

Mist drifts across the water. The sky glows pink and gold.

Birds call faintly. The boat rocks gently as DARREN rows them out.

ETHAN sits at the bow, bundled in a jacket, sipping coffee. For once, he looks calm.

DARREN
 See? Worth waking up for.

No traffic, no noise—just us and the fish.

ETHAN
 (flat, but softer than
 usual)
 And hypothermia.

DARREN laughs, casts his line. ETHAN watches the ripples, then tries his own.

A beat of silence—peaceful.

ETHAN's line tugs. He reels in, surprised, pulling up a decent bass.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
 (laughing, genuine)
 Hey! Look at that.

DARREN
 (clapping)
 Atta boy! First catch of the day.

They toss the fish in the cooler. ETHAN exhales, shoulders easing.

ETHAN
 (quiet, almost to himself)
 This... isn't so bad.

DARREN
See? Told you. Cabin life heals all
wounds.

ETHAN watches the horizon, mist lifting, sun rising.
For the first time in days, he looks hopeful.

ETHAN
(smiling faintly)
Maybe you were right.

DARREN
(grinning)
I'm always right.

They share a laugh. The boat drifts in silence, morning light shimmering.

ETHAN sits calm, peaceful.

EXT. BOAT RAMP - LATE MORNING

The sun is higher now. ETHAN sits in the boat, tired but content, pulling it onto the trailer as DARREN backs the truck down the ramp.

ETHAN
(relieved)
Finally. That wasn't so bad.

Across the lot, a GAME WARDEN appears with a clipboard.

DARREN's eyes widen. He grips the wheel tighter.

DARREN
(muttering)
Oh, hell no.

Instead of stopping, DARREN guns it—truck, trailer, and boat (with ETHAN still inside) lurch forward.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - LATE AFTERNOON

The truck barrels down the lane, boat swaying wildly on the trailer.

ETHAN clutches the sides, bouncing inside the boat.

ETHAN
 (shouting over the wind)
 Darren! What the hell are you
 doing?!

DARREN keeps his eyes locked on the road, silent.

The truck roars past fields until, finally, he pulls over a mile away.

ETHAN climbs out, furious.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
 (exasperated)
 What the hell was that all about?!

DARREN
 (sheepish, shrugging)
 I may have kept a fish or three
 that were... a tiny bit undersize.

And the game warden was right there, so...

ETHAN
 (stares, deadpan)
 So you dragged me out of the lake
 like a getaway car?

DARREN
 (grinning)
 Exactly. Smooth exit. No questions
 asked.

ETHAN buries his face in his hands.

ETHAN
 (flat, bewildered)
 Of course. Why not.

DARREN proudly pats the cooler, oblivious.

EXT. SMALL TOWN CAFÉ - DAY

A cozy café sits on the corner of Main Street.

Locals sip coffee, a waitress refills mugs, a bell jingles as the door opens.

INT. CAFÉ - CONTINUOUS

ETHAN and DARREN slide into a booth. ETHAN slouches, still rattled.

DARREN, cheerful, already scanning the menu.

DARREN
Best pancakes in the county.

This'll fix everything.

ETHAN
(flat)
Pretty sure pancakes don't erase
felony fishing.

DARREN
(laughing)
Relax. Nobody cares. Small towns
thrive on stories.

By tomorrow, we'll be legends.

ETHAN glares, stirring his coffee.

ETHAN
(mutters)
Yeah. Legends.

A WAITRESS approaches, smiling.

WAITRESS
What can I get you boys?

DARREN
(grinning)
Stack of pancakes, extra syrup.

And my friend here needs comfort food—make it double.

ETHAN
(quiet, resigned)
Just coffee. Black.

DARREN
(to waitress, winking)
He's in mourning.

The waitress chuckles, walks off. ETHAN stares out the window.

Across the café, a couple laughs together. ETHAN's face tightens.

DARREN (CONT'D)
 (leaning in, upbeat)
 See? This is the fix. Cabin, lake,
 café.

By Monday, you'll forget all about Rachel.

ETHAN
 (deadpan)
 Or I'll forget how to trust anyone
 ever again.

DARREN shrugs, unfazed, already scrolling his phone.

INT. CAFÉ - LATER

ETHAN and DARREN sit in the booth, plates half-empty. ETHAN stirs his coffee, still brooding.

DARREN wipes his mouth, stands.

DARREN
 Be right back.

He disappears toward the counter. ETHAN sighs, staring out the window.

A beat of silence.

DARREN returns, grinning ear to ear, flanked by CLAIRE and JESS.

They laugh at something DARREN just said as he ushers them to the booth.

DARREN (CONT'D)
 Ethan, meet Claire and Jess.

Locals. Thought we could all hang out.

ETHAN blinks, stunned.

ETHAN
 (flat)
 Of course you did.

CLAIRE
 (smiling)
 Darren says you're new in town.

ETHAN
(deadpan)
Unfortunately.

