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Patterns Of Attraction

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December 28, 2025

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EXT. MATTHEW'S PUB - BUSY CITY STREET - NIGHT

Heavy traffic, people walking along the sidewalk, light flickers on overhead pole lights.

FADE TO.

INT. MATTHEW'S PUB - NIGHT

Dim lighting, long haired bikers smoking and shooting pool, loud music, college town party environment. WESTON (WES) STERLING, (21) sits at the end of a long bar observing and watching the crowd while sipping a whiskey on the rocks. He watches a STRANGER (mid 20s), talk and flirt with a GIRL (21).

The stranger buys her another drink. She gets up excusing herself to the bathroom. The stranger high fives a group of college frat guys behind him as she walks away like he's claiming victory and teaching them. Wes slowly gets up, calmly walks over to the stranger, flips the bartender a two-finger hello.

WES

This guys next drink? On me.

Wes nods at the stranger. The stranger, slightly confused, somewhat offended.

STRANGER

What are you? A fagot?

Wes slips his drink cool, calm, not even bothered.

WES

Actually, today is your lucky day.

STRANGER

Sorry man, I'm not into (beat) whatever you are.

The frat buddies laugh behind them. Wes ignores them.

WES

You know that girl you think you're taking home?

STRANGER

Yeah...

WES

She just walked into the bathroom and is about one minute from coming back here to tell you her friends need her. Then she'll thank you for the drinks and be gone.

The stranger laughs, jocks laugh behind him as they mock Wes.

STRANGER

(Cocky)

Do you even know how many girls I've fucked this year already?

WES

None.

The stranger is shocked, like he knew he was bluffing and appears puzzled how Wes knew.

WES

Listen, if you want any chance with her (beat) when she gets back, you need to say, Hey, I realized I got a little ahead of myself. What actually brought you out tonight?

The stranger laughs even harder. The girl slowly returns, holding her phone up, with an exaggerated frown.

GIRL

I'm so sorry, but my friends just called and they need me. Thank you so much for the drinks, but I have to run.

The stranger looks like he saw a ghost, looks over at Wes who doesn't even make eye contact. Wes gives him a confident nod. The stranger talks to the girl.

STRANGER

(Nervous)

Hey... I realized I got a little ahead of myself. What brought you out tonight?

The girl suddenly slows, shifts back into the conversation, puts her phone down and sits...

Wes motions for the bartender to cash out. He grabs his leather jacket, walks past him, gives him a single light tap on the back, and heads for the door as the girl now starts smiling and flirting with the stranger. The college guys all whisper in amazement. Wes pushes through the door and leaves the bar.

EXT. MATTHEW'S PUB - NIGHT

Wes pushes through the door, leather jacket slung over his shoulder, calm as ever. The night air hits him. One of the frat guys, JAMES CONWAY (21), follows hesitantly.

JAMES

Wait... seriously. How did you do that?

Wes stops, lights a cigarette, and glances at him casually.

WES

Do what?

JAMES

That voodoo type shit.

WES

It's just simple pattern recognition.

Wes holds up his right hand with his cigarette in his left and puts up a finger as he's counting each pattern.

WES

(continued)

Body language, timing, micro-expressions. People leak information whether they mean to or not.

JAMES

What are you? A psychic?

Wes smirks, slow, calm, measured.

WES

No. She was disassociated from the conversation. All I did was help him flip it from, I want to fuck you to I want to KNOW you.

He exhales, takes a drag, and starts walking down the sidewalk, leaving James puzzled behind him.

CUT TO.

EXT. BUSY STATE COLLEGE CAMPUS - MORNING

College kids walking everywhere, busy, large college, bell rings for class to start.

INT. LARGE LECTURE HALL - DAY

Tiered rows of students filing in. Wes sits mid-back, calm, scanning the room.

POV style observations: Students tapping pens, scrolling phones, whispering, glancing at crushes.

He notes micro-expressions: a student biting their lip nervously, a guy overcompensating confidence, a girl checking her watch repeatedly. He mentally catalogs distractions, body language, and subtle social hierarchies – all in a few beats.

A stunning girl enters, LEXI WRIGHT (19). We go SLOW MOTION. Her walk has that *Take My Breath Away* effect – effortless, dreamlike. She crosses the room. A natural flip of her hair. Her eyes meet Wes and they lock. Something unspoken flickers. She slides into the empty seat across the room from him.

Class starts. A clock on the wall goes from 9:00 AM to 9:15 AM. PROFESSOR DALTON drones on about behavioral cues.

PROFESSOR DALTON

(monotone)

...nonverbal communication makes up over half of all interpersonal interpretation. Micro expressions, postural shifts, blink rates...

Wes barely listens – he's scanning, predicting, analyzing. A guy in front keeps tapping his foot. A student in the corner doodles someone else's name repeatedly. Wes notices subtle patterns – tiny tells, habitual ticks, who's anxious, who's lying to themselves. But he keeps looking over and eyeing Lexi, curious. Professor Dalton's eyes land on Wes.

PROFESSOR DALTON

Weston Sterling... You took this class last semester, didn't you?

Wes finally looks up.

WES

Yes, I'm awake. Which already puts me ahead of half the room.

A few students snicker, heads turn, some impressed, and some confused. Professor Dalton crosses his arms, unimpressed, sensing a chance to roast him.

PROFESSOR DALTON

Since you're clearly engaged in today's topic... why don't you tell the class the difference between a regulator and an emblem in nonverbal behavior.

Wes reads the class collectively fearing his embarrassment, answers quickly without missing a beat.

WES

A regulator controls the flow of conversation. Examples would be a head nod, an eyebrow raise, looking away when you want someone to stop talking. An emblem has a direct verbal translation. Like giving a thumbs up or flipping someone off.

The entire room reacts impressed. Lexi flashes him a smile.

PROFESSOR DALTON

(stunned)

Correct...

Wes goes back to analyzing the room like nothing happened. One STUDENT whispers to another.

STUDENT

This dude's a human polygraph.

Professor Dalton clears his throat, slightly thrown off, and continues on. Wes finishes analyzing the room as the bell rings and students shuffle out.

FADE OUT.

EXT. CAMPUS SIDEWALK - DAY

Lexi walks briskly, phone in hand, texting, smiling. Wes jogs to catch up. James bumps into him stopping all progress. She struts off. Wes watches, intrigued, puzzled.

JAMES

Yo! My boy from the other night!

WES

Names Wes.

Reaches out calm for a handshake, watching Lexi walk away over James shoulder.

WES

(Continued)

Weston Sterling.

They shake hands and turn, walking together. James responds mirroring Wes's language.

JAMES

I'm James... James Conway.

WES

And here I was expecting James Bond.

James laughs.

JAMES

You're funny bro. Look, after football practice today, my friends and I are having a party. You want to swing by?

WES

Not really.

JAMES

There will be all kinds of hot girls, you in?
(beat) unless you're into guys.

James gives a careless shrug.

WES

I'm not into guys.

James peddles backwards, doing a double gun motion with his hands, turns and jogs off. Wes looks around hopelessly as Lexi is gone and out of sight.

JAMES

Hope to see you there!

FADE TO.

EXT. COLLEGE FOOTBALL FIELD - AFTERNOON

Bright sun. Football practice is in full swing. Players sprint, toss balls, cheerleaders rehearse routines. The energy is chaotic, loud.

Wes walks along the sideline, leather jacket slung over his shoulder, scanning the field. His eyes immediately lock on Lexi, practicing cheerleader routines. She flips, lands perfectly, then laughs with a teammate.

Wes finds a spot on the bleachers, sits, and casually watches. His gaze sweeps across micro-expressions: player tics, coach gestures, small panics. Lexi notices him briefly, flashes a small, almost imperceptible smile. Wes tilts his head, intrigued.

Enter EMILY FIELDS (20), punk-rock girl with an eyebrow ring, red streak dyed in her hair, and half sleeves of tattoos on her arms. She drops down onto the bleacher next to Wes. She immediately notices Wes's stare. Wes senses her presence but does not look or acknowledge her.

EMILY

You're joking, right?

Wes glances at her, already reading a subtle smirk, cocked eyebrow, crossed arms. He notices a name tag on her shirt that says Emily. Wes nods sideways towards Lexi on the sideline.

WES

Who is she?

EMILY

She's obviously out of your league... athletic, pretty, smart... Hell, I'm not a lesbian, but even I'd fuck her.

WES

No. There's more going on there... and I'm not sure what yet.

Emily is impressed. She leans back, scanning the field.

EMILY

Well, good luck cracking that one.

Wes' attention shifts back to the field. A freshman player, nervous, is about to miss a key point in a drill. Coach shouts instructions, but the kid's panicking, eyes wide, hands shaking. Wes' POV: micro-expressions, shifting weight, trembling fingers – the pattern is clear.

WES

That kid's a nervous wreck.

Wes subtly leans, gestures, eyes fixed. The freshman notices just enough to shift his stance and catch the ball perfectly. The coach stops mid-shout, noticing the flawless catch.

COACH

About damn time someone listens to my advice!

The player nods embarrassed but relieved. Emily's eyebrows raise, head tilts, and a slight shrug with a smirk.

EMILY

There's something different about you too, huh?

Wes shrugs and smirks.

WES

I notice patterns. Then adjust the variables.

Emily leans back, amused.

EMILY

Adjust the variables, huh... genius.

James notices Wes and jogs to the bleachers. James trying to process Wes' effortless control.

JAMES

You down for the party tonight?

EMILY

(interrupting)

I'll be there.

WES

I'll consider it.

JAMES

Cool! It's going to be epic.

The coach yells at the whole team, James notices and runs back to the field. Wes exhales, watches Lexi on the field, intrigued. Emily smirks.

EMILY

You're obsessed, aren't you?

WES

Not yet. (beat) You know her?

EMILY

Lexi Wright, actually grew up with her. We're both from Mason High. We were good friends in like second grade, but then she started hanging out with the smart kids.

WES

The smart kids? Interesting.

EMILY

Okay, so we obviously grew apart. But she was prom queen, super smart, irresistible... everyone loved her there... Seems like her success followed her.

WES

She know about this party?

Emily laughs.

EMILY

She's a... how can I put this nicely... a goodie two shoes. She isn't going to some stupid frat party. Your only way in with her is being genuine.

Wes looks like he already figured that out. Emily notices his intellect.

EMILY

(Continued)

I'll throw some rumors out towards her clique for you. They'll have to drag her there. She hates me, if you can't tell, we're very much opposites.

Emily uses both hands to show herself off physically. Wes nods and goes back to analyzing the whole social environment. Emily stands up to leave.

WES

Thanks.

CUT TO.

EXT. JAMES' HOUSE - QUIET RESIDENTIAL AREA - NIGHT

Wes pulls up, kills the engine. The distant thump of bass shakes the windows. On the lawn, a freshman is violently puking while a circle of drunk idiots cheer him on. Wes watches with deadpan judgment, adjusts his jacket, and walks to the door.

INT. JAMES' HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The place is a disaster. Red solo cups everywhere. Beer stink, sweat, and bad decisions. Wes steps inside and automatically reads the chaos — who's flirting, who's fighting, who's crying, who's about to blackout. His eyes land on Emily sitting on a couch, drink in hand. A sweaty, overconfident frat boy is leaning way too close.

Wes POV zoned in observations: Emily's smile is a tight, polite mask — ankles crossed, shoulder angled away, eyebrow doing the kill me twitch. Wes heads straight over locking eyes with hers. She flashes a real smile.

WES

Em! Glad you could make it.

Emily lights up like he's a lifeboat. She stands. They hug — just long enough to send a message. The frat boy deflates and oozes away. They sit.

EMILY

Thanks... I was about to puke on him as a last resort. (beat) How did you know my name? Pretty sure I never introduced myself.

WES

You left your name tag on earlier at the field.
(beat) I'm Wes.

EMILY

Socially competent AND hyper-observant. Lucky me.

WES

It's a blessing and a curse.

Before Emily can answer, James stumbles into frame like a newborn deer on tequila. He sloshes his drink, bumps into a girl – she glares and storms off.

JAMES

(slurring)

Broooo... you made it! I-I need help.

EMILY

No, you need water.

James ignores that.

JAMES

There's this girl. I'm trying to talk to her.

WES

Who?

James leans in like he's sharing state secrets.

JAMES

We've been calling her... Sexy Lexi.

Emily immediately chokes on her drink laughing, wiping her mouth.

EMILY

Of course you have.

Wes gives her a look, Emily reads him like they've known each other forever.

EMILY

All I did was mention there was something fun happening tonight.

James throws an arm over Wes' shoulder, dragging him.

JAMES

Come on, man, come on. She's in the kitchen.
Bring your... mind-reading shit.

Wes follows steady while James stumbles.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Lexi stands with a pack of cheerleaders who look detached and self-centered. Arms crossed, judgy eyes scanning the room like everything is beneath them. Lexi is trying to look like she belongs – but there's a hint of discomfort. Wes POV: the entire cluster like an open book. Lexi listens half-heartedly as one of the cheerleaders gossips. Her shoulders are slightly raised, her cup held too tight. She scans the exits like she's counting escape routes.

Wes clocks everything in two seconds.

James shoves Wes forward.

JAMES

There she is. Right there. The Holy Grail.

WES

James. No. She's uncomfortable, she wants out,
and you're hammered. I'm not getting in the
middle of this.

Wes turns to leave. James grips his arm – surprisingly strong
for a drunk idiot.

JAMES

Bro-bro-wait. I'll pay you.

Wes stops.

WES

...pay me?

James looks around like he's about to confess to murder. Holds up one finger, then two.

JAMES

One.. no here... Two. Thousand. Dollars.

Wes stares at him. Blinks once.

WES

For what?

JAMES

For you to, like... Jedi-mind-trick me into her pants. Not literally you- me. Me into her pants. You get it.

Wes's expression is pure kill me.

WES

James, no. I'm not a dating mercenary.

James digs into his wallet - somehow he has a giant wad of cash folded terribly. He shoves it at Wes.

JAMES

Half now, half when she's on the other end of my dick.

Wes pushes the money back.

WES

I'm not taking your daddy's money. And you're not sleeping with her tonight. She's too closed off. Too guarded. You approach now, you'll scare her off.

James leans in, whisper-shouting.

JAMES

That's why I need YOU! Tell me what to say!

Wes sighs – defeated by the stupidity around him.

WES

Fine. You want one shot? Listen carefully then...
(beat) She feels trapped. Too many eyes on her. So, you get her away from the group. Just a few feet. Lower your voice. Ask her if she wants to take a breather outside for a second. That's it. Not flirting. Not hitting on her. Just... a moment of safety.

James nods aggressively like he understands nothing.

JAMES

Moment. Safety. Got it. I'm going to crush this.

Wes shakes his head in disbelief. James staggers toward Lexi. The cheerleaders see him coming and stiffen like a startled deer. James plants his hand on the counter beside Lexi and leans in way too close.

JAMES

(sexy whisper that is NOT sexy)

Heyyyy Lexiiii... wanna... uh... go breathe... with me?

Lexi freezes – horror, confusion, disgust all flash at once. The cheerleaders burst into giggles. Lexi steps back.

LEXI

I'm... going to go. Enjoy your– whatever this is.

She leaves the kitchen, pushing past the crowd. James turns back to Wes, devastated.

JAMES

...Did I do it wrong?

Wes just stares at him.

WES

Spectacularly.

James slumps to the floor beside the fridge like a dying horse. Wes watches Lexi disappear into the hallway irritated.. Emily comes in behind Wes and sees Lexi leaving.

EMILY

Looks like James nailed talking to her.

Wes nods in agreement as he leaves and Emily follows loyally behind.

FADE OUT.

INT. LEXI'S DORM - NEXT MORNING

A small dorm room. Sun leaks around blackout curtains. Lexi, hair a mess but effortlessly gorgeous, blinks awake. Across the room, KARA (20s), queen-bee cheerleader with a resting-judgment face, sits at her mirror brushing her hair like she's in a shampoo commercial.

KARA

I still can't believe you bailed on that party so early.

LEXI

I'm not even old enough to drink. I'm nineteen.

Kara rolls her eyes.

KARA

That is such a you problem. You better figure that out if you want any chance with half those football guys.

LEXI

Like James?

Kara lights up like Lexi mentioned a celebrity.

KARA

Um, yeah? He's literally every girl's dream. He's the starting quarterback... or whatever guy throws the ball. (beat) Every girl wants to bone him.

LEXI

He's overrated. And obviously stupid.

KARA

Yeah, but he's probably got a huge cock.

Lexi's eyes go wide, shocked.

A sudden KNOCK at the door. Lexi hops out of bed, runs fingers through her hair, and opens it a crack. Emily stands there – punk rock, messy eyeliner, dry expression, holding a coffee like it personally betrayed her.

LEXI

(confused)

Hey...?

EMILY

Mind if I come in?

Lexi opens the door fully.

LEXI

Sure. Just... surprised. I thought you hated me?

Before Emily can respond—

KARA

(smirking)

Because emo girls hate everyone.

Emily doesn't even look at her. Zero acknowledgment.

EMILY

I thought you hated me, why would I hate you?

LEXI

Because of Billy Matters.

Emily laughs.

EMILY

Oh my god — Billy Matters? Lexi, that was like ninth grade. And that kid was a walking yeast infection.

Lexi bursts out laughing.

LEXI

He really was.

Emily cracks the faintest smirk. Kara watches them bond, annoyed she's not the center of the room.

EMILY

(soft but still sarcastic)

I saw you at the party last night. You looked... uncomfortable. And since your cheer-coven was too busy judging everyone, I figured maybe someone should check on you.

Lexi melts – her guard dissolving immediately.

LEXI

That's... really sweet.

EMILY

Don't tell anyone. I have a reputation.

Kara rolls her eyes.

KARA

Cute. Bonding over trauma. I'm thrilled.

Emily ignores her again.

EMILY

Anyway. Just wanted to make sure you're good.
(beat, sincere) You left early. That usually
means something sucked.

Lexi nods, the honesty landing.

LEXI

Thank you. Really... I just feel like everywhere I
go guys start acting stupid... like James.

EMILY

Because James is stupid, he has like two brain
cells.

LEXI

Then why is everyone so obsessed with him?

EMILY

I wouldn't say everyone. My vibrator has more
personality than that dude.

Kara spins in her chair, offended and insulted.

KARA

Yeah, well at least he wouldn't need batteries to
get a girl off.

Kara flashes a fake sweet smile.

KARA

(continued)

Can you say the same?

Emily tilts her head – amused, not threatened.

EMILY

Kara, the only thing getting you off is your own reflection. And even that's bored of you.

Kara scoffs, crosses her arms.

KARA

Please. You're just intimidated because guys ACTUALLY like me.

EMILY

Oh, they don't like you. You're just... accessible. Like a community college with free parking.

Lexi chokes on a laugh she tries to hide. Kara leans forward, getting meaner.

KARA

At least I'm not walking around looking like a Hot Topic clearance rack.

EMILY

I'd rather be a clearance rack than a walking red flag wearing mascara. Plus, I don't need to Photoshop my face before posting it.

Kara freezes – hit detected. She tries again, weaker.

KARA

God, you're so... nasty. No wonder you don't have any friends.

Emily shrugs, unfazed.

EMILY

I'd rather have no friends than fake ones who'd sell me for a Starbucks gift card. (beat) Maybe even a medium. Not even venti-worthy.

Kara looks at Lexi for backup. Lexi stays silent – she's not stupid enough to intervene. Emily steps closer, low and deadly calm.

EMILY

(continued)

Face it, Kara. You talk a big game – but you mistake attention for value.

Kara's jaw drops. Emily turns to Lexi, instantly warmer.

EMILY

(continued)

I'll see you around...

Emily walks out, absolute mic drop style, leaving Kara blinking like she forgot how vision works.

CUT TO.

INT. JAMES' APARTMENT - NEXT MORNING

Sunlight blasts through half-open blinds like a personal attack. James lies face-down on the couch, half off it, one shoe on, one missing. A marker penis is drawn on his cheek. He groans. Across the room, WES sits calmly on a recliner, sipping coffee, perfectly composed – like he never went to a party at all. James lifts his head, hungover.

JAMES

What... happened last night? (beat) Did I... did I fuck that girl?

Wes doesn't even look up.

WES

The only thing you fucked last night were your chances.

Wes casually takes a sip. James flops back down.

JAMES

Oh god... (beat) Did I... talk to her?

WES

If you call stumbling around and asking her to breathe, then yes.

James covers his face. Then perks up immediately like he got a bright idea.

JAMES

Bro! Fix it. Please. You have help me.

Wes finally looks at him – observant, unimpressed.

WES

Last night you offered me two thousand dollars to help you fuck her.

James perks up more, desperate.

JAMES

Offer still stands!

Wes sighs, sets coffee down, and leans forward.

WES

It's not that simple. And you're already in a hole.

James smirks.

JAMES

Not the hole I want to be in.

Wes is not amused with James.

WES

Let's put it this way, she left the party early..
and it wasn't because she had class in the
morning.

James stares at the ceiling, defeated.

JAMES

Okay... okay... So what do we do?

Wes leans back, casual but calculating.

WES

First?

Wes gets up.

Wes

(continued)

You shower and wash that dick off your face.

James looks confused and rubs his cheek. Wes heads for the door.

WES

(continued)

Then I'll figure out if you even have a chance left.

James points weakly.

JAMES

You're a good man, Wes.

Wes opens the door.

WES

I'm not doing this for you. (beat) I'm doing it because I'm curious how badly you can screw up.

Wes walks and as the door closes.

INT. LIBRARY - NOON

Quiet. Sunlight through tall windows. Emily sits with headphones on, flipping through a book. Wes approaches and sits beside her. Emily slides one headphone off.

EMILY

(deadpan)

You keep sitting next to me and people are going to think we're friends (beat) or worse, you like my personality.

Wes gives a tiny confident smile.

WES

You never try to impress anyone, do you?

Emily's caught off guard for half a second. She pretends it's no big deal.

EMILY

Obviously.

Wes looks at her sincere, unguarded.

WES

No. You're actually cool. You're real. (beat) And that's rare.

Emily blinks, thrown off like she doesn't know how to accept a compliment. She shifts back to sarcasm quickly, but Wes reads everything.

EMILY

Facts.

Wes almost laughs. Then his energy shifts – quieter, heavier.

WES

Can I tell you something?

Emily closes her book, concerned.

EMILY

You can tell me anything.

Wes leans in a little, voice low.

WES

Lexi... it's like a sixth sense. She's different, sweet, innocent, a good person.

Emily raises a brow, cracks a grin.

WES

(continued)

I know, It's not logical. I notice things about people. I always have. But with her, (beat) it's like I'm SUPPOSED to pay attention.

Emily watches him, assessing. His honesty is weirdly sweet... and clearly scaring him.

EMILY

Do you get butterflies in your stomach too?
Because this sounds like a crush.

WES

Yeah, but that's not even the worst part. There's
something else. And I don't know what to do.

Emily smirks.

EMILY

If this ends with I killed someone, I'm out of
here.

Wes half laughs.

WES

God no... (beat) actually it's worse.

EMILY

Okay, now I'm intrigued.

WES

James offered me money to read her. Like she's a
football play.

Emily's smile drops instantly.

EMILY

(whisper yelling)

Wes! For fucks sake!

WES

I didn't say yes... I actually said no - multiple times. But I also don't fit in anywhere. And now suddenly the most popular guy in school wants to hang out with me.

Emily softens - really softens for maybe the first time.

EMILY

Wes... that's not a choice. That's manipulation. And it's wrong.

Before Wes can answer-

KARA (O.S.)

Didn't know the library started hosting support groups for social outcasts.

Kara and Lexi approach. Kara smirks, arms crossed.

KARA

Emily, sweetheart, I didn't know you started a mentoring program.

EMILY

Yeah, for people who peak emotionally at age nine. You should apply.

Kara bristles.

KARA

I'm just saying, sitting with the cryptid here is a choice.

She gestures at Wes. Wes shrinks. Emily fires back immediately.

EMILY

At least he doesn't bite... but I do, so back off.

Kara steps closer, ready to go nuclear—

But Lexi puts a hand up, firm.

LEXI

Kara. Chill. This isn't The Real Housewives: Campus Edition.

Kara looks betrayed, but backs off with an eye roll.

KARA

Whatever. I'll be in the hallway with the normal people.

Kara storms off. Lexi lingers, looking between Emily and Wes.

LEXI

She's like an acquired taste. She grows on you.

EMILY

(deadpan)

Yeah... like a rash.

Lexi ignores the comment.

LEXI

Everything okay here between you two?

Emily and Wes share a look – the guilty kind.

EMILY

Yeah. Just... talking.

Lexi's not convinced, but she lets it go and walks out.

The moment they're gone, Emily turns back to Wes – serious.

EMILY

You need to stop this or tell her before this blows up. Because it will.

Wes nods, but finally honest.

WES

I know.

CUT TO.

INT. JAMES' APARTMENT - NIGHT

James is sprawled on the couch, half-drunk but hyped, texting on his phone. Empty Red Solo cups litter the table. Wes sits in a chair across from him, leather jacket draped over the back, calm, measured, sipping a cocktail.

WES

Look... I can't help you manipulate Lexi.

James doesn't look up.

JAMES

(relaxed)

Dude, chill. You're literally just reading her cues and giving advice.

Wes reads him like a book.

WES

You called it Jedi mind-tricking her into your pants.

James finally looks at him, grinning, completely unashamed.

JAMES

C'mon man, you do the mind reading thing all the time anyways. You're just telling me what you see.

WES

I notice patterns. I don't lie and manipulate.

James leans forward, suddenly persuasive, almost conspiratorial.

JAMES

What about the girl at the bar? Literally the same thing. You manipulated the whole situation. (beat) Look... I'm not going lie, bro, you'd be popular as hell if you help me. And nobody has to know. It's just us.

Wes looks puzzled and slightly impressed.

WES

You're smarter than you think.

James leans back and smirks, feeling he's won at manipulating Wes.

JAMES

This Jedi mind fuckery is your thing.

Wes exhales, frustrated, running a hand through his hair.

WES

You're not wrong... but this feels wrong.

JAMES

Hey... I'm just asking for advice. A little help.
That doesn't make you a bad guy.

Wes glares, trying to resist. James grins and stretches, sitting casually.

JAMES

(continued)

You know... I'd trust no one else with this. It's like... a friendship thing.

Wes blinks.

WES

A friendship thing? You're paying me to manipulate a girl.

James shrugs innocently.

JAMES

Technically yes... but think about it. This could be fun. And you get to see what makes her tick. Knowledge is power, man.

Wes leans back, conflicted, staring at James. He's weighing curiosity, morality, and the thrill of the challenge.

WES

This is a bad idea.

JAMES

No, it's going to be legendary.

Wes runs a hand through his hair again, mutters under his breath.

WES

This is absurd.

CUT TO.

INT. WES' APARTMENT- NEXT MORNING

Wes staring at the ceiling, knowing he's about to be pulled into something morally questionable – and curiously intrigued. Wes texts on his phone with Emily. The screenshots play back and forth.

Emily: Did you tell James to go fuck himself last night?

Wes: Not exactly.

Emily sends an eye roll emoji. Then follows with another text.

Emily: Try to get your shit together and we'll talk later after class.

Wes sends a thumbs up emoji.

Wes tosses his phone on the floor and closes his eyes on the couch emotionally torn for the first time ever.

INT. LECTURE HALL - LATER THAT MORNING

Students file in, half-asleep. Wes sits alone mid-row, notebook open but untouched.

He's staring at nothing – replaying last night – but his eyes still scan: shoes, body language, micro-expressions. Habit.

POV – WES'S OBSERVATION FLASHES: A guy tapping his pen: anxious about a test. A couple whisper-fighting: she's annoyed; he's apologizing. A girl staring at her phone: holding back tears.

His mind never stops. The door opens and Lexi enters.

Warm, bright energy. She spots Wes – hesitates – then walks over with a shy smile. She slips into the seat beside him.

LEXI

Hey... mind if I sit here?

Wes snaps out of his haze, instantly composed.

WES

Yeah. Sure.

Lexi tucks a strand of hair behind her ear – nervous but trying to be friendly.

LEXI

So... um... about the other day. Kara was out of line. I'm sorry about that.

Wes shrugs, cool and unbothered.

WES

It happens.

Lexi laughs lightly, flirtatious.

LEXI

Yeah... she's... a lot. But she really does have a good heart. She just—comes in hot.

Wes nods casually, though he's dissecting every micro-moment.

POV — WES'S INTERNAL ANALYSIS: She apologizes for others, she's empathetic, a peacekeeper.

She doesn't fully excuse Kara, boundaries exist.

She sits beside him by choice, curiosity outweighs social pressure.

She keeps fidgeting with her sleeve, anxious about how she's coming off.

Lexi glances at him, noticing his calm.

LEXI

(continued)

You're always so calm. I wish I could do that.

Wes allows a faint smile.

WES

Maybe we should hang out more... and see if it rubs off.

Wes hones in on her body language immediately with more POV observations: She leans in a fraction, instinctive interest. Smile arrives before her thoughts, she's genuine, not polite. Fingers tighten briefly on her sleeve, self-checking, not nervousness. Her eyes stay on him, engaged, not cautious. Attraction present, but boundaries intact.

LEXI

Maybe... I could use practice just relaxing.

A beat.

They hold eye contact for a few seconds longer than normal. The room dulls. Background noises drop. For a brief moment, it's just them. Wes doesn't analyze. He just lets it happen. Lexi breaks first with a small breathy laugh, a hint of embarrassment, but something stays.

LEXI

Well, I just wanted to say not everyone here is like Kara.

Wes hesitates just a fraction. His thought scramble, unfocused. He notices her waiting.

WES

You're good. Really.

Lexi's smile softens genuinely.

Professor Dalton enters and they break eye contact. Students quiet down. Lexi sits forward attentively, but something between the two of them lingers.

FADE OUT.

INT. CAMPUS CAFETERIA - DAY

Lunch rush. Loud. Chaotic. Trays sliding, fries dropping, bad decisions everywhere.

At a JOCK TABLE, James sits center like a prince holding court. Jerseys, hoodies, confidence.

Wes enters with a tray. He scans automatically - posture, eye lines, power dynamics. James spots him instantly, stands up and starts motioning come here.

JAMES

Yo! Wes! Over here, man!

Heads turn at the table. A chair is kicked out for him by another jock. Wes clocks all of it: open body language, relaxed smiles, no territorial tension, acceptance. Wes slowly walks over and sits.

JOCK #1

So, this is the Jedi dude?

WES

I prefer emotionally invasive.

The table laughs genuinely. Wes glows finally feeling acceptance somewhere. James eats it up.

JAMES

Nah for real – this guy's smart as hell. Like... scary smart.

JOCK #2

Is that why you dress like a Netflix serial killer?

WES

Only on weekdays.

Big laugh. James beams – proud he found him.

Across the room— CHEERLEADER TABLE.

Kara sits like a queen. Perfect posture. Perfect smile. Lexi sits with them, tray untouched. She listens more than she talks. Kara makes fun of Wes at her table.

KARA

(amused)

Why does he look like he knows where bodies are buried?

The girls laugh, Lexi smiles politely and defends.

LEXI

He seems... nice.

Beat.

KARA

Lexi, please... He looks like a sociopath.

Lexi forces a smile. Doesn't laugh.

BACK TO JOCK TABLE

Emily approaches with her tray, clocking the setup instantly. She's an obvious outcast to the table.

EMILY

Wow. I miss one lunch and you're in witness protection?

She drops into the seat next to Wes.

JOCK #1

Who the fuck are you?

EMILY

His emotional support disaster.

JOCK #2

I like her, she's kind of hot.

EMILY

The only thing hot here is my patience, which is running out.

Wes smirks.

WES

She's lying, she loves attention.

EMILY

I tolerate it.

James laughs – then clocks something.
They're comfortable together.

CHEER TABLE - CONTINUOUS

Emily's presence is noticed.

KARA

Is she... sitting with them?

CHEERLEADER #1

Wow. Bold. Like an STD with confidence.

Girls laugh. Lexi doesn't.

LEXI

That's Emily. She's actually really-

KARA

(interrupting)

-really desperate for attention?

Lexi saddens...

JOCK TABLE - CONTINUED

James leans in, low.

JAMES

Lexi is over there. What's she thinking?

Wes subtly glances. Reads it all instantly: Lexi's shoulders tight, smile delayed, eyes checking exits.

WES

She doesn't fit there.

James grins.

JAMES

Yeah, well she can fit in my lap.

All the jocks laugh encouraging James. Emily shoots him a look.

EMILY

Careful genius. You're like a chair with a surprise in the middle.

James seems impressed with Emily and laughs it off.

JAMES

I'm kidding... but not really.

Wes watches Lexi again. Notices something deeper now.

CHEER TABLE - CONTINUED

Kara leans closer to Lexi.

KARA

You've been off all day.

LEXI

I just don't like talking about people. Even if they aren't here, they have feelings too, you know?

Awkward beat.

CHEERLEADER #2

God, you're such a Girl Scout.

KARA

That's why guys love her. She's low maintenance.

Lexi looks up.

LEXI

That's not a compliment.

Silence.

Lexi looks across the room and sees Wes laughing, relaxed. She sees Emily joking and James showing off.

Lexi makes eye contact with Wes, they hold it a bit longer than normal. Lexi flashes a smile. Emily notices. Emily and Lexi make eye contact. Lexi looks away immediately. Wes reads everything.

Lexi STANDS. No drama. No announcement. Tray in hand, she walks. The cheer table goes quiet.

JOCK TABLE - CONTINUED

All in Mid-laughter. Lexi stops at the table, directly speaks to Wes.

LEXI

Hey... is it okay if I sit here?

James is already pulling out a chair and stealing the spotlight.

JAMES

Absolutely.

She sits reluctantly beside James and across from Wes and Emily.
Emily smiles.

EMILY

Welcome to the island of misfit toys.

Lexi laughs.

LEXI

Worth it.

Wes watches Lexi laugh — really laugh — and clocks something new. His eyes flick: the way she tucks hair behind her ear, the split-second hesitation before smiling, the way her shoulders finally relax. Wes speaks without thinking.

WES

Those cheerleaders were talking shit on everyone and you left. You don't judge, you're fair. You give everyone a chance.

Lexi freezes — just a beat.

LEXI

Wait, you can really tell all that?

Emily grins.

EMILY

He's like a machine.

Wes catches himself, softens it.

WES

I don't mean it in a creepy way. (beat) You're just... present. Most people aren't.

Lexi studies him curious now.

LEXI

So, what else do you see?

Beat. Wes considers the responsibility of answering.

WES

You pretend things don't bother you because you don't want to disappoint anyone.

Lexi exhales – the truth lands.

LEXI

Truth.

A jock leans in, trying to lighten it.

JOCK #1

Yo, read me. Am I going to pass my math test today?

Wes barely looks at him.

WES

Absolutely not.

The table erupts with laughter. Emily claps once.

EMILY

It didn't take a genius to read that.

James laughs – but it's half a beat late.

JAMES

Alright, enough profiling people... (beat) for free.

Wes shoots him a threatened look, Emily glares at James and Wes. The rest of the table laughs missing it entirely.

Lexi smiles at Wes – different now.

LEXI

I'm glad I moved.

Wes meets her eyes.

WES

Me too.

Emily sees the connection. James clocks that Emily sees it.
Across the room, Kara watches - livid.

CUT TO.

INT. CAMPUS GYM - NIGHT

Empty except for Wes and James shooting basketballs. James hits a foul shot, SWISH. Wes gets the ball and shoots like a little kid, misses horrible. James laughs.

JAMES

You should stick to the brain stuff, man.

WES

Agreed.

JAMES

So... Lexi sat with us today.

Wes nervous how to reply and comes up with a quick lie.

WES

No, she came over to sit with Emily.

JAMES

(cocky)

Okay, but she sat beside me.

Wes doesn't react. Reads him.

WES

You threw a chair out and gave her no choice where to sit. She felt obligated to sit beside you. And why are you acting nervous?

JAMES

I'm not nervous.

Wes doesn't believe him and just stares.

JAMES

Okay, yeah. But she's like the hottest girl on campus... and I need her.

Points to his penis.

JAMES

(continued)

WE need her.

WES

But she doesn't need you.

James nods - annoyed that it's true.

JAMES

That's why I want your help.

WES

I already told you-

JAMES

(interrupting)

Yeah, yeah, yeah... No manipulating, no puppeteer shit, I know. (beat) Just... tell me what not to screw up.

Wes studies him. Long beat.

WES

You want the truth?

JAMES

Obviously... I can take it. Hit me with it, come on!

WES

(cold)

You don't actually want advice. You want confirmation. You talk over people, you scan the room while they're still finishing sentences. Every joke you make is just a reminder you're supposed to be in charge. You mistake attention for interest and noise for connection. You don't even listen. You just wait and when you're not the center of the moment, you feel like you're losing something.

James is shocked.

JAMES

Damn... is that everything?

WES

Yeah, that's the part you asked for. As for Lexi, she likes silence... so learn to shut the fuck up, listen, and respond to HER, not your ego.

James leans back, processing.

JAMES

Okay? So, like I never talk then?

WES

Not exactly. You don't say. You ask — and then you shut up.

James frowns.

JAMES

That sounds difficult.

WES

What about shutting the fuck up and listening is difficult?

James opens his mouth. Stops. Thinks.

JAMES

Everything?

WES

Alright, what stands out about her?

JAMES

The ass and titties!

Wes doesn't react... silence.

WES

Those are features. I asked what stands out.

James thinks way too long.

JAMES

I don't know... she seems... nice?

WES

Good. Now let's not fuck this up.

James stares.

JAMES

How?

WES

By trying to be impressive.

James groans.

JAMES

Okay, fine. Show me.

Wes sighs.

WES

Alright. I'll be Lexi.

James grins immediately.

Wes softens instantly – posture shifts, shoulders open, expression warm.

Wes uses an over exaggerated funny female voice.

WES

(as Lexi)

Hey.

James immediately busts out laughing.

JAMES

What the fuck was that!?

WES

(as Lexi)

What was what, James?

JAMES

I can't do this with that voice.

WES

(as Lexi still)

Why not James? Don't you like me anymore? I thought you liked my ass and titties.

Wes and James continue laughing hysterically. Then Wes goes back to his normal voice.

WES

Okay okay, fine... here we go... Hey James!

JAMES

Hey! Uh- So, you were amazing at the game today. I mean, not that I was watching you specifically. I watch the whole field. I mean I do like watching you specifically though... but not like too much.

Wes looks flabbergasted.

WES

Nope. You're rambling nonsense. You lost her.

JAMES

Already?!

WES

You complimented her like a stalker.

James slaps his face, jumps up and down like he's amping up for a big play. Wes continues looking at him like he's an idiot.

JAMES

Okay. Reset.

WES

Hi.

JAMES

Hey... um... so do you like water?

Wes pauses.

WES

What is wrong with you?

JAMES

Jesus Christ.

WES

Try again. Ask her something real.

James exhales.

JAMES

Okay.

WES

Hey.

James meets his eyes. Softer this time.

JAMES

Why do you always sit with people who don't
really see you?

Wes freezes. A beat.

WES

That would actually work.

James lights up.

JAMES

Really?!

WES

Because it's not about you. And because you didn't rush to fill the silence.

James laughs, pumped.

JAMES

Holy shit. This is like hacking reality.

WES

It's not hacking. It's paying attention.

James grins, then hesitates.

JAMES

Okay, but what if I mess it up?

WES

She forgives effort but shuts down when she feels overwhelmed.

James swallows at that.

JAMES

And I'm not... crossing a line?

Wes looks at him. Serious now.

WES

You cross the line when you stop seeing her as a person and just a sex toy.

James nods. Sincere.

JAMES

Dude... you're kind of a genius.

WES

Don't make it weird.

JAMES

Too late. (beat) I trust you with this.

That lands heavier than expected. Wes looks away.

WES

Yeah.

James shoots another basket - SWISH.

JAMES

Alright. Tomorrow. Operation: Don't Fuck This Up.

James struts away.

WES

Yeah... about that.

James turns back.

JAMES

What?

WES

Nothing.

James grins, points at him.

JAMES

You're a good friend, man.

He jogs off. Wes stands alone now. The gym lights HUM.

Wes stares at the floor – conflicted.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. CAMPUS HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

Between classes. Lockers slamming. Students flowing like chaos in backpacks. Emily and Lexi walk side by side, books in hand. They're mid-laugh – the easy kind. Comfortable.

LEXI

I swear, if I hear one more person say you're lucky you're naturally pretty, I'm going lose my mind.

EMILY

Yeah, because God forbid you also have a personality. That would be greedy.

Lexi laughs, relieved.

LEXI

It's nice not having to... I don't know. Perform.

Emily softens.

EMILY

Yeah. Same.

Ahead of them – Kara and her CHEERLEADER CLIQUE glide past like a fashion ad. Kara slows just enough.

KARA

Wow. Didn't know Hot Topic started offering campus tours.

Emily doesn't miss a beat.

EMILY

Didn't know insecurity came with matching outfits.

A couple cheerleaders eye roll. Kara glares, keeps walking.

LEXI

God, I really like you.

EMILY

Careful. I'm allergic to compliments.

They walk a few steps. Lexi's tone shifts sincerely.

LEXI

No, I mean it. You don't... want anything from me.
That's rare.

Emily absorbs that. It lands heavier than she expects.

EMILY

Yeah?

Lexi nods.

LEXI

(quietly)

Honestly... you're kind of the only person here I trust. I also really like Wes, too. I feel comfortable. Both of you are very nonjudgmental and just down-to-earth good people.

Emily's smile falters – just a flicker. Guilt stirs. Before she can respond, James and Wes approach from the opposite direction. James spots Lexi instantly.

JAMES

Hey, Lexi!

Smooth. Relaxed. Very not James. Lexi notices and smiles suspiciously.

LEXI

Okay... who are you and what did you do with James?

James laughs, proud of himself.

JAMES

What? Can't a guy evolve?

Lexi glances at Wes.

LEXI

You've been hanging around him, haven't you?

Wes smirks.

WES

He's like a science project gone wrong.

Lexi laughs more than normal then looks at Wes more closely.

LEXI

You're so funny.

Lexi taps Wes's shoulder playfully and flirtatious. James perks up, trying to steer it back.

JAMES

Yeah, I told him to stop dressing like Jeffery Dahmer.

Emily jumps in.

EMILY

He just needs the glasses to really fit the part.

Wes looks at Lexi, easy, genuine.

WES

I see you and Emily are quickly becoming closer.

Lexi blinks. That hit.

LEXI

She's great, I love her.

A beat. They hold eye contact – just long enough. James recognizes it and tries to regain attention for Lexi.

JAMES

Anyway– You going to the game tonight?

LEXI

Yeah, obviously. I do cheer, you know?

James grins.

JAMES

Yeah, cheer for me.

James gives a wink. Lexi laughs uncomfortable. Then turns back to Wes.

LEXI

You should come. I'd love to see you there!

Wes hesitates, but honest.

WES

Yeah... maybe.

James steps in again, louder.

JAMES

Cool. We'll see you there.

Emily watches the whole exchange – every look, every beat. James checks his phone.

JAMES

We're late. C'mon.

He nudges Wes. They start off. Wes glances back at Lexi.

WES

See you.

Lexi smiles.

LEXI

See you.

James doesn't love that. They disappear into the crowd. Emily exhales. This is her moment.

EMILY

Hey... Lexi, there's actually something I need to tell you about James...

Suddenly, a STUDENT slips on a spilled drink behind them – FULL BODY WIPEOUT. Books fly. Someone claps. Laughter ripples. Lexi laughs and instinctively helps the student up.

LEXI

Oh my god, are you okay?

STUDENT

I'm okay... my pride though- not so much.

The moment's gone. They start walking again.

LEXI

So... what were you saying about James?

Emily opens her mouth then closes it.

EMILY

Nothing... We can talk later.

Lexi smiles, unaware.

LEXI

Yeah, sounds good.

Emily forces a smile, but the guilt sits heavy as they walk off.
Emily glances back down the hallway where Wes disappeared.

CUT TO BLACK

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD / BLEACHERS - NIGHT

Friday night lights. The crowd is ELECTRIC. The marching band in full swing. Cheerleaders tumbling, flipping, loud cheers.

EXT. ON THE FIELD - NIGHT

James in full huddle with the team.

JAMES

Alright! Coach wants a run, but we're doing this my way. Play action, up the gut...

James points to a WIDE RECEIVER.

JAMES

(continued)

You run a slant. I'll pump fake once. The safety will hesitate and you dash for the endzone. The ball will be there.

The whole team yells BREAK! The team lines up in an I formation. James yells out a few fake huts then the center snaps the ball. James fakes the hand off, drops back, pumps fakes, FIRES and TOUCHDOWN. The stadium EXPLODES. James rips off his helmet, hyped, throwing a fist in the air, jumping, and riding the roar. He sprints toward the SIDELINE.

IN THE BLEACHERS

Wes and Emily sit in the front row. Wes watches very analytical with Emily beside him, clapping ironically.

EMILY

James seems more on point tonight.

WES

He's been having me watch films of other teams and analyzing their defenses. Pretty simple really.

James RUNS straight toward them.

JAMES

(grinning, breathless)

You see that!? That was exactly what you said. They bit on the fake.

WES

Because they're predictable.

James laughs, pumped.

JAMES

God, I love your brain.

Emily raises an eyebrow, suspicious. Lexi jogs over from the sidelines, glowing with post-routine adrenaline.

LEXI

Hey Wes!

Wes turns – softens instantly.

WES

Hey Lexi.

James recognizes he's not acknowledged and tries to steal the spotlight.

JAMES

Did you see that pass? I totally read the defense!

LEXI

(distracted)

Yeah.

Lexi's eyes stay on Wes.

LEXI

I didn't know you watched football.

WES

I've been trying to learn.

Lexi laughs genuinely.

LEXI

That's fair.

James steps closer, trying to reclaim ground.

JAMES

I've been teaching him about...

Lexi cuts off James and continues talking to Wes.

LEXI

You're always so laid back and carefree. I love that for you.

Wes enjoys the compliments, smiles. James starts showing frustration.

JAMES

Wes! What the fuck are you doing!?

Wes turns, acknowledging James anger.

WES

I'm talking. Chill.

Lexi bats her eyes at Wes, full flirtatious.

LEXI

You're just so easy to talk to.

James exhales sharply and forces a tight smile toward Wes.

JAMES

Get your shit together and remember why you're even here.

Wes tenses up.

WES

Get back out there with your team.

James laughs, shakes his head, then PUNCHES Wes's shoulder. Wes holds his shoulder in pain. Emily instantly, without hesitation steps between them and SHOVES James.

EMILY

Back off, you testosterone fueled neanderthal!

Lexi looks threatened, scared. Emily looks defensive, confident, and tough. James ignores her.

JAMES

I'm not paying you to flirt with her! You're supposed to be helping ME get the girl.

Everything STOPS. Silence. The crowd nearby senses tension and anger.

LEXI

(confused)

Paying him?

Wes steps back, afraid. Emily in full flight or fight mode.

WES

Please stop.

James is spiraling now. Adrenaline + jealousy + ego.

JAMES

You don't get to play dumb now. We had a deal!
You got paid half to start and the other half
when you're finished.

Dead silence. Lexi looks distraught. Emily sits, softening with dread and fear.

LEXI

What is this? A joke?

Wes looks at Lexi realizing she's already connected all the dots.

LEXI

(continued)

You took a bribe to manipulate me?

Wes swallows.

WES

I—

LEXI

(interrupting, angry)

You let him pay you to study me and then just casually inserted yourself into my life?

WES

I didn't mean to—

LEXI

(interrupting again)

To what? To feel safe around you?

Wes swallows hard with regret.

LEXI

(continued)

To trust you?

James tries to jump back in.

JAMES

Lexi...

LEXI

(sharp)

Don't speak.

Lexi turns to Emily now.

LEXI

You don't even look surprised! Did you know about this!?

Emily nods, devastated.

EMILY

I tried to tell you earlier, but I froze.

LEXI

So, I'm just a game to you three? Great...

She turns back to Wes - voice steady, worse than yelling.

LEXI

You're the worst part, I actually believed you were different.

James shifts, uncomfortable. Lexi meets James's eyes.

LEXI

And you- I'd expect this from you.

That stings more than anger.

LEXI

But Wes?

She shakes her head.

LEXI

That's on me.

She steps back. The crowd ERUPTS again - another play - oblivious.

LEXI

I hope whatever this was worth to you... was worth losing me.

She turns and walks toward the tunnel. Emily watches her go, shattered. James exhales.

JAMES

Fuck...

Wes doesn't move. The crowd ROARS at the game still in play. Wes has never felt more alone.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. STARBUCKS - NEXT MORNING

Morning rush. Too bright. Too loud. Espresso machines scream like dying animals. Wes and Emily stand in line. Same clothes as last night. They look wrecked – but quieter now. Hungover without alcohol. Wes stares ahead, trying to focus.

Wes POV - Normally: tapping foot means impatience, crossed arms means defensiveness, leaning in means interest.

But today, it's all noise. Wes squints. Tries again. Nothing sticks. Emily watches him spiral.

EMILY

Why do you keep squinting? You look like the sun is attacking you.

Wes ignores her. Emily pulls back and shows empathy.

EMILY

(continued)

Okay, other than the obvious textbook self-loathing, which I am right there with you, what else is going on?

Wes doesn't look at her.

WES

It's like static.

Emily blinks and answers confused.

EMILY

What is static?

WES

I can't read anyone. I look at people and it's just — gestures. No patterns. No tells.

He glances around again.

EMILY

Okay, well stop it because you look ridiculous and it's kind of embarrassing.

WES

I've never had this happen before.

Emily considers this — then smirks, gently.

EMILY

Welcome to normal people ville.

Wes exhales despite himself.

WES

I think I'm broke.

Emily tilts her head.

EMILY

Or maybe you can't analyze your way out of guilt.

Wes nods — slow, honest.

WES

Every time I think about her... everything
scrambles.

Beat.

EMILY

Yeah. Turns out feelings are kind of a design
flaw.

They move forward in line. Emily softens and takes
responsibility.

EMILY

I should've told her.

Wes looks at her.

EMILY

(continued)

I knew it was wrong, but I still chose comfort.

She hates admitting that. The BARISTA calls out.

BARISTA

Next!

They step up. Wes opens his mouth, but nothing.

BARISTA

What can I get you?

Wes panics. Overthinks. Emily sees it immediately and intervenes.

EMILY

He'll have a black coffee and I'll take whatever fixes regret.

Barista blinks confused.

BARISTA

Oat milk latte?

EMILY

Sure. That sounds like personal growth.

They step aside. Wes stares at her.

WES

You didn't even hesitate.

Emily shrugs.

EMILY

No worries, I got you.

A beat. Something shifts between them.

WES

I don't know how to fix this.

Emily meets his eyes.

EMILY

(serious)

Because neither of us get to FIX anything.

Wes nods. That hurts. It should.

EMILY

(continued)

But we CAN decide who we are next.

Their drinks are called. Emily grabs them.

EMILY

(continued)

Come on, actions have consequences.

Wes follows – powerless, honest, changed. They walk over to a table and sit across from each other.

WES

Do you think we should text her?

EMILY

(sarcastic)

Oh absolutely, let's text her. Nothing says I value your trust like a little digital reminder that we trashed it yesterday. We're probably just tombstone emojis in her phone.

WES

Tombstone emojis?

EMILY

Obviously. We're dead to her, genius.

INT. GYM – SAME TIME MORNING

Lexi is on the treadmill, headphones in, water bottle on treadmill, checking her phone repeatedly. Sweat glistens. Focused... but distracted.

Kara struts in with a FRIEND, spotting Lexi. She smirks.

KARA

Oh wow, checking your phone more than you run?

Lexi forces a small smile, keeps moving.

LEXI

(short of breath)

I... I just want to see if, you know... everything's okay.

KARA

Everything's okay? You mean that trio of idiots that just played with your head? Wes, James, and... that emo girl?

Lexi hesitates, protective.

LEXI

Emily didn't do anything... and Wes—he didn't mean it like that.

KARA

(laughing)

Didn't mean it? Girl, please. He helped James to manipulate you. That's not some little misunderstanding.

Lexi's slows the treadmill and hops off.

LEXI

I know it was wrong, but I just want to forgive and move on.

Kara scoffs, arms crossed.

KARA

Forgive? Seriously? They basically turned your life into a game, and you're thinking forgiveness?

Lexi glances down at her phone again.

LEXI

I know Wes didn't mean to hurt me. I blame James more than anyone. When I'm around Wes, I feel seen, comfortable, like I can finally be myself. And Emily... she's the only person I actually trusted here.

Kara rolls her eyes but smirks a little.

KARA

You're absolutely insane.

Lexi exhales, determined, and starts running again. Kara shakes her head and walks off with the friend.

FRIEND

Some people must really love abuse.

KARA

Can we say daddy issues?

Kara and her friend laugh. Lexi steals one last glance at her phone, she pulls up Emily's name to text and sees typing bubbles

appear and quickly stop with no message. Lexi smiles and quickly drops her smile to a disappointed frown.

LEXI

(muttering)

Typical... overthinking everything, as usual.

FADE OUT.

INT. STARBUCKS - MORNING CONTINUED

Emily starts typing a message to Lexi and it displays on the screen, hey, can we talk about last night? Then immediately erases the message and sighs.

WES

What did you say? What did she say?

EMILY

She said nothing.

Wes knows Emily better than anyone. He gets a glimpse back of his social observant skills. He notices Emily depressed, stressed out, over stimulated.

WES

Because you never sent the text.

Emily nods, she knows she can't get anything past Wes. She sips her coffee and contemplates life.

INT. CAMPUS WALKWAY - LATE MORNING

Wes and Emily walk side by side, coffee in hand, heads low, and quietly processing.

They pass Lexi, moving briskly with books tucked under her arm. She notices Wes, eyes meet, and immediately she looks down.

Wes is caught off guard, no insight, static. He doesn't analyze it - he just feels it.

Emily notices. A subtle nudge.

Lexi keeps walking and produces a quick smile. Emily steps forward.

EMILY

Hey.

Lexi slows, turns. Her expression is neutral but open.

LEXI

Hey.

Emily keeps it light.

EMILY

We're still alive. Luckily, coffee still works.

Emily lifts her cup slightly. Lexi lets out a soft real smile.

LEXI

Glad to hear it.

Lexi glances at Wes. A brief pause. Wes smiles back — restrained, sincere.

LEXI

See you around?

WES

Yeah. Definitely.

Lexi nods and continues on. Wes watches her go relieved but mixed with something heavier. Emily smirks.

EMILY

Not bad for a scrambled psychic.

WES

I don't even know how to read that.

EMILY

(sincere)

You don't need to. Not today.

EMILY

(continued)

I'm here.

Wes looks at her. Really looks.

WES

Thanks.

They keep walking toward class.

FADW OUT.

EXT. CAMPUS - BENCH - MIDDAY

A quiet stretch of campus. Sun out. Students passing, distant laughter. Emily sits alone on a bench, headphones on. Heavy metal hums faintly – aggressive but controlled.

A book open in her lap, unread.

She looks different. Still Emily – but steadier. Less armor.

Lexi approaches slowly, but hesitates.

Emily senses someone. Pulls one earcup off.

They lock eyes.

A beat.

LEXI

Mind if I sit?

Emily nods. Lexi sits, leaving a polite space between them. Silence, but not awkward. Emily finally speaks carefully.

EMILY

So... (beat) We do the awkward thing now, right?

Lexi studies her hands.

LEXI

Yeah, but I don't want excuses.

Emily nods with acceptance.

EMILY

You deserved better than silence. I chose comfort over conflict.

LEXI

You were the one person I trusted most. Not because you were nice... Because you were real, you showed up, you were present.

Emily saddens and swallows her guilt.

LEXI

(continued)

The laughs we shared were real. I finally felt connected with someone who appreciated me for me.

Emily's voice cracks, but she owns her mistakes.

EMILY

I know. I was wrong.

Lexi finally looks at her.

LEXI

Yeah. (beat) You were.

Emily nods.

A Beat.

EMILY

I don't expect you to ever forgive me. But I do want you to know that I never meant to hurt you.

Lexi considers this. Long moment.

LEXI

I know. (beat) That's what made it worse.

Emily puts her head down in shame.

LEXI

(continued)

But... I also see that you're not who they are.

Emily looks up, surprised.

LEXI

(continued)

I'm not ready to trust you like before. But I don't hate you.

Emily nods – grateful, restrained.

EMILY

That's more than fair.

A beat. Something loosens. James struts behind them, Kara proudly glued to his arm.

KARA

Some of us know how to have a good time.

James laughs trying to sell it. They keep walking.

A second of silence and shock. Emily and Lexi look at each other and process it.

Then – Lexi busts out laughing. Emily breaks first, shaking her head.

EMILY

Well.

LEXI

Yeah.

EMILY

Didn't see that coming.

Lexi laughs now, real and unburdened.

LEXI

God no... oddly enough though, they're kind perfect for each other.

They sit there a moment longer, but in comfort. Emily puts her headphones back on but pauses and offers one earcup to Lexi.

LEXI

What is this?

EMILY

Productive anger.

Lexi smirks and takes it. They sit together. Music shared. Past behind them.

FADE OUT.

INT. WES' APARTMENT - NIGHT

A small messy lived-in apartment. Messy in a way that suggests thinking more than living.

Wes sits on the couch, half-watching something he's not absorbing. Phone face-down. Brain fried.

A KNOCK comes from the door. He doesn't move at first.

Another KNOCK, but funny and unique.

Wes immediately knows that knock must be Emily.

WES

(loud)

Very funny Emily.

Emily shouts through the door.

EMILY

Are you going to let me in or do I need to talk
through a door?

Wes sighs, exhausted. He gets up and opens the door.

Emily stands there.

But— She looks different.

Natural brown hair. No heavy makeup. No punk armor. Just...
herself.

Wes freezes. A beat too long.

Emily recognizes it instantly and throws a quick WAVE.

EMILY

Hi, still me here.

Wes stumbles on words.

WES

I... You... like?

Wes shakes his head stunned. Emily smirks.

EMILY

Go ahead. Say it.

WES

You look...

Emily interrupts and finishes his sentence.

EMILY

Normal?

WES

Different?

EMILY

(sarcastic)

Well, thank you Sherlock Holmes.

She steps past him into the apartment, casually and comfortable. Wes closes the door behind them and turns toward her.

WES

I just mean... Your hair. Your face. The-
everything.

Emily turns, studying him.

EMILY

Relax. I didn't get abducted by a cult.

WES

I wasn't thinking about a cult.

She looks around, then sits on the arm of the couch.

EMILY

Don't worry, same personality.. just less eyeliner.

A long silent beat as Wes's mind finally slows, he notices, and feels rather than analyzes.

WES

Good. I was worried for a second.

Emily chuckles.

EMILY

Please. I already know how you work.

Wes nods because she's right.

WES

Why are you here?

Emily's tone shifts. Still light - but real.

EMILY

Because you've been spiraling and too oblivious
to read the obvious in front of you.

Wes exhales. Looks down.

WES

I screwed up.

Emily stands and steps closer.

EMILY

Yeah, you did... We did. (beat) But that's not why
I'm here.

Wes looks up.

EMILY

(continued)

You need to hear this before you turn yourself
into the villain.

WES

I kind of am.

EMILY

No. That's not who you are.

WES

That sounds like something people say to make someone feel better.

Emily steps directly in front of him now and gently takes his wrist.

EMILY

Stop.

A beat.

EMILY

I'm saying it because you're the first person who actually saw me... and didn't try to fix me.

Wes feels that.

EMILY

(continued)

You didn't flinch at the hair. The makeup. The tattoos.

She lets go of Wes and gestures to herself.

EMILY

(continued)

You accepted me like I wasn't a performance you'd get tired of.

Wes frowns, concerned.

EMILY

(continued)

I didn't dress like that because I loved it.
(beat) I was hiding it.

She lets that sit.

EMILY

(continued)

Hiding from being overlooked. From being
dismissed. From being normal and STILL not
chosen.

Wes swallows.

WES

Emily...

EMILY

Let me finish.

She takes a deep breath.

EMILY

(continued)

You didn't make me better by being perfect.

Emily smiles.

EMILY

(continued)

You made me better by being honest.

WES

I don't feel like I deserve that credit.

EMILY

That's how I know you're growing.

Wes finally smiles.

EMILY

(continued)

I don't need attention anymore. I don't need to
be loud to be seen.

Their eyes lock.

EMILY

(continued)

I just need someone who actually looks at me.
(beat) And stays.

Silence. Heavy. Earned.

WES

I don't know how to make things right.

Emily steps closer — no space now.

EMILY

You don't have to. Just be better than yesterday.

A beat.

Emily lightens the conversation.

EMILY

(continued)

Plus, you still owe me for emotionally imploding at Starbucks.

WES

You ordered for me.

EMILY

And I will again. Anytime.

Emily studies Wes.

EMILY

(continued)

Just so you know, this is the part where you stop thinking... (beat) and just kiss me already.

Something undeniable now, Not rushed, Not dramatic, Just right.
Wes leans in and kisses her as the scene fades out.

FADE OUT.

EXT. CAMPUS FOOTBALL FIELD - EVENING / DUSK

The sky is painted in golds and purples. Cheer practice has just ended. Lexi wipes sweat from her brow, gathers her gear, a little tired. The field is quiet.

Wes approaches from the walkway, confident but calm. He carries no notebook, no pretense – just himself.

WES

Lexi. Can we talk for a minute?

Lexi glances up, sees him approaching. Hesitates – wary but curious.

LEXI

Sure.

Wes stops a few feet away. He takes a deep breath, collects himself.

WES

I just wanted to say I'm sorry. About everything.
I was stupid.

Lexi studies him. There's a pause – heavy with honesty.

LEXI

Thank you. That means a lot. I appreciate you saying it.

Wes nods, quietly relieved.

WES

I fucked up.

Lexi smiles softly, genuine – not triumph, just understanding.

LEXI

I get it. Everyone makes mistakes. There's bigger problems in life to worry about.

They share a quiet moment of mutual respect. Wes's shoulders relax; he exhales.

From the walkway, a figure approaches – Emily, hair back to its natural color, clean and polished, casual but confident. She carries a coffee cup, a subtle smile on her lips. Lexi notices immediately.

LEXI

Wow. (beat) You look amazing.

Emily smirks.

EMILY

Yeah. Turns out punk rock wasn't a permanent personality.

Wes looks at her.

WES

Don't worry, her personality hasn't changed.

Lexi and Emily laugh softly.

She reaches out. Wes naturally takes her hand.

Wes nods, bye. They start walking off together, hand in hand.
The sun dips lower, casting long golden shadows.

Lexi watches them go, a mix of awe and happiness on her face.

She turns, gathering her gear, a quiet smile on her lips –
satisfied and ready to move on.

FADE OUT.