

Second Chances

written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. CHICAGO, ILLINOIS - DAY

Establishing.

INT. BIG BOX STORE - DAY

DANIELLE CROSS (45, eight months pregnant) pushes a shopping cart full of baby toys towards a cash register. She's an All-American blonde in a larger maternity dress. Danielle stops and takes a deep, long breath.

ETHAN (O.S.)

Not now!

She looks down to see her husband ETHAN CROSS (45) dive between her legs with his hands positioned to catch something.

He's tall and handsome in a dorkish way.

She sighs.

Ethan gets to his feet, groaning in pain.

DANIELLE

He's not going to fall out.

ETHAN

He could.

Danielle shakes her head. They walk to the Register.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

An SUV is parked next to an older Ford Mustang.

Danielle and Ethan walk to them, pushing the shopping cart.

DANIELLE

My boss asked about the beast.

ETHAN

It's one major repair away, OK?

She stops in her tracks.

Ethan pretends to dive.

Danielle laughs uncontrollably.

DANIELLE

What are we having for dinner tonight? I'm in the mood for wings.

He looks at her oddly.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

The doctor wants to do another ultrasound this week, too.

(beat)

Everything's fine but it's the final trimester.

ETHAN

I'll bring some wings home.

They reach the cars.

The trunk of the SUV opens.

Ethan loads it up with their purchases.

They lightly kiss.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

When am I supposed to stop being impossibly terrified about this?

Danielle thinks for a moment.

DANIELLE

College, I think.

He closes the trunk.

EXT. VIDEO RENTAL STORE - DAY

Movie posters from popular and obscure films of the past 40 years are in the window.

A sign indicates the store has been in business since 1979.

A Chicken Wing Shop, a Bodega, and a Tanning Salon are all within walking distance.

The Mustang parks in front. Ethan exits.

Real Estate Investor JAMES BRIGHTON (55, pudgy) approaches Ethan. An expensive suit is tailored to his thin frame.

JAMES

Mister Cross, I presume.

ETHAN
Can I help you?

James hands Ethan his business card.

JAMES
I didn't think places like this
still existed.

ETHAN
I think we might be the only one
left in the Midwest.

JAMES
And sitting on some prime real
estate, too.

Ethan looks at it and then at James.

ETHAN
You're not the first.

JAMES
I was hoping I'd be the last.

ETHAN
The store's not for sale.

Ethan tosses the card to the ground and walks inside.

INT. VIDEO RENTAL STORE - DAY

Framed movie posters of famous and obscure movies are on every wall. Some are signed.

Framed photos of Ethan, Danielle, his PARENTS, various FAMILY MEMBERS, ACTORS, and DIRECTORS from the last 50 years cover the walls.

A photo in the middle of Danielle and Ethan holding a clacker with "Expecting" is in the middle of all of them.

DVDs and VHS Tapes as far as the eye can see sorted by genre and decade... enough to make even the most dedicated cinephile cream their shorts.

A large TV on one wall plays a loud action film.

Store clerk and film school student SYLVESTER "BRICK" BRYKOWSKI (20) is behind the counter, typing on a laptop.

He's short with a wispy beard and a baseball cap that says "Taxation is Theft."

Ethan walks in and straight to the counter.

Brick looks up. He points around.

Ethan's eyes glance all over the store.

It's empty.

ETHAN

Can you watch something good?

BRICK

Skyscraper is an American classic!

ETHAN

I thought you film dorks were into snooty French films.

BRICK

Stereotypes, yo.

ETHAN

(points to a shelf with
Criterion films)

I've got every Criterion release
and you spend your time with such
classics as Green Bay Samurai.

BRICK

Another classic!

Ethan motions to the laptop.

ETHAN

What's this one about?

BRICK

A bodybuilder fucks up his life.

ETHAN

Isn't that Pain and Gain?

BRICK

It's more focused on the nature of
toxic masculinity and the modern-
day manosphere, with its effects on
a generation of boys.

ETHAN

Do the steroids turn him evil?

BRICK

I did a lot of research and you'd be surprised how many times someone uses them and then becomes this total whack job.

ETHAN

When it comes out on DVD, we'll make sure to stock it.

BRICK

I don't even have a final draft!

ETHAN

I've got faith in you, Brick!

Ethan walks into his office.

ETHAN'S OFFICE

Framed posters of older action movies are all over.

Ethan's best friend LUKE (45, CPA) does the books for the store on an old desktop computer.

Luke is tall, dark, and handsome with womanizer vibes emanating off of him.

KNOCK KNOCK!

Luke looks up to see Ethan walk in.

ETHAN

How does it look?

Luke shakes his hand.

LUKE

Not good.

Ethan sits down across from Luke.

ETHAN

It's never good.

LUKE

You're about to hit the point where you might want to start considering an exit strategy.

ETHAN

This place has been in my family for almost fifty years.

LUKE

And you outlasted everyone else.
You can close out as the last man
standing and no one will complain.

ETHAN

It's still profitable.

Luke looks around.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

It still breaks even.

EXT. VIDEO RENTAL STORE - NIGHT

Ethan walks out.

A pair of YOUTUBERS film the store.

ETHAN

Can I help you?

They turn to him.

YOUTUBER 1

Brick said we could film here.

Ethan thinks for a moment.

ETHAN

The Chicago Weird people.

YOUTUBER 1

It's the Oddities of Chicago and we
have two million subscribers!

The second YouTuber aims his camera at Ethan.

YOUTUBER 1 (CONT'D)

Would you mind?

ETHAN

Of course.

The first YouTuber motions for the camera to roll.

YOUTUBER 1

Can you tell us who you are? Just
for the record.

ETHAN

I'm Ethan Cross, the owner of
Gray's Movies.

YOUTUBER 1

Who's Gray?

ETHAN

That was my father. He died and I took the place over.

YOUTUBER 1

Is it true this is the very first video rental store in Chicago?

ETHAN

First in Illinois, actually, and third in the Midwest.

(thinks)

A Blockbuster in Lansing, Michigan, opened up the week before we did.

YOUTUBER 1

What's the one bit of trivia that you'd like everyone to remember?

ETHAN

Every Mayor in this city, up to Rahm, used to rent movies here.

YOUTUBER 1

Who had the weirdest tastes?

Ethan thinks.

ETHAN

Mayor Washington loved movies. At one point I think he may have rented everything in here.

YOUTUBER 1

The Wikipedia for this place says two murders have happened.

Ethan points to his right.

ETHAN

Joey "The Clown" Gandolfi was shot there. He was a low-level foot soldier for the Outfit.

(points left)

Peter "Bones" Bonafucci was stabbed there. He was another Outfit guy.

(smiles)

Those are not even the best stories to come out of here.

YOUTUBER 1
What's the best one?

ETHAN
When I was in high school, a pair of Aldermen got into a fist-fight over who was more attractive in a movie: Diane Keaton in "Annie Hall" and Phoebe Cates in "Fast Times."

YOUTUBER 2
No way!

ETHAN
My dad got three grand not to leak it to the news.

YOUTUBER 1
How does it feel to own a place with so much history?

ETHAN
That's a great question.

INT. CHICKEN JOINT - NIGHT

Framed photos of various LOCAL CELEBRITIES eating chicken wings from the past 50 years litter the walls.

Ethan walks in and looks around.

A dozen FOOD DELIVERY DRIVERS wait around.

The owner, HAROLD (75), spots him from the grill and motions for him to walk over. He's tall with white hair and a beard.

GRILL

Six baskets of wings are in various states of being fried.

Ethan walks over.

Harold sauces up some wings.

ETHAN
How long for three pounds of the Devil's Taint?

Harold points to the Drivers.

HAROLD
It'll be a little while.

Harold places some wings into a Styrofoam box. He places it on the counter and grabs a basket of wings. His eyes spot a rack of sauces with crude labels on them.

ETHAN

What happened to the kid who used to run the register?

Harold grabs one marked "Hermes Lung." He expertly tosses some into a pan. His fingers gracefully open the bottle and sauce them. He gently swirls them back and forth.

HAROLD

He asked for \$30 an hour.

ETHAN

Brick just asked for free rentals.

HAROLD

Some things can't be measured in a dollar amount, I suppose.

Harold places some wings into a Styrofoam box. He places it on the counter.

A Driver looks and grabs it.

HAROLD (CONT'D)

Guadalupe just sold the salon. She is moving to Florida.

ETHAN

I'm getting offers now, too.

Harold grabs a basket of wings. His eyes turn to the sauce rack. He grabs a bottle marked "Satan's Taint."

HAROLD

My kid wants to sell this, like to grocery stores and shit. He says it could be my legacy.

(points to the photos)

I'll settle for that and my family.

ETHAN

You should listen to him.

EXT. TOWNHOME - NIGHT

The Mustang parks on the street.

Ethan exits with a large bucket of chicken wings.

INT. TOWNHOME - NIGHT

Framed photos of Ethan and Danielle from over the last two decades together are on the walls.

Ethan walks in.

Danielle sits at a fully set kitchen table.

DANIELLE
How was work?

ETHAN
Slow.

He sits down across from her.

DANIELLE
It's always slow.

ETHAN
It'll turn around.

She grabs the bucket and opens it up. Her nose sniffs.

DANIELLE
My mom said its my pregnancy hormones kicking in.

ETHAN
Did she have a weird craving?

DANIELLE
Chocolate chip cookie dough mint ice cream.

Ethan thinks for a moment.

ETHAN
Do they make that?

DANIELLE
It was only at the Woodman's out in the suburbs and she made my father drive to it at one in the morning.

ETHAN
I can't imagine Mike doing that.

DANIELLE
It's hormones because these taste better than they smell.

He eats.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)
I put everything into the room.

ETHAN
When are we going to assemble it?

DANIELLE
My mother said we're not supposed
to until after he's born.

BEDROOM (LATER)

Danielle and Ethan get into bed.

She quickly falls asleep.

His hand rubs her back. He smiles and then goes to sleep.

KITCHEN (NEXT MORNING)

Danielle drinks orange juice, her eyes focused on a social media app on her cell phone.

Ethan walks in and brews a fresh cup of coffee on a Keurig.

ETHAN
So who said something stupid?

DANIELLE
Your cousin Mindy.

He curses under his breath.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)
She's talking about politics on
Facebook and... yeah.

ETHAN
How bad is it?

DANIELLE
To the left of Tucker Carlson but
the right of Joe Rogan.

Ethan grabs the coffee and opens the fridge. His hand yanks out a big bottle of creamer. He pours some in it.

ETHAN
This is technically an improvement.

DANIELLE
I want to block her but--

ETHAN
Just keep scrolling.

DANIELLE
She's your cousin... can't you say something to her?

ETHAN
I remember when she was a stripper when we were in our twenties.

DANIELLE
No way.

ETHAN
She danced at a truck stop for two years and then she had Hunter.

DANIELLE
So being an online preacher is what, an improvement?

ETHAN
Better than a gas station, right?

Danielle laughs.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
What is she saying... specifically?

DANIELLE
It's two steps from let's go burn the homos.

Ethan takes a sip.

ETHAN
If I say something, we're probably going to get banned from family functions for a couple of years.

DANIELLE
Someone should.

ETHAN
Just mute her and move on.

INT. VIDEO RENTAL STORE - DAY

Ethan looks at Brick's laptop.

Brick wanders the aisles.

ETHAN
 You should go by just Brick instead
 of Sylvester. Be like McG or
 Director X or--

BRICK
 That is pretentious.

KELLY (O.S.)
 Just the man I need.

Ethan's college girlfriend KELLY RAUCCI (44) walks in. She's tall with long, dark hair.

ETHAN
 Hey stranger.

KELLY
 Do you know a film called Mandalfo?
 It's a kid's cartoon thingie.

ETHAN
 We have it!

Ethan walks over to the Children's Aisle.

Kelly follows him.

CHILDREN'S AISLE

Ethan goes through and finds Mandalfo. It's a Swiss children's film from the 1970s.

ETHAN
 I can't remember the last time this
 was rented. It's a super underrated
 classic, too.

KELLY
 My son needs it and the only place
 we could find it was on eBay from a
 sketchy vendor in Pakistan. I was
 going to call you but--

ETHAN
 No need to apologize.

KELLY
 Danielle's going to pop any day.

ETHAN
 Any advice?

KELLY

You're going to really miss sleep
after a while.

ETHAN

So I've been told.

KELLY

We need it--

ETHAN

Return it when you're done. I'll
make sure Brick waves the late
charges for it.

Ethan grabs the DVD and walks up to the counter.

Kelly follows him.

COUNTER

Brick quickly rings her up.

ETHAN

How's Chad?

KELLY

Happily unemployed.

ETHAN

That doesn't sound good.

Kelly hands Brick \$5.

KELLY

For better or worse, right?

ETHAN

Right.

Kelly takes the movie and leaves.

Brick watches her posterior closely as she leaves.

Ethan lightly smacks him.

BRICK

What?

ETHAN

She's a friend.

BRICK
And she's hot.

ETHAN
You didn't date her, I did.

BRICK
I can't picture you and her.

ETHAN
We were different back then. One moment we're in the bathroom of a Starbucks and she's screaming so loudly a police officer broke the door down. And then the next moment the police showed up at my dorm room because we were fighting so loudly that half the floor was scared of the screaming.

Ethan's eyes turn back to Brick's laptop.

BRICK
So she's the one that got away? I'm trying to figure out a context.

ETHAN
She's just someone I used to know in a much different way. Her husband is very nice, too, and we've all had dinner together.

BRICK
That's... very adult.

ETHAN
There comes a point where the who you are and the who you were are so different that sometimes you don't recognize that person. It'll happen to you.

Danielle walks in.

Brick yawns.

BRICK
I'm going to get a Monster from the corner store.

Ethan gives him a thumbs up.

Danielle walks up to the counter.

DANIELLE
Hey Brick.

BRICK
Misses Cross.

Brick leaves.

DANIELLE
Misses Cross makes me sound like an
old woman.

ETHAN
We're not young, for the record.

DANIELLE
You're middle-aged and I'm still in
the prime of my life.

He chuckles.

ETHAN
Is everything OK?

DANIELLE
I got a call about this place at
work and--

ETHAN
We're not selling.

DANIELLE
Luke sent me the tax filings.

Ethan looks around.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)
I'm with you, either way, but my
name is on everything too.

Ethan points to the horror movie section.

ETHAN
That's where I first saw you.

Danielle points to the romantic comedy section.

DANIELLE
We talked there and--

ETHAN
I first saw you looking at some
cheesy 80s slasher. You looked...
so impossibly beautiful.

DANIELLE

It was just a T-shirt and jeans.

She shakes her head.

ETHAN

I grew up in this place with my dad. I want Ethan Junior to have those same memories with me.

DANIELLE

I thought we settled on Brock Allen for him.

ETHAN

I want to have our family photo on the wall, too.

DANIELLE

And I need to get back to work.

ETHAN

I love you.

DANIELLE

I love you too.

They lightly kiss. Danielle leaves.

INT. SUV - DAY (DRIVING)

Danielle is behind the wheel. She turns the radio on. A rock song comes on. Out of the corner of her eye, she sees a semi-truck barreling towards her. Her eyes open wide.

FADE OUT.

OVER BLACK:

SFX: The sickening thud of a semi-truck hitting the SUV.

FADE IN:

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY (1 WEEK LATER)

Danielle's headstone lists her as a beloved wife.

The remnants of a funeral are all around it.

Her grave is filled in.

Ethan stares at the headstone. His eyes are beyond puffy.

Luke comes up to Ethan. He puts his arm around him.

LUKE

When you're ready.

ETHAN

You don't have to.

LUKE

I've got nowhere else to be.

ETHAN

Thanks, man.

Ethan takes a deep breath. His phone buzzes. He takes it out and looks at it.

"Ultrasound with Danielle."

Several tears come down Ethan's face.

Luke grips him closely.

LUKE

They're in a better place.

Ethan sobs uncontrollably.

INT. TOWNHOME - DAY

Ethan walks in and looks around. He takes a deep breath.

BABY ROOM

All of the baby stuff that Ethan and Danielle bought is in a corner. The receipt is on top of it.

Ethan walks in and looks around. He closes the door.

BEDROOM

Ethan lies down in bed. His hand reaches over to Danielle's side and feels around. Nothing.

DISSOLVE TO:

BEDROOM (1 YEAR LATER)

Ethan is in bed, staring at the ceiling. He has a beard now.

ETHAN
Maximum effort.

He gets out of bed and walks out.

KITCHEN

Empty takeout dishes, some a month old, are on the table.

Ethan walks in and makes a cup of coffee. His phone buzzes with a text from Luke.

"Hey buddy, need you to sign off on the taxes."

LIVING ROOM

A FedEx envelope is by the door.

Ethan (freshly showered) walks to the door and spots it. He opens it up and looks inside.

An offer for the store is in there.

He sighs and walks out.

EXT. TOWNHOME - DAY

James is next to Ethan's Mustang.

JAMES
Mister Cross!

Ethan groans.

ETHAN
Do you know what all of the other
guys like you have done when I told
them to fuck off?

JAMES
They fucked off?

Ethan gets into his Mustang.

James watches Ethan drive away.

INT. VIDEO RENTAL STORE - DAY

Brick types on his laptop. He looks up to see:

BAD ACTION MOVIE SECTION

CINDY (30, actress) looks through an assortment of bad, 1990s direct-to-video action thrillers. She's a curvy redhead.

CINDY

Do you guys have Skyscraper?

Brick perks up.

BRICK

Which one?

CINDY

The good one.

BRICK

Please tell me you don't mean the one with The Rock in it.

She laughs.

CINDY

I'm prepping for a movie and the director told me to watch it.

BRICK

Umm... I don't want to ask but--

CINDY

The character I'm playing is a riff on Zarkov and I can't find it on any of the streaming services.

BRICK

If you're looking to play a heavy there are a dozen films we have here, easy, that are much better fits.

Ethan walks past them and into the office.

BRICK (CONT'D)

I based something I wrote off it.

(beat)

I'm trying to be a screenwriter.

CINDY
Don't say trying. You're just not
in the WGA yet.

BRICK
One could wish, right?

CINDY
What's your script about?

BRICK
It's a crime thriller with a lot of
dark comedy elements.
(beat)
Right now it's just not good enough
to be out there.

CINDY
I thought the same thing... I took
classes for a long time and never
auditioned. And then one day I said
fuck it and I learned so much that
the classroom doesn't teach you.

ETHAN'S OFFICE

Luke types on the computer.

Ethan sits across from him.

ETHAN
That bad, huh?

Luke takes a deep breath.

LUKE
Your property taxes doubled and
your income didn't.

ETHAN
Danielle's life insurance from work
helped... and the settlement from
the trucking company, too.

Luke looks around.

Ethan takes a deep breath.

LUKE
All good things come to an end.

ETHAN
And this... this can't.

LUKE

Are you happy living this sort of life? Honestly.

Ethan looks around.

ETHAN

This place contains every good memory I've ever had. I don't want to walk by and see some corporate strip mall for tech bros.

LUKE

My grandfather's tailor shop on the West Side is a Starbucks now.

ETHAN

This is just the low point in my hero's arc, that's all.

LUKE

Where's the path to victory?

ETHAN

I'll find one.

LUKE

Then find \$2,500 because that's how much I need to prevent the city from taking the property right now.

MAIN STORE

Cindy and Brick watch a bad 90s action film. They laugh hysterically at it.

CINDY

And they made four of them?

BRICK

They recycled the cast, too, so it became his brother's identical cousin who vowed revenge.

Cindy laughs harder.

BRICK (CONT'D)

My boss says it was the eighties but I don't quite understand why.

CINDY

Cocaine, mostly.

Brick ejects the disc and places it into the rental DVD cover.

They walk to the counter.

COUNTER

Cindy places three DVDs on the counter.

Brick rings her up.

BRICK
It'll be \$15 and it's due next
Wednesday before noon.

She hands him \$20 in cash.

He gives her the change.

Ethan walks in from the office. He and Cindy catch eyes.

There's an impossible attraction between them.

ETHAN
I hope it's something good.

BRICK
Skyscraper, Hawkeye, and the
director's cut of Samurai Cop Two!

ETHAN
I didn't realize there was a
director's cut of that film.

CINDY
I didn't realize there was a
Samurai Cop one.

They look at each for a long moment.

ETHAN
Have a good day.

CINDY
You too.

Cindy walks out.

BRICK
She was hot for an older woman.

ETHAN
How old do you think I am?

Brick shrugs.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
I'm going to grab some wings.

INT. CHICKEN JOINT - DAY

A handful of Food Delivery Drivers wait around.

Ethan walks in and to the counter.

Harold spots him from the grill and motions for him to walk over.

GRILL

Harold expertly sauces some recently cooked wings.

A Driver walks up to the counter.

DELIVERY DRIVER
The app just said the guy canceled his order.

Harold places the wings into a Styrofoam takeout box.

HAROLD
Are they paying for it?

DELIVERY DRIVER
The app said--

Harold hands the wings to Ethan.

The Driver leaves.

ETHAN
How much do I owe you?

HAROLD
Anytime they cancel, I get paid full freight.

ETHAN
Still.

Harold spots a small box of wings and hands it to him.

HAROLD
You can give me twenty for this and I'll call it even.

Ethan sniffs.

HAROLD (CONT'D)
Mango and Peach with a little bit
of an Indian kick.

Ethan grabs the smaller box.

Harold spots Ethan's wedding band.

HAROLD (CONT'D)
It took me a couple of years before
I was comfortable taking mine off.

Ethan looks at his wedding band.

HAROLD (CONT'D)
It gets easier if that helps. You
just have to take a step in the
right direction, that's all.

ETHAN
It's just... so overwhelming.

HAROLD
That's because you're looking at it
as some day something snaps and
life just feels normal. It's like
after you have a heart attack. It
is a new way of life. Neither of
mine were fun but it's a new
everything afterwards.

Ethan looks around.

HAROLD (CONT'D)
Do you want some advice?

ETHAN
Sure.

HAROLD
There comes a point when you take a
small step... you return a gift she
never got, you clean out your
fridge, and you do something that
says it's time. It helps you let
go.

ETHAN
That's just--

HAROLD

You'll always have the memories.
They matter more than stuff.

Ethan nods.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ethan walks up to the fridge and opens it up.

Nothing but takeout containers are inside.

He grabs a garbage bag and places the takeout containers into it. His eyes look at what's left.

An expired bottle of ketchup is the only thing left.

He closes the door and takes a deep breath. His phone buzzes with a text from Luke.

"I'm about to file your taxes and the store's checking account is a little light."

Ethan pulls up his bank account on his phone and looks at it. He has \$1,500 in his checking account and \$105,000 in an account labeled "Money from Danielle." He goes to transfer \$2,000 into his checking but stops.

Images of Danielle and the baby stuff flash through his mind. They land on the receipt: \$2,500.

INT. BABY'S ROOM - NIGHT

All of the boxes are in there.

A thin layer of dust is on all of them.

Ethan opens the door and looks at them. He spots a receipt and places it in his wallet. His hands grab a box.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. BIG BOX STORE, SERVICE DESK - NIGHT

All of the boxes are on the counter.

A STORK CLERK approaches him.

She looks at the boxes and then at Ethan.

He hands her the receipt.

STORE CLERK

We can't take back anything that's been used, sir.

ETHAN

There was a car accident.

The Clerk thinks for a moment. ***It hits her like a truck!***

STORE CLERK

I'm so sorry for your loss.

ETHAN

Please don't cry.

The Clerk wipes her eyes.

Tears come down his. He wipes them away quickly.

The Clerk quickly processes a refund.

INT. MUSTANG - NIGHT

Ethan gets into the car. His keys go into the ignition. His eyes look in the rearview mirror. His phone buzzes with an email from his bank. He pulls it up.

\$3,000 has been credited back into his account.

He takes a deep breath.

ETHAN

That wasn't that bad.

Ethan sends Luke a text: "You up for a drink?"

Luke texts him back: "At Bake's."

Ethan starts the engine. It roars to life.

INT. DIVE BAR - NIGHT

Hasn't been fashionable in several decades.

Luke sits at the counter.

A plate of nachos and several empty beers are in front of him.

Ethan sits down next to him and grabs a nacho.

LUKE

This is the first you've wanted to go out since... the unpleasantness.

ETHAN

That's a nice euphemism.

LUKE

My brother used it to describe his first marriage so it made sense.

ETHAN

I returned all of the baby stuff.

Luke takes a sip of his beer.

LUKE

I didn't realize you still had it.

ETHAN

I got a credit for more than enough to handle everything.

Ethan motions to a BARTENDER for a drink.

The Bartender nods and pours him a beer.

LUKE

Do you know James Brighton?

Ethan curses under his breath.

ETHAN

He will not take no for an answer.

LUKE

He called me at work.

The Bartender hands Ethan the beer.

LUKE (CONT'D)

I'm listed on the property as your service agent. I told him he'd need to contact you about it.

Ethan takes a sip.

ETHAN

Thank you.

Luke takes a bite of the nachos.

LUKE

For the record, video rental stores aren't going to have a resurgence.

ETHAN

They could.

LUKE

Give me one good reason you want to keep fighting for it. I just don't see why this isn't done already.

ETHAN

Every time I walk in there I see the photos of me, my father, and then I remember every good memory I had as a kid started here. I met Danielle here, my mom showed me all of the westerns her dad took her to... I think about it selling it and it's like I'm trading in those memories for dirty money.

Luke takes a long sip of his beer.

LUKE

I want to shit on them but... that isn't the worst set of reasons. It isn't good... but it's not the worst, either.

ETHAN

Part of me thought I'd have the same ones with my kid, too.

LUKE

You'll be able to show any kids you might have photos of the life you had before them.

ETHAN

What if that's not good enough?

LUKE

I think it might not be up to you.

Ethan takes a sip.

ETHAN

Can we talk about something else?

LUKE

The new girl has a friend.

ETHAN

There's always a new girl.

LUKE

It must be my charm, I suppose.

(beat)

She's hot and it's just dinner.

ETHAN

I've dated exactly two women in my life and I'm OK keeping it at that number for now.

LUKE

You should make the Chicken dish that we had six months ago.

ETHAN

It's not a date!

LUKE

It's four friends, that's all.

INT. VIDEO RENTAL STORE - DAY

Brick has ten pages of a script taped onto a whiteboard.

Ethan walks in and looks at it.

Brick turns and looks at Ethan.

BRICK

It's been a little slow.

Ethan looks at the whiteboard.

ETHAN

Where'd you find that?

BRICK

It was in the back behind some boxes full of Laserdiscs.

ETHAN

They were like Blu-rays.

BRICK

Why don't we have them out here?

ETHAN

When Laserdiscs were the top of the food chain technology for movies nobody rented them because the player was hard to find and expensive as all hell.

(beat)

It was the eighties.

Brick shrugs.

BRICK

Are you seeing what I'm seeing?

ETHAN

This guy really says cunt a lot.

BRICK

That's Zyzz.

ETHAN

Why does your hero say that? Some people might be offended.

BRICK

He's from Australia.

Ethan turns to him.

BRICK (CONT'D)

They say that word all the time.

Ethan sighs.

ETHAN

I can see that being an issue.

BRICK

I'm trying to find a way to end this and I can't think of anything.

Ethan turns back to the white board. He looks at the last page and focuses on it.

ETHAN

That's it?

BRICK

It's artistic!

Ethan stops and looks at Brick.

ETHAN

It's bullshit.

Brick looks at him oddly.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

The best endings are the ones you want to rip off! Think of Good Will Hunting and--

BRICK

(imitating Robin Williams)
He stole my line.

ETHAN

The ending isn't the line. It's the idea that Will went after her, the love of his life, and the shrink gets it because he sees part of himself in young Will.

(beat)

Find that sort of subtext and people will vibe with it. Your guy needs to have that moment where his story is complete... not that it's just over and fade to black.

BRICK

And now I want to go back and do a page one rewrite.

ETHAN

You're way too hard on yourself.

BRICK

It's not ready for coverage and--

ETHAN

The good thing is they'll tell you if it's not working and they know what they're talking about, right?

KELLY (O.S.)

Please don't kill me.

Brick turns to see Kelly walk to the counter. She has the children's DVD from last year in her hand.

ETHAN

What's up?

Kelly hands Ethan the DVD.

KELLY

It's a year late and--

ETHAN
 (hands the DVD to Brick)
 Scan it and waive any fees.

KELLY
 We just found it while we were
 moving and--

ETHAN
 I'm heading to Harold's. Are you
 hungry, perchance?

KELLY
 My car's along the way.

Ethan and Kelly walk outside.

EXT. CHICAGO STREET - DAY

Harold's is in the distance.

Kelly and Ethan walk.

KELLY
 He swore he returned it but--

ETHAN
 It's not a big deal.

KELLY
 It was just another lie, you know?

Ethan shrugs.

ETHAN
 Where are you guys moving?

KELLY
 I'm moving to a small condo out in
 Morton Grove.

ETHAN
 I'm always the last to know.

KELLY
 Chad found someone else and--

ETHAN
 I'm sorry.

KELLY
 I was going to stop by but with all
 of the stuff with Danielle--

ETHAN
Her whole family basically stopped
calling after the funeral.

KELLY
I thought they loved you!

ETHAN
I thought about it for a long time
and it's probably one of those what
do you say kind of things.

They reach a small SUV.

KELLY
Chad's family's the same way.

ETHAN
I don't know what's worse.

KELLY
This is me.

They pause.

KELLY (CONT'D)
We should catch up sometime.

ETHAN
A drink or something?

KELLY
I'll text you.

They hug. It starts out lightly and then she grips him
harder. She lets go and looks around.

KELLY (CONT'D)
I'm sorry it's--

ETHAN
Sometimes you just need that.

He walks towards Harold's. She gets into the SUV.

INT. SUV - DAY

Kelly watches Ethan for a moment. A smile comes over her.

EXT. CHICKEN JOINT - DAY

Ethan approaches the entrance.

JAMES (O.S.)

Ethan!

Ethan sighs and turns around.

James walks towards him, a folder in his hand.

ETHAN

I guess I didn't make myself clear.

James hands him the folder.

Ethan opens it up and looks inside.

An offer for his building is in it.

JAMES

I wanted to tell you that one of my competitors has reached out to a pair of Aldermen in his pocket about using eminent domain.

ETHAN

I've had a dozen of guys like you hand me the same folder.

JAMES

It's a fair offer with no bullshit.

ETHAN

What are you going to do with it?

JAMES

This would be the perfect spot for a multi-use corporate facility.

(beat)

I can name something inside after your father if you'd like.

Ethan thinks for a moment.

James hands him his card.

ETHAN

Is there a time limit on this?

JAMES

Six months from now I might not be interested, either.

ETHAN

We'll be in touch.

They shake hands. James walks away. Ethan walks inside.

INT. CHICKEN JOINT - DAY

Harold stands by the register, tapping his foot.

Ethan walks in and looks around.

HAROLD
Stripe's down, so cash only.

Ethan places \$20 on the counter.

ETHAN
I'll take that much of the mango
and peach sauce.

HAROLD
That good, huh?

ETHAN
They were delicious.

Harold spots the folder in Ethan's hand.

HAROLD
Are you going to take it?
(sauces some wings)
He was out there for an hour.

ETHAN
I keep thinking I'd be selling out
my father's legacy by taking it.

HAROLD
He'd slap you for pussyfooting
around this.
(beat)
He'd slap me for still being here
after all my heart bullshit.

ETHAN
He'd say that your ticker is just
an excuse, right?

HAROLD
Not a chance.

Ethan looks at him oddly.

HAROLD (CONT'D)
There's a lot about your old man
you never got to experience.

ETHAN
My dad lived to work.

HAROLD

And he fucking died there, too.
(beat)
Gray didn't live to see what the
world has changed into.

ETHAN

He'd want me to fight.

HAROLD

You should really look at the
offer, first, before you think
about what Gray would've done.

ETHAN

And then what?

HAROLD

Look around and figure out what you
think is best.

INT. VIDEO RENTAL STORE - DAY

Ethan walks in with a takeout bag with two boxes of chicken wings in one hand and the folder in another.

Brick grabs one and eats.

Ethan grabs the other. His eyes focus on the folder for a moment, then turn to the wings.

ETHAN'S OFFICE (LATER)

Ethan dumps the contents of the folder on his desk. He spots a contract offer for his building. His eyes focus on the amount.

\$2,500,000.00

He stares at it for a long moment. His eyes turn to his laptop. His fingers pull up the store's banking account.

The store has \$1,500 in it.

Ethan's phone buzzes with an email. He pulls it up.

It's an email from the city requiring renovations to every building made before 1990.

His eyes linger on a line marked "Estimated City Fees For Inspection" for a long moment.

\$25,000.

Ethan curses under his breath. He types "City repair estimate cost" into an internet search engine. A news article from a local newspaper has an article on it. He clicks on it. His eyes scan it, landing on a line.

"Estimated repair per building is estimated to be \$500,000."

Ethan pulls up his personal checking account.

Between savings and checking accounts he has \$3,000.

BACK ROOM

Older mementos from several decades of film are all over.

Ethan walks in and looks around. His eyes focus on a box marked "Laser discs." He takes his phone out and pulls up eBay. His fingers type in "Laser disc."

Thousands of results come up. All are at least \$300 each.

He looks at his discs and spots one. His fingers type in "Scream Laser disc" and searches for it.

There's a listing for \$600 on it.

Ethan grabs the box and walks out.

ETHAN'S OFFICE

Ethan places the box on his desk. He lists the Laserdiscs on an eBay account.

Bidding wars immediately break out.

INT. TOWNHOME - NIGHT

Ethan walks in and looks around. His eyes focus on the photos of him and Danielle. He walks over and looks at the one of them on their wedding day.

ETHAN

I miss you.

He takes a long, deep breath. His hands take it off the wall. And then another. And then the rest. He takes them and walks over to a closet.

It opens up, revealing several empty boxes.

Ethan looks around. He places the photos into an empty box. His eyes land on an old photo album marked "College." He grabs it and opens it up.

Photos of Ethan and FRIENDS from 20 years ago are inside. He goes through, turning pages. His hand stops on a photo of him and Kelly at a frat party.

They're young, happy, and very much in love.

He takes his phone out and snaps a photo of it. His fingers quickly send it to Kelly.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Boxes are all over.

Kelly sits on a couch, a box takeout on an end table in front of her. Her phone buzzes with the photo. She looks at it for a long moment. Her finger pulls up Ethan on her speed dial.

INTERCUT BETWEEN KELLY AND ETHAN

Ethan answers the phone.

KELLY

We were so young.

ETHAN

I was going through some things and found a whole album of college.

KELLY

Is Chad in any of those photos?

He goes through the album, landing on a photo of Ethan with CHAD (20), a younger Kelly, and another WOMAN (20) all dressed up like 1920s gangsters with realistic-looking guns.

ETHAN

The gangster party!

KELLY

I barely remember that night.

ETHAN

That was the night of the robbery that you thought was hilarious.

She thinks for a moment.

KELLY

We could go to jail for that!

ETHAN

We passed the statute of
limitations ten years ago.

Kelly stands up and opens a box. She digs through it and
takes out a small wad of cash. It's all older bills.

KELLY

I still have the money from it.

ETHAN

Why is it I remember the look on
the Priest's face so vividly?

KELLY

I never told that part of the story
to Chad.

ETHAN

I never told Danielle.

KELLY

He still has me in his phone as
Crazy Kelly.

ETHAN

Me too.

She playfully hits him.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

I remember the wild child.

KELLY

Oh, I bet you do.

ETHAN

It's why Danielle wasn't your
biggest fan, for the record.

KELLY

I thought she didn't know about
that part of your life.

ETHAN

She knew about us... not the felony
robbery but I told her exactly how
I felt about you back then.

KELLY

We were kids.

ETHAN
It doesn't seem that long ago.

KELLY
It's half a lifetime.

They both look around.

KELLY (CONT'D)
Are you doing OK?

ETHAN
One day at a time, right?

She thinks.

KELLY
My divorce lawyer said the same
thing.

EXT. VIDEO RENTAL STORE - DAY

Ethan exits. His eyes spot a MAN staring at his Mustang.

ETHAN
Can I help you?

The Man turns to him.

CAR MAN
Is this for sale?

ETHAN
Not particularly.

The Man thinks for a moment.

CAR MAN
This is my wife's dream car.

ETHAN
It's a family memento.

The Man thinks. He hands Ethan a business card.

CAR MAN
If you change your mind.

The Man walks away.

Ethan stares at the card for a moment.

CINDY (PRE-LAP)
Do you think you have enough frozen dinners in there?

INT. GROCERY STORE - NIGHT

Ethan stares at Spices.

His cart has chicken breasts, rice, and pasta on top of a dozen frozen dinners.

He turns to see Cindy pushing a cart towards him.

ETHAN
Miss Action Movie.

CINDY
I'm surprised you remember.

ETHAN
I'm usually pretty good at that.

CINDY
It was an expensive research assignment but it was fun.

He looks at her oddly.

CINDY (CONT'D)
I'm an actress and this is for a part in a movie I'm in.

ETHAN
Right on.

CINDY
I was going to ask if you were Gray but you don't look like a Gray.

ETHAN
Ethan. Gray was my father and the original owner of the store.

CINDY
I'm Cindy.

Ethan looks into her cart.

A bottle of wine and some pasta are inside.

ETHAN
No sauce.

CINDY

I always run out of pasta before I run out of sauce.

ETHAN

(motions to cart)

I was going to cook dinner for some friends and then realized all I had in my fridge was condiments and containers of takeout.

CINDY

The divorced guy special!

ETHAN

I'm... a widower.

CINDY

I'm so sorry.

ETHAN

Sounds like your night is going to be as exciting as mine.

She looks into his cart and grabs some expensive Paprika. Her hand places it back and swaps it out with a cheaper version.

CINDY

It contains more Paprika per shake.

ETHAN

You assume with how much more it costs that it'd have more.

CINDY

I used to do the same and then I looked at the wrapper.

ETHAN

It's a lot like some of the older DVDs we have, I think.

Cindy motions for him to continue.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

A lot of them advertise all of these amazing special features and they turn out to be the trailer and a deleted scene. The best is when they advertise it as a Director's Cut and it's just four more seconds of my footage.

CINDY

But it was the director's true vision, though.

(beat)

Have you ever seen Samurai Santa 4? They're having a revival at the Music Box on Friday and my director wants me to go. I'd rather not go alone, you know?

ETHAN

That could be fun.

Cindy hands Ethan her phone. He texts his phone from hers and hands it back to her.

CINDY

I'll see you then.

He nods. She walks away.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ethan places the grocery bags on a counter. His phone buzzes with a text from Cindy.

"I'm sorry if you were offended by the divorced guy thing."

He responds: "It's OK."

Ethan's eyes look around. They land on James's folder. He opens it up and looks inside. His eyes land on the offer.

It's still \$2.5 million.

He takes his phone out and calls Luke on FaceTime.

LUKE (V.O.)

How's the meal coming?

INT. LUKE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Small with a classy oil painting on the wall.

Luke stares at his phone.

ETHAN (V.O.)

What would you do with two and a half million dollars?

INTERCUT BETWEEN LUKE AND ETHAN

Luke thinks for a moment.

LUKE

This isn't a bit to get me to say
two chicks at once, right?

ETHAN

It might be the only way you could
pull that off, too.

LUKE

Hey!

ETHAN

One of those investor types offered
me that much for the store.

Luke mouths holy shit.

LUKE

Take it and fucking run.

ETHAN

It's not that simple.

LUKE

Is there a way to save the store
that isn't a Bikini Car Wash?

ETHAN

I'll figure it out.

Ethan hangs up.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Ethan walks out of the shower and puts a towel on. He walks over and looks into the mirror. His eyes focus on his beard. He reaches into a drawer and takes out an electric razor.

ETHAN

Danielle liked you without this.
Maybe this one will too.

He shaves his beard off. His eyes turn to his hand. They focus on his wedding band.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

It's a new era. A new me.

Ethan takes his wedding band off and places it on the counter. He takes a deep breath and walks out.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ethan breads some chicken breasts. His eyes look over to a skillet in the oven.

The oil inside the skillet is at a light boil.

He tosses the chicken breasts into it. His phone buzzes with a text from Cindy. Ethan's eyes look at it.

"I've got good news and bad news."

Ethan responds: "What's the bad news?"

Cindy responds: "They canceled the screening on Friday."

Smoke comes off the skillet. Ethan doesn't notice.

He texts her: "What's the good news?"

Cindy responds: "I landed a two-episode arc on a TV show!"

Ethan texts her: "Congrats."

Flames come off the chicken.

Cindy texts him: "It means I have to go to Texas for two weeks. Want to grab a bite to eat at some point?"

Ethan responds: "I'm busy tonight but I think I can find some time to hang out."

Cindy responds with a smiling emoji.

The smoke alarm goes off!

Ethan looks up to see flames coming off the skillet. He drops the cell phone and grabs a cup. His hand turns on the faucet, filling it with water. He tosses it on the pan.

The flames get higher.

Ethan curses under his breath. He opens drawers frantically, looking for something. His hands open one under the sink. His eyes spot a fire extinguisher.

ETHAN

Bingo!

He grabs it and pulls the pin. His eyes focus on the fire. His hands press down on the extinguisher.

Flame retardant chemicals empty from the extinguisher. The fire dies down quickly.

Ethan turns the oven off. His eyes look around.

Dried chemicals are everywhere!

ETHAN (CONT'D)

It's supposed to be air!

He grabs the extinguisher and looks at the label.

"1985's Best Fire Retardant."

Ethan groans. His eyes scan the extinguisher, landing on an expiration date.

7.5.2000.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

It still put the fire out.

Ethan touches the dried chemical.

It's dusty and moves as soon as he touches it.

He spots some paper towels and wets them down. His hands wipe the counter down. He looks at the towel rack.

It's empty.

Ethan thinks for a moment. He spots a dust buster. His finger turns it on. It roars to life for a moment and then dies. He presses down several times.

Nothing.

Ethan walks out and returns with a vacuum cleaner. He plugs it and takes out a small attachment. His finger turns it on.

It starts and then dies.

He turns it on again. It starts and roars to life for a moment... and then dies.

Ethan sighs.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

The third time's the charm.

He turns on the vacuum. It starts and then dies. Smoke comes out of it.

Ethan unplugs it. He grabs his phone and wipes it off. His fingers pull up Luke and texts him: "I'm having issues. Can we grab something at a bar?"

INT. SPORTS BAR - NIGHT

Ethan sits in a corner booth. Most of an empty beer is in front of him.

Brick texts Ethan: "I need help with something."

Ethan texts him back: "Is everything OK with the store?"

Brick replies: "I'm about to spend \$100 on coverage and I can't click on it. Like what if they say it's terrible?"

Ethan responds: "If they do, I'll give you \$100. Deal?"

Brick responds: "Deal."

Luke sits down across from him.

LUKE

So Sasha is recently divorced and not looking for anything serious.

ETHAN

I don't know what I'm looking for.

LUKE

So maybe you can find it with her.

A WAITRESS drops off a pair of beers and walks away.

ETHAN

This was supposed to be just four friends, having a meal.

LUKE

You haven't even met her yet!

ETHAN

I'm sorry.

LUKE

If it's weird after one, then it's not a big deal.

ETHAN

What if we're not compatible?

LUKE

Then don't stick your dick in her.

Ethan takes a long sip of his beer.

Luke's girlfriend YASMIN (40) and her best friend SASHA (40) sit down across from them.

Yasmin is an All-American blonde and Sasha is a curvy brunette. Both are in nice dresses.

Sasha's eyes connect with Ethan's for a brief moment. She sizes him up like a piece of Wagyu Steak.

SASHA

(to Luke)

She didn't say how handsome your friend was going to be.

Luke smiles.

ETHAN

Thanks.

SASHA

I'm Sasha.

ETHAN

Ethan.

LUKE

(points to Yasmin)

And that's Yasmin.

(beat)

There, now we're all friends.

The Waitress comes over.

SASHA

Two of whatever they're having.

EXT. SPORTS BAR PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Luke, Ethan, Yasmin, and Sasha walk out.

Yasmin grabs Luke's hand.

YASMIN

I parked in the garage.

Luke nods to Ethan.

LUKE
Catch you later.

Luke and Yasmin walk away.

Sasha motions to an SUV in the distance.

Ethan nods.

They walk towards it.

ETHAN
I never asked what you did.

SASHA
I'm in marketing.

ETHAN
I could use some help with that.

SASHA
What are you looking for help on?

ETHAN
Getting more people into the store.

SASHA
What does your social media
presence look like?

Ethan thinks for a moment.

ETHAN
I think we might have a Facebook
page that nobody goes to anymore.

She chuckles.

SASHA
What about your TikTok?

He shrugs.

ETHAN
I've always thought that the power
of holding media in your hand means
more than scrolling on your phone.

SASHA
OK, boomer.

ETHAN
I own a video rental store.

SASHA
Fair enough.

Sasha and Ethan reach the SUV. They look at each other for a moment.

ETHAN
It was nice meeting you.

They lightly kiss and then passionately make out. He stops.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
My wife--

Her hands grab his.

SASHA
You forget about her for a moment
and let me take care of the rest.

She kisses him. They passionately make out.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ethan and Sasha stumble into the room, passionately making out. Clothes fly off in all directions. They land on the bed and have bad, awkward sex. He finishes and looks around.

ETHAN
I'm sorry--

SASHA
It's OK.

He rolls onto his side of the bed.

She takes a deep breath and rolls onto Danielle's side.

ETHAN
Can you... move over? You're on her
side and I don't like it.

Sasha looks around.

SASHA
There's nowhere else to go.

Ethan looks at the ceiling.

Images of Danielle flash through his mind.

Tears pour down his face. He rolls away from her, bawling his eyes out.

Sasha looks around. She takes a deep breath and leaves.

LUKE (PRE-LAP)
There's one positive, at least.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ethan and Luke eat delivery pizza. Beers are in front of them.

ETHAN
All three seconds of sex?

LUKE
At least your dick still works.

Ethan groans.

EXT. VIDEO RENTAL STORE - DAY

Ethan walks to the front door. His phone buzzes with a call from Cindy. He answers it.

CINDY (V.O.)
So how'd the meal turn out?

INT. CINDY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Small and cramped.

Cindy stares at her laptop. Her browser is open to Amazon, where a carefully curated list of shoes is in her cart.

ETHAN (V.O.)
Long story short, I basically need
a new kitchen.

INTERCUT BETWEEN CINDY AND ETHAN

CINDY
Oh no!

ETHAN
My fire extinguisher was one of the
chemical types and everything just
decided to break down.

Cindy searches for "small kitchen appliances."

Dozens of results come up.

CINDY
Amazon has a sale going on.

Ethan thinks and nods.

ETHAN
What are you doing tonight?

CINDY
Beercade?

ETHAN
What's that?

She smiles.

CINDY
Cheap beer and old arcade games.
You'll love it.

EXT. VIDEO RENTAL STORE - DAY

A CITY INSPECTOR approaches Ethan.

CITY INSPECTOR
Mister Cross?

Ethan nods.

CITY INSPECTOR (CONT'D)
I'm assuming you saw the letter.

ETHAN
What letter?

The Inspector sighs.

CITY INSPECTOR
I'm here to inspect your building
and figure out everything that
isn't up to code per the new
regulations from the Mayor.

Ethan opens the door and motions for him to walk inside.

The Inspector walks in. Ethan follows him.

INT. VIDEO RENTAL STORE - DAY

Brick types on his laptop.

A dozen pieces of mail are on the counter, including a thick package at the very bottom.

Ethan walks up to the counter. His eyes latch onto the thick package and opens it up.

BRICK
It's from the City.

ETHAN
So's he?

The Inspector looks around, writing things onto a clipboard.

Ethan opens the package and takes out a letter detailing renovations he needs to have done.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
The City of Chicago wants every building in this retail zone to be up to code.

BRICK
How long will it take?

Ethan takes a deep breath. He spots an envelope from eBay on the counter and grabs it. His hands open it up.

A check for \$4,000 (after taxes) is inside.

ETHAN
I hope I've got 200 more boxes full of rare Laserdiscs in the back.

BRICK
Can't you get a loan?

ETHAN
They're going to take one look at my books and laugh.

BRICK
This place can't close.

ETHAN
Not if I can help it.

INT. CHICKEN JOINT - NIGHT

A handful of Delivery Drivers wait.

Harold and Ethan are by the grill.

GRILL

Ethan stares at a bottle of marinade with Harold's face on it.

Harold tosses some wings in sauce.

HAROLD

My son said this is going to put
three generations through college.

Ethan puts it on the counter.

ETHAN

I'll be able to say I was there
when Harold himself sauced them.

HAROLD

Are you taking the offer?

ETHAN

It's looking like I have to.

Harold places the wings in a Styrofoam box. He places it on the counter.

A Driver grabs it.

HAROLD

Guadalupe just showed me the condo
she bought in Coral Gables.

ETHAN

I want to fight but it feels
hopeless to do so.

HAROLD

You'll regret not selling if they
take it from you, too.

Harold grabs a basket of wings. He shakes it and places it in a Styrofoam box.

ETHAN

You forgot something.

HAROLD

He wanted them plain.

Ethan shakes his head.

HAROLD (CONT'D)

I bet most of your reasons revolve
around nostalgia fucking with you.

(MORE)

HAROLD (CONT'D)
 (points around)
 This is a young man's game and you
 are lucky to cash out of it.

ETHAN
 And do what?

Harold places the box on the counter.

HAROLD
 Whatever you want.

A Delivery Driver grabs it.

ETHAN
 If it's a young man's game, why are
 you still here?

Harold thinks for a moment.

HAROLD
 Mostly dumb reasons.

ETHAN
 Your property is probably worth
 more than mine.

HAROLD
 And I'm not ready to walk away.
 (throws some wings in a
 fryer basket and places
 it in)
 Remember the end of Rocky?

ETHAN
 He gets up off the canvas and makes
 it to the final bell.

HAROLD
 And he still loses the fight.

Ethan thinks for a moment.

INT. VIDEO RENTAL STORE - DAY

Ethan walks in with a box of wings.

Brick turns to him.

ETHAN
 I need your help with the Facebook
 Page. They've made it--

BRICK

That's for old people. You need to have a TikTok, a YouTube channel, and a Discord server.

ETHAN

Facebook--

BRICK

Is for old people and weirdos.

ETHAN

That's fair.

Brick motions for his phone.

BRICK

It'll be faster.

Ethan hands Brick his phone

Brick quickly downloads a number of social media apps.

ETHAN

I can use my Facebook on these, to log in, right?

BRICK

And you wonder why I call you old.

ETHAN

It's because anyone over the age of 12 looks old to you.

Brick shrugs. His phone buzzes with an email. He clicks on it. His eyes open wide.

BRICK

Holy shit.

ETHAN

Is a Nigerian prince going to give you five hundred thousand dollars?

BRICK

Even better: A 9 on the Blacklist.

ETHAN

Congratulations!

(thinks)

What's the Blacklist?

BRICK

It's a website that reviews scripts to let you know how you rate among your peers. It's like the pinnacle of ratings for screenwriting.

ETHAN

And a nine is good?

BRICK

It's out of ten and it's impossibly rare to get.

Brick hands him the phone.

Ethan looks at it. It's an Evaluation of his script. The words "Generational talent" stick out to him.

ETHAN

I'm proud of you.

BRICK

Really?

ETHAN

You clearly worked hard on this.

Ethan hands the phone back to Brick.

Brick's phone buzzes with an email notification. He looks at it and smiles. He shows it to Ethan.

Someone has downloaded his script!

ETHAN (CONT'D)

That's good, right?

It buzzes again with another notification. *And another. **And then another. And then another!***

Brick puts his phone into his pocket and puts it on mute.

BRICK

I can't believe this is happening.

ETHAN

When you win an Oscar for it, make sure to thank the guy who let you write it while working.

Brick chuckles and looks around.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

And I should host the party here.

BRICK
With what money?

ETHAN
Your generation likes to give money
online, right?

Brick nods.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
It's either a Go Fund Me or we try
to do a bikini car wash.

BRICK
A what?

Ethan walks over to the comedy section. He quickly searches through the movies and finds "Bikini Car Wash 8: Veronica Strikes Back!" His hand holds it up.

Brick stares at it.

Ethan looks at the DVD for a moment and sighs.

ETHAN
You had to be there, I suppose.

BRICK
A Go Fund Me is probably the better
idea in your case.

ETHAN
Can you help me set it up? You're a
genius with that shit.

Brick walks into Ethan's office.

Ethan follows him.

ETHAN'S OFFICE

Brick sits down in front of Ethan's computer. He quickly sets up a GoFundMe and sets it to go live in an hour.

ETHAN
And that's it?

BRICK
Once the money comes in they'll
want an account to put it into.

ETHAN

Type in that every account gets a free rental with proof of donation.

BRICK

Are you sure?

ETHAN

It's worldwide, so if they come here from Europe to rent a fucking movie then I'll gladly throw it in.

Brick leaves.

Ethan pulls up YouTube and types in "How to go viral?"

Millions of results come up.

INT. BEERCADE - NIGHT

Retro arcade games and CUSTOMERS are all over.

Ethan watches Cindy play an old pinball game. He has a pair of beers in his hands.

PINBALL AISLE

Cindy's eyes are laser-focused on the game.

Ethan looks at her score. It's five million and counting.

ETHAN

This isn't fair.

CINDY

There was one on every base my dad was stationed at.

ETHAN

I wouldn't have pegged you as an Army Brat.

He hands her a beer.

CINDY

It gave me perspective, I guess.

ETHAN

How so?

CINDY

Every place has its own bullshit. You just learn to live with it.

Both take a drink.

EXT. BEERCADE PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Cindy and Ethan walk to Ethan's Mustang.

ETHAN
Did you drive or--

CINDY
I'm a block away.

They stop in front of it.

ETHAN
It's been a while.

CINDY
I just got out of a relationship so
I want to take it slow.

He nods.

ETHAN
Can I see you again?

CINDY
I'd like that.

They awkwardly hug.

She walks away.

Ethan's phone buzzes with a text from Luke: "I'm drinking.
Join me. Bake's."

INT. DIVE BAR - NIGHT

Luke sits at the counter. Six empty beers and a dozen shot
glasses are in front of him. He's pretty shit-faced.

Ethan sits down next to him.

A BARTENDER walks up to them.

Luke motions for two.

The Bartender hands them two beer bottles and walks away.

ETHAN
What happened?

LUKE

Her high school sweetheart reached out on Facebook and magically she fell back in love with him.

Ethan takes a drink.

LUKE (CONT'D)

The first thing he did when he got out of jail was track her down. She thought it was romantic.

Beat.

ETHAN

Do I laugh or cry?

LUKE

I'll let you know.

Both take a drink.

ETHAN

I met someone. She's an actress.

Luke gives him a thumbs down.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

What?

LUKE

Anyone in that field at our age is looking for someone to pay the bills while they pursue their dream.

Luke takes a sip of his beer.

ETHAN

So if I shouldn't go out with an actress, who should I go out with?

LUKE

Someone... not an actress.

ETHAN

So do I find them at a club or--

Luke chuckles.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

What?

LUKE

If we walked into a club right now
it's either oldies night or every
girl there thinks we're going to
pull an Andrew Tate and traffic
them somewhere.

Ethan takes a sip of his beer. He looks at it for a long
time.

THUMP!

Ethan looks over to see Luke passed out.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - NIGHT

Ethan closes a door.

KELLY (O.S.)

This is a surprise.

He turns to see Kelly staring at him. A glass of wine is in
her hands.

ETHAN

My best friend passed out.

KELLY

This is feeling like college all
over again.

ETHAN

Except we're sober.

KELLY

Nightcap?

Ethan nods.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Ethan walks inside and looks around.

Kelly closes the door behind him.

ETHAN

Where's the little man?

KELLY

With his father... and her.

ETHAN

I didn't realize he was with
someone so soon.

She grabs a glass and spots an expensive bottle of wine. Her
hands quickly fill it up.

He grabs it and takes a sip.

KELLY

He left me for her.

ETHAN

The Kelly I knew once would have
something to say. And probably a
couple of fists, too.

They sit down on her couch.

KELLY

We're civil, which is more than he
deserves but... the kid.

Kelly takes her phone out and shows him a photo of her, her
EX HUSBAND, her SON, and her EX-HUSBAND'S NEW GIRLFRIEND.

The new girlfriend is a younger version of Kelly.

ETHAN

He's got a type, it seems.

Kelly looks at the photo and then Ethan.

KELLY

She has dark hair, so what?

ETHAN

That's you in college.

Kelly looks at the photo again. She groans.

Ethan laughs.

KELLY

It's not funny!

ETHAN

I figured he'd find someone who
looked nothing like you.

KELLY

I hate you, for the record.

ETHAN

Does she sound like you, too?

She takes a sip of her glass.

He laughs.

KELLY

It's still not funny!

ETHAN

If it was anyone else.

She thinks for a moment.

KELLY

I mean I should laugh but--

ETHAN

It's never funny when it's you.

They look at each other for a long moment.

KELLY

What?

ETHAN

The only difference between this
and dorm life is the bottle.

She looks at the wine for a moment.

KELLY

Chad left it behind when he moved
out. We bought it as a celebration
when we had the house.

He puts his glass down. His hand grabs hers and puts it down.

They lightly kiss. He looks at her for a long moment.

ETHAN

I need to go.

INT. VIDEO RENTAL STORE - DAY

Brick and Ethan put movies away.

Brick's phone buzzes with a notification from a dating app.

BRICK

Do you think it's someone real this
time or another bot?

ETHAN

Life was easier when I was your age, or at least dating was.

BRICK

How'd you meet Danielle?

ETHAN

Right where you're standing.

Brick looks around.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

Back then, that was the romantic comedy section. We talked about Waiting to Exhale. She said the sequel would be called breathe, bitch, breath!

Brick snorts.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

It was a Bill Bellamy joke.

Brick shrugs.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

He was an MTV VJ who had like 20 minutes of fame.

Brick looks around.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

And now I sound like that guy.

Brick nods.

BRICK

I think that's why my generation isn't all that romantic.

ETHAN

And then she swiped left sounds like a bad Netflix film.

Brick