JESS
(teasing)
Well, lucky you. Darren promised us
a cabin night.

ETHAN shoots DARREN a look. DARREN just grins, oblivious.

DARREN
See? This is how you bounce back,
man.

New friends, new adventures.

ETHAN buries his face in his hands, trapped and exhausted.

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

The truck pulls into the gravel drive. CLAIRE and JESS giggle as DARREN unloads a cooler.

ETHAN trails behind, carrying a blanket and wine, nerves already fraying.

DARREN
(grinning)
This is it, man. Cabin magic.

ETHAN
(mutters)
More like cabin disaster.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

Dimly lit, cozy. ETHAN has gone all out:

- A fire crackles in the fireplace.
- A blanket spread with wine, cheese, candles.
- Mood music playing softly.

ETHAN stands nervously in front of the fire, wearing only a condom, trying to look romantic.

ETHAN
 (mutters to himself)
 Okay... smooth. Just be smooth.

He stokes the fire with the poker.

A glowing ember pops, arcs through the air—lands squarely on the condom.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
 (yelps)
 Ow—hot! Hot!

The condom smolders, catches fire. ETHAN panics, flails, trying to pat it out.

CLAIRE gasps, horrified.

CLAIRE
 Oh my god!

ETHAN stumbles, trips over the wine glasses. The blanket spread is ruined.

Beat. Silence. The fire crackles.

CLAIRE and JESS grab their coats and bolt.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

The door slams. Silence. The fire crackles.

ETHAN stands frozen in the middle of the room—naked, clutching a crumpled shirt over his crotch.

Thin wisps of smoke curl upward.

DARREN, in boxers with a half-empty beer, watches the girls leave like it's just another Tuesday.

DARREN
 (deadpan, casual)
 Well... that could've gone better.

ETHAN turns slowly, locking eyes with him.

ETHAN
 (flat, incredulous)
 Really?

DARREN shrugs, takes another sip.

INT. CABIN - LATER THAT NIGHT

The fire has died down. Quiet except for the crackle of embers.

ETHAN sits hunched on the couch, blanket around his waist.

DARREN lounges in a chair, still in boxers, sipping a beer, unfazed.

DARREN

Alright, man. Tomorrow's the reset.

We'll go hiking—no women, no drama.

Just us and nature. Nothing can go wrong.

ETHAN stares at him, pale, sweating.

ETHAN

(flat, biting)

Do you even hear yourself?

Every time you say 'nothing can go wrong,' it goes wrong.

DARREN shrugs, unfazed.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

(flat)

I think I need to go to the hospital.

DARREN waves him off, grinning.

DARREN

Nah, you'll be fine. Fresh air, sunshine.

Best cure there is.

ETHAN shifts uncomfortably, grimacing.

ETHAN

(serious, louder)

No, Darren. I think I need to go to the hospital.

I think I burnt my dick off.

Beat. Silence.

DARREN takes a sip, shrugs.

DARREN
Well... that's one way to stay
celibate.

ETHAN buries his face in his hands.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - LATE NIGHT

Fluorescent lights buzz overhead. Plastic chairs line the wall.

ETHAN sits hunched, blanket wrapped around his waist, clutching a clipboard of intake forms.

DARREN lounges beside him, legs stretched out, flipping through a hunting magazine like he's on vacation.

ETHAN
(flat, muttering)
I can't believe this.

DARREN
(grinning, unfazed)
Hey, look at the bright side.

You're getting professional attention.

Most guys would kill for that kind of service.

ETHAN glares at him.

ETHAN
(deadpan)
Bright side?.....Really?...I just
burnt my frigging dick off.

DARREN shrugs, keeps reading.

DARREN
Nature's way of telling you to slow
down.

Besides, tomorrow we hike. No women, no drama.

Just us and the trail.

ETHAN stares at him, incredulous.

ETHAN
 (quiet, biting)
 If this is healing, I'll take the
 trauma.

Beat. Silence. A NURSE passes by, glances at ETHAN's blanket,
 then quickly looks away.

DARREN flips another page, completely unfazed.

Across the room, a TELEVISION plays the local news.

ANCHOR (V.O.)
 Authorities continue searching for
 a woman connected to a string of
 robberies in the area.

She is considered armed and dangerous.

A few PATIENTS glance up, murmuring.

PATIENT
 (low, to no one in
 particular)
 Crazy world out there.

ETHAN and DARREN keep talking, oblivious.

DARREN
 See? That's why you stick with me.

I keep things simple.

ETHAN
 (flat)
 Simple? Darren, I'm sitting here
 with a blanket over my crotch.

That's not simple. That's tragic.

DARREN laughs, unfazed.

On the TV, a mugshot of a WOMAN flashes briefly onscreen.

No one reacts—ETHAN and DARREN don't notice.

But the audience sees it.

The news keeps playing in the background, unnoticed.

INT. CABIN - MORNING

Sunlight filters through the windows.

DARREN hums at the stove, flipping pancakes with reckless confidence.

ETHAN sits at the table, hunched, nursing a mug of coffee. His blanket draped over the chair, his expression sour.

DARREN
(cheerful, oblivious)
Big day ahead, man. We'll hit the
trail, breathe that mountain air.

No women, no drama—just us and nature.

Nothing can go wrong.

ETHAN stares at his coffee, silent.

DARREN plops a stack of pancakes onto ETHAN's plate, grinning.

DARREN (CONT'D)
Fuel up. You'll need the energy.

We're talking miles of pure wilderness.

ETHAN
(flat, simmering)
Yeah. Because last night went so
well.

DARREN waves him off, already pouring syrup.

DARREN
Forget last night. That was just a
warm□up.

Today's the real fix. Hiking clears the soul.

ETHAN
(deadpan)
Pretty sure my soul's still on
fire.

DARREN laughs, unfazed, digging into his own plate.

DARREN
Trust me. By the time we're
knee□deep in brush, you'll thank me.

ETHAN glares, mutters under his breath.

ETHAN
(quiet, biting)
I'm starting to think you're trying
to kill me.

DARREN happily eats, oblivious. ETHAN simmers, tension thick under the cozy breakfast glow.

EXT. FOREST TRAIL - DAY

ETHAN and DARREN walk side by side along a narrow dirt trail.

Tall trees rise around them, sunlight filtering through the canopy.

Birdsong echoes faintly.

From a distance, everything looks normal:

- DARREN strides confidently, backpack slung over one shoulder.

- ETHAN trudges, coffee thermos in hand, simmering but quiet.

- The trail winds peacefully ahead.

Closer: burrs cling to ETHAN's pant leg, unnoticed.

The illusion of peace begins to fray.

EXT. OVERGROWN FIELD - DAY

ETHAN and DARREN push through waist-high weeds and tangled brush.

Seed pods cling to their clothes, burrs snag at every step.

The "shortcut" looks more like a jungle.

DARREN plows ahead, grinning, swatting branches aside.

ETHAN trudges behind, arms raised to shield his face, muttering.

ETHAN
(sarcastic, grumbling)
Oh yeah, Darren. Great shortcut.

Really saving us time here.

DARREN
 (laughing, unfazed)
 It's all part of the adventure,
 man.

You'll thank me when we hit the ridge.

ETHAN stops, looks down—his pants are covered in burrs.

He grimaces, starts peeling them off.

ETHAN
 (flat, biting)
 If this is adventure, I want a
 refund.

DARREN chuckles, brushing burrs off his own shirt.

EXT. FOREST TRAIL - DAY

The trail narrows, trees closing in.

Weeds thicken, burrs cling to their clothes.

DARREN pushes forward confidently. ETHAN mutters, swatting at branches.

ETHAN
 (sarcastic)
 Great shortcut, Darren. Really
 saving us time.

DARREN
 (grinning)
 Adventure, man. Builds character.

EXT. OVERGROWN BRUSH - DAY

They push deeper into tangled weeds. Seed pods cling to ETHAN's pants.

ETHAN
 (grimacing)
 Ugh—these things are everywhere.

He hops onto a stump, starts peeling off his pants to shake the pods loose.

DARREN
(laughing)
Careful, man. You're giving the forest a show.

ETHAN shakes out the pants, wincing.

ETHAN
(grumbling)
That shit hurt.

He begins pulling his pants back on—just as a LOCAL HIKER emerges from the trail.

The hiker sees ETHAN mid□pants, hears only “that shit hurt,” and freezes.

HIKER
(eyes wide, horrified)
Oh my god—

The hiker bolts, sprinting back down the trail.

ETHAN
(alarmed)
Wait! No—it's not what you think!

ETHAN makes a move to chase after him, but DARREN grabs his arm.

DARREN
(deadpan, smirking)
Let him go. If we catch him, we'll have to kill him.

ETHAN stares at DARREN, horrified.

ETHAN
What?!

DARREN
(grinning)
Relax. He thinks he just escaped a horror movie.

Best to let him keep running.

ETHAN buries his face in his hands.

DARREN shrugs, brushing burrs off his shirt.

EXT. GAS STATION - LATE AFTERNOON

The pickup pulls into a dusty small town gas station.

DARREN hops out, starts pumping gas. ETHAN trudges toward the convenience store, still picking burrs off his pants.

INT. GAS STATION - CONTINUOUS

Fluorescent lights hum overhead. ETHAN grabs a bottle of water from the cooler.

DARREN wanders in behind him, browsing the snack aisle.

At the counter—the HIKER from earlier.

He turns, sees ETHAN and DARREN.

Beat. His eyes widen, face pale.

ETHAN freezes, water bottle in hand. DARREN grins, oblivious.

ETHAN
(flat, muttering)
Oh, great.

The HIKER stares for a moment, horrified, then bolts—snatching his receipt and rushing out the door.

DARREN watches him go, shrugs.

DARREN
(laughing)
Guy runs faster than a deer.

ETHAN
(deadpan)
Yeah, because he thinks we're the monsters.

DARREN
(grinning, unfazed)
Adds to our legend. Small towns thrive on stories.

ETHAN buries his face in his hands.

DARREN munches chips, unfazed, while the door swings shut behind the fleeing hiker.

INT. CABIN - MORNING

Sunlight streams through the window.

ETHAN wakes groggily, looks around—the cabin is empty.

No sign of DARREN.

ETHAN

(mutters)

Great. He's probably planning
another disaster.

ETHAN drags himself upright, blanket slipping off his
shoulders.

He rubs his face, sighs, and listens—only silence outside.

He shuffles toward the door, wary.

EXT. CABIN - LATER

ETHAN sits on the porch steps, sipping coffee, still
simmering.

Birds hum, wind stirs the trees.

Suddenly—the roar of an engine.

A flashy two-seater sports car pulls into the gravel drive,
gleaming in the sun.

DARREN hops out, sunglasses on, grinning like a kid at
Christmas.

DARREN

(excited)

Morning! Get dressed—we're hitting
the sights.

And we're doing it in style.

ETHAN stares, suspicious, coffee halfway to his lips.

ETHAN

(flat)

Where did you even get that?

DARREN waves him off, unfazed.

DARREN

Doesn't matter. What matters is
adventure.

Small town, big car, two legends on the road.

ETHAN squints, shaking his head.

ETHAN

(sarcastic)

Yeah. Because nothing says "low-key
weekend" like a midlife crisis on
wheels.

DARREN laughs, slaps the hood proudly.

DARREN

Trust me, man. This is the reset.

We'll cruise, see the sights, maybe meet some locals.

No drama this time.

ETHAN sighs, mutters under his breath.

ETHAN

(quiet, biting)

That's what you said about the
boat. And the hike. And the cabin.

DARREN just grins, opening the passenger door with a
flourish.

ETHAN hesitates, reluctant. DARREN beams, the sports car
gleaming between them.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

A sports car glides down the quiet two-lane road, engine
purring.

Heads turn. Locals pause mid-conversation, jaws dropping.

DARREN beams behind the wheel, sunglasses on.

ETHAN slouches in the passenger seat, arms crossed,
mortified.

EXT. DINER PARKING LOT - DAY

DARREN pulls in, revs the engine for effect.

A couple of TEENAGERS whip out their phones, filming. One whistles.

TEENAGER

Dude, is that a Lambo?

DARREN grins, nods proudly.

ETHAN mutters under his breath.

ETHAN

(flat)

Yeah. Because nothing says "subtle"
like a neon midlife crisis.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

DARREN leans against the hood, chatting with a curious OLD MAN.

The man circles the car, shaking his head in disbelief.

OLD MAN

Never thought I'd see one of these
in town.

Looks like it belongs in a movie.

DARREN laughs, soaking it in.

ETHAN stands off to the side, sipping a soda, glaring.

ETHAN

(sarcastic)

Yep. Just what we needed. More
attention.

EXT. HARDWARE STORE - DAY

DARREN idles at the curb.

A group of LOCALS gather, pointing, whispering.

One woman snaps a photo, another waves.

DARREN
 (grinning)
 See? Instant celebrity.

ETHAN
 (deadpan)
 Or instant target.

Hope you've got insurance.

DARREN just laughs, revs the engine again.

ETHAN simmers while DARREN basks in admiration, the sports car gleaming absurdly against the small town backdrop.

EXT. SMALL TOWN MAIN STREET - DAY

The sports car roars down the quiet street, gleaming like a spaceship in the sunlight.

Locals stop and stare—phones out, jaws dropping.

DARREN drives like he owns the town, sunglasses on, grinning.

ETHAN slouches in the passenger seat, arms crossed, unimpressed.

DARREN
 (excited, gesturing)
 See? Instant respect. This is how
 you make an entrance.

ETHAN
 (flat, muttering)
 Or how you make enemies.

DARREN laughs, unfazed, slowing as they near the café.

He spots the row of parked pickups and minivans, then the café window.

DARREN
 (grinning)
 Perfect. This is the stage.

ETHAN sighs, staring out the window, already dreading what's next.

DARREN pulls the car to the curb, revs the engine once for effect.

Locals glance over, whispering.

DARREN brims with confidence. ETHAN simmers.

The sports car gleams absurdly against the small town backdrop.

EXT. SMALL TOWN CAFÉ - DAY

The shiny sports car idles at the curb.

DARREN leans against it like a salesman, sunglasses on, brimming with confidence.

ETHAN sits inside, slouched, staring blankly out the window.

Through the café glass, a BEAUTIFUL WOMAN sits alone, sipping coffee.

DARREN spots her, nudges ETHAN.

DARREN
(grinning)
There she is. Perfect. Go talk to her.

This car sells the whole package. You'll look like a million bucks.

ETHAN
(flat, weary)
No. I'm done. I don't feel up to it.

DARREN
(pressing)
Come on, man. Fortune favors the bold.

ETHAN shakes his head, firm.

ETHAN
Not this time. I'm finished.

Beat. DARREN stares at him, then shrugs.

The BEAUTIFUL WOMAN rises, walks out of the café.

She approaches DARREN, leans in, whispers something in his ear.

DARREN's grin widens.

He looks back at ETHAN, suddenly serious.

DARREN
Hey man... I'm gonna need you to get
out.

ETHAN blinks, stunned.

ETHAN
(disbelieving)
What? ...Are you serious right now?

DARREN nods, already opening the passenger door.

ETHAN climbs out, incredulous.

The WOMAN slides into the seat, smiling.

DARREN hops in, revs the engine.

DARREN
(grinning)
Don't wait up.

The car roars off down the street, leaving ETHAN standing alone on the sidewalk.

Silence. He exhales, shoulders heavy, then starts walking aimlessly through the small town streets.

EXT. SMALL TOWN STREETS - DAY

ETHAN walks alone, hands in his pockets, head down.

The sports car's roar fades in the distance.

Silence, except for the hum of town life around him.

MONTAGE - ETHAN'S REFLECTIONS

- ETHAN on the boat at dawn, briefly smiling as he caught a fish.

- The boat ramp chaos, Darren gunning the truck, Ethan clutching the cooler.

- The cabin night: firelight, the ember popping, Ethan clutching the smoldering condom.

- Hospital waiting room: Ethan wrapped in a blanket, Darren flipping a magazine.
- Hiking through brush, Ethan peeling burrs, the hiker bolting in terror.
- Gas station: the hiker's horrified stare, sprinting out the door.
- Darren basking in attention as locals gawk at the sports car.
- Ethan's blank stare through the windshield, Darren grinning at the café window.

BACK TO PRESENT

ETHAN keeps walking, shoulders heavy.

He passes storefronts, families, ordinary life.

ETHAN
(voiceover, weary)
What am I even doing here?

EXT. SMALL TOWN SIDEWALK - DAY

ETHAN walks aimlessly, shoulders heavy.

He slows, stops in the middle of the sidewalk.

Across the street, a COUPLE laughs together, holding hands.

ETHAN watches them, expression somber-envy and regret flickering across his face.

Suddenly-COLLISION.

A YOUNG WOMAN, distracted, bumps into him.

Her coffee splashes across his shirt.

WOMAN (LILY)
(alarmed, apologizing)
Oh my god-I'm so sorry! I wasn't
looking.

I was late for work and trying to text my boss-

They're closing the office here, and I've got to prep for Chicago-

ETHAN bends down, picks up her fallen cup.

He looks up. Their eyes meet.

Beat. Silence.

ETHAN freezes, stunned.

The noise of the street fades.

For a moment, it's just the two of them.

LILY
(soft, embarrassed smile)
I really didn't mean to-

ETHAN
(quiet, almost breathless)
It's... okay.

LILY
(soft, embarrassed smile)
I'm Lily.

ETHAN
(quiet, almost breathless)
Ethan.

They hold the gaze a moment longer.

ETHAN's weariness melts into something new-unexpected, undeniable.

For the first time all weekend, he feels alive.

The world rushes back in: cars, chatter, footsteps.

But ETHAN doesn't move.

For the first time all weekend, he feels alive.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

The cabin is quiet.

ETHAN sits alone at the table, lamp casting a soft glow.

He stares at nothing, lost in thought.

For the first time all weekend, he looks peaceful.

The door bursts open.

DARREN stumbles in, loud, energized, jacket half-off.

DARREN
(grinning, animated)
Man, you should've been there!

We hit the lake, cruised the backroads, ended up at this bonfire-

I swear, I've never seen so many people lose their minds over a car.

ETHAN doesn't respond. He just sits, distant.

DARREN keeps talking, pacing, reliving every detail.

DARREN (CONT'D)
And the girl? Total knockout.

We tore up the night, man. Epic.

Best adventure yet.

ETHAN finally looks at him, flat, detached.

ETHAN
(quiet, distracted)
Yeah. Sounds... great.

DARREN doesn't notice the disconnect. He keeps going, laughing, pouring himself a drink.

ETHAN leans back, lost in thought, drifting away from Darren's chaos.

DARREN basks in his own story.

ETHAN quietly searches for something different-something beyond the weekend's disasters.

INT. CABIN - MORNING

Soft light filters through the window.

ETHAN sits at the table, coffee in hand, staring into space.

Her smile, her voice, the way their eyes locked-it replays in his mind.

DARREN snores loudly from the couch, sprawled out, jacket still half-on from his night out.

Empty beer bottles litter the floor.

ETHAN watches him for a moment, then shakes his head.

He exhales, sets the mug down, and stands.

EXT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

ETHAN steps outside, the morning air crisp.

He looks toward town, determination flickering across his face.

ETHAN
(quiet, to himself)
Lily.

He starts walking down the path, leaving the cabin behind.

DARREN sleeps in chaos. ETHAN finally moves toward something new.

EXT. SMALL TOWN - DAY

ETHAN walks through the streets, scanning storefronts.

He passes the diner, the hardware store, the gas station—each place buzzing with locals.

He's searching, driven.

Finally, he spots her: LILY, inside a modest office with a sign that reads:

"Riverbend Publishing - Independent Voices, Local Roots."

Through the glass, she's boxing up manuscripts, stacking files, and labeling cartons.

A moving company flyer sits on the counter: *Chicago Relocation - December 1st.*

ETHAN hesitates at the door, nervous.

He exhales, pushes it open.

INT. PUBLISHING OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The bell above the door jingles.

LILY looks up from a stack of half-packed boxes, surprised.

ETHAN steps inside, awkward but genuine.

ETHAN
(soft, fumbling)
Hey... uh, about yesterday.

I wanted to apologize again for the coffee thing.

LILY smiles, shaking her head.

LILY
You don't need to. I was the one
not paying attention.

Beat. ETHAN shifts, searching for words.

He glances around—papers, cartons, books stacked for shipping—

but he's too caught up in her to connect the dots.

ETHAN
(quiet, sincere)
Still... I was hoping maybe—

Would you want to grab lunch sometime?

LILY studies him for a moment, then smiles warmly.

LILY
Sure. I'd like that.

ETHAN exhales, relief washing over him.

For the first time all week, he's not reacting to Darren's chaos—he's choosing his own path.

LILY turns back to her packing, taping up a box.

ETHAN watches her, lost in thought, oblivious to what the boxes mean.

The spark between them is undeniable.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - AFTERNOON

Warm light, chatter, clinking cups.

ETHAN and LILY sit across from each other, mid-conversation.

ETHAN leans in, clearly enjoying her company.

LILY scrolls her phone, distracted.

LILY
(sighs, to Ethan)
Sorry—I've been juggling calls all
day.

ETHAN
(smiling faintly)
Busy job?

LILY
Yeah. And... complicated.

The office here is closing. They're relocating me to Chicago.

ETHAN freezes, smile faltering.

ETHAN
Chicago?

LILY nods, half-excited, half-nervous.

LILY
It's a big opportunity. Could be
temporary, could be longer.

I don't even know yet.

ETHAN stares at his coffee, processing.

ETHAN
(quiet, almost to himself)
Of course.

LILY notices his shift, softens.

LILY
Hey—don't look so grim. It's not
tomorrow.

I've still got time here.

ETHAN forces a smile, but his eyes betray him.

ETHAN
Right. Time.

Beat. Silence. The hum of the café fills the space.

LILY leans forward, changing the subject.

LILY
Actually... there's a BBQ tomorrow
night.

Friends, music, nothing fancy.

You should come.

ETHAN looks up, surprised.

ETHAN
(soft, hesitant)
Me?

LILY
(smiling warmly)
Yeah. You.

ETHAN exhales, the weight of Chicago still in his chest, but her smile pulling him back.

ETHAN
(quiet, sincere)
Okay. I'll be there.

LILY nods, pleased.

ETHAN finally smiles—blue about her leaving, but falling for her all the same.

EXT. SMALL TOWN PARK - EVENING

Golden hour.

ETHAN and LILY walk side by side along a quiet path.

No dialogue—just laughter, gestures, easy conversation.

ETHAN says something. LILY laughs, brushing her hair back.

She playfully nudges him; he stumbles, nearly trips.

They both laugh harder, the tension melting away.

They sit on a bench, sharing stories, faces lit by the fading sun.

ETHAN points at something in the distance.

LILY leans closer, smiling.

As the light dims, they rise.

A hug lingers—longer than expected.

It turns into a kiss, soft and tentative at first, then deeper.

EXT. FAMILY BBQ - DAY

The BBQ is in full swing. Kids run across the lawn, smoke rises from the grill, relatives chatter around picnic tables.

ETHAN arrives with LILY, carrying a bottle of wine. He's nervous but smiling.

DARREN is already there, plate piled high, grinning, holding court with a few relatives.

Beside him is the glamorous GIRL he picked up in the Lambo.

DARREN spots ETHAN, surprised.

DARREN

Buddy! Didn't expect to see you here.

ETHAN freezes. LILY looks between them, confused.

LILY

Wait... you two know each other?

ETHAN shifts uncomfortably.

ETHAN

Yeah. Darren's... a friend.

DARREN grins, slaps him on the back.

DARREN

Best friend. Partner in crime.

LILY tilts her head, studying them both.

LILY
(soft, realizing)
Hold on. Darren's my cousin.

ETHAN blinks, stunned.

ETHAN
(disbelieving)
Cousin?

DARREN laughs, unfazed.

DARREN
Small world, huh? Guess that makes
us family now.

ETHAN winces, sheepish.

ETHAN
(flat)
Yeah. He's the idiot cousin.

LILY shakes her head, half amused, half exasperated.

LILY
It all makes sense now.

She slips her hand into ETHAN's, squeezing it.

ETHAN exhales, relieved she isn't running.

From inside the house, a TV hums with a NEWS REPORT...

INT. FAMILY BACKYARD - DAY

From inside the house, a TV hums with a NEWS REPORT.

ANCHOR (V.O.)
Authorities continue searching for
a woman connected to a string of
robberies in the area...

The GIRL glances toward the sound, stiffens.

Her photo flashes onscreen.

She forces a smile, excuses herself.

GIRL
Be right back.

She slips outside. Moments later, the roar of the Lambo engine echoes down the street.

DARREN pats his pockets, realizes his wallet is gone.

DARREN
(confused)
Hey... where'd she go?

ETHAN and LILY exchange a look.

For them, the chaos finally makes sense.

EXT. FAMILY BACKYARD - LATER

The party hums on, but DARREN is frantic, searching pockets, scanning the yard.

The Lambo's roar fades into the distance.

DARREN
(shouting after it)
Hey! That's mine!

He bolts toward the street, chasing hopelessly as relatives watch, bewildered.

Kids laugh, thinking it's part of the show.

ETHAN and LILY linger near the fence, wine bottle in hand.

They exchange a look—half disbelief, half relief.

ETHAN
(flat, dry)
Family chaos.

LILY smiles, squeezing his hand.

LILY
Guess you don't get to choose your
cousins.

ETHAN exhales, shoulders easing.

For the first time, he's not embarrassed—he's amused.

They step away from the backyard together, leaving DARREN's shouts behind.

The night air is calm, the town quiet.

ETHAN and LILY walk side by side down the street, closer now, the chaos fading into the distance.

EXT. SMALL TOWN STREET - NIGHT

ETHAN and LILY walk together, quiet now, the town settling into evening.

They reach her doorstep.

LILY smiles, gives him a quick, friendly hug.

ETHAN turns to leave, hesitant.

LILY
(soft, inviting)
Do you want to come inside?

ETHAN pauses, stunned.

He looks at her, then nods, a smile breaking through.

She opens the door.

He steps inside.

The door closes behind them.

INT. LILY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Soft lamplight. The TV hums in the background, muted.

ETHAN and LILY sit together on her couch, glasses of wine in hand.

The mood is quiet, intimate.

ETHAN shifts, uneasy. He stares at his glass, hesitant.

ETHAN
(soft, reluctant)
You know, Darren's always had
these... ideas.

He once told me a threesome would bring me and Rachel closer together.

I thought—maybe he was right. Maybe it would fix things.

He exhales, voice heavy.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
But Rachel... she brought in another
guy.

And it wasn't what I expected.

It wasn't what I wanted.

It was the beginning of the end.

Beat. ETHAN swallows hard, eyes distant.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
And then... Max.

My dog.

He was the one steady thing I had left.

And he passed. Just like that.

No warning. No chance to say goodbye.

ETHAN's voice cracks. He looks down, fighting emotion.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
(quiet, broken)
After that, I didn't know who I was
anymore.

I just kept letting Darren drag me into his chaos,
because at least it kept me moving.

INT. LILY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

Soft lamplight. The TV hums in the background, muted.

ETHAN and LILY sit together on her couch, glasses of wine in hand.

ETHAN has just finished telling her about Rachel, Darren's wild ideas, and Max.

The mood is quiet, vulnerable.

LILY leans back, thoughtful.

LILY
(soft, certain)
That would never happen with me.

ETHAN blinks, caught off guard.

He thinks she means the threesome story.

He shrugs, awkward.

ETHAN
Yeah... well, good.

LILY smiles, tilts her head.

LILY
One man is enough.

I like women too.

ETHAN nearly spits his wine out, coughing, eyes wide.

ETHAN
(disbelieving)
Wait—am I hearing this right?

LILY laughs, amused by his reaction.

She leans closer, teasing.

LILY
You heard me.

No judgement, right?

ETHAN stares at her, stunned, then breaks into a nervous laugh.

The tension melts into playful energy.

ETHAN and LILY sit closer now, the spark between them undeniable.

INT. LILY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

ETHAN's phone buzzes on the coffee table.

Caller ID: DARREN.

ETHAN glances at it, then ignores the call.

He turns back to LILY.

They kiss, slow and tender.

The TV flickers in the background, forgotten.

Wine glasses half-empty on the table.

MONTAGE - ETHAN AND LILY

— Curled up together on the couch.

- Laughter, soft touches, quiet intimacy.
- A kiss deepening, the world outside fading away.

FADE OUT.

INT. LILY'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Sunlight filters through the curtains.

LILY moves around the room, getting ready for work—hair tied back, jacket slipping on.

ETHAN sits at the edge of the couch, watching her with quiet admiration.

She smiles at him before heading out the door.

ETHAN exhales, picks up his phone.

EXT. LILY'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

ETHAN dials.

DARREN's voice answers, groggy, half-awake.

ETHAN
(steady, calm)
Hey. It's me.

I'm at Lily's place.

Can you come pick me up later?

EXT. LILY'S APARTMENT - MORNING

ETHAN stands outside Lily's door, phone in hand.

He looks down the street, thoughtful.

For the first time all week, his voice carries a quiet certainty.

A small smile breaks through.

EXT. LILY'S APARTMENT - MORNING

ETHAN waits outside, hands in his pockets, calm but thoughtful.

DARREN's beat-up pickup truck rattles up the street, pulling to the curb.

DARREN leans out the window, grinning ear to ear.

DARREN
(smiling, teasing)
Well? Tell me about it, man.

ETHAN climbs in, shuts the door.

He looks at Darren, then out the windshield, a small smile tugging at his lips.

ETHAN
(quiet, measured)
It's... different this time.

Not one of your fixes.

Something real.

DARREN chuckles, nudges him playfully.

DARREN
Come on, don't leave me hanging.

Details.

ETHAN shakes his head, still smiling.

ETHAN
No details.

Just... Lily.

Beat. DARREN studies him, surprised by the calm in his voice.

For once, Ethan isn't frazzled or defensive—he's grounded.

DARREN
(grinning, impressed)
Well, I'll be damned.

Guess my trip idea finally paid off.

ETHAN smirks, shaking his head.

ETHAN

Not the way you think.

But yeah... it did.

The truck rumbles down the street.

ETHAN gazes out the window, smile fading as the thought creeps in.

LILY is moving.

Chicago.

The certainty he felt moments ago wavers, replaced by the weight of distance.

His reflection stares back at him in the glass—hope shadowed by inevitability.

ETHAN exhales, quiet, caught between joy and dread.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

The camera pans across the bullpen.

Phones ring, keyboards clack, coworkers shuffle papers.

DARREN is perched on a desk, animated as ever, dispensing his "guru" wisdom to a small crowd of coworkers.

He gestures with his hands, voice booming, full of confidence.

DARREN

Listen, life's just like poker.

You don't fold—you bluff until you win.

Coworkers nod, half believing, scribbling notes.

DARREN beams, basking in attention, his voice echoing across the room.

Across the bullpen, the glass wall reflects Darren's animated figure—his chaos contained in its own bubble.

ETHAN's phone buzzes on his desk.

He picks it up, answers quietly.

LILY (V.O.)
(cheerful, excited)
Hey... change of plans.

A position opened up in New York.

I took it.

ETHAN freezes, then breaks into a grin.

He leans back in his chair, voice low but certain.

ETHAN
(soft, thrilled)
New York.

That's... incredible.

So... the city gets to keep you.

DARREN's voice booms in the background, still holding court.

But ETHAN doesn't hear him anymore.

His world has shifted—Lily isn't leaving for Chicago.

She's coming closer.

ETHAN sets the phone down, smile lingering.

For the first time, Darren's chaos feels far away.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

The doors open.

LILY steps inside, calm smile.

She scans the room, moving with quiet confidence.

Across the bullpen, ETHAN looks up from his desk.

His face lights up.

He rises, straightens his shirt, and walks toward her.

They meet halfway, in the middle of the office.

Her hand brushes his arm.

He slips his hand fully into hers.

Across the room, DARREN spots them.

ETHAN spots DARREN.

They share a moment—smile, nod, a small wave.

Mutual acknowledgment.

No words needed.

ETHAN turns back to LILY.

Together, they head toward the exit.

ETHAN
(quiet, content)
...Guess it's not just me now.

As they pass through the bullpen, Darren's booming voice fades into the background, replaced by the hum of the city outside.

EXT. CITY STREET - CONTINUOUS

ETHAN and LILY step into the crowd.

The city swallows them up, but their connection is clear—two people moving forward together.

FADE OUT.

ROLE CREDITS - OVER CITY STREET FOOTAGE

Crowds move through the busy avenue, horns blaring, neon signs flickering.

ETHAN and LILY vanish into the flow, their joined hands the last glimpse before the crowd swallows them.

In the background, a gag unfolds:

— The gorgeous WOMAN who stole DARREN's rented Lambo is cornered.

— The Lambo sits wrecked against a lamppost, smoke curling from the hood.

– Police swarm the scene, either chasing her down the sidewalk or pressing her against the car in arrest.

The chaos plays out behind the credits, unnoticed by ETHAN and LILY.

Their story has moved on.

Darren's mess lingers in the background, unresolved but irrelevant.

FADE TO BLACK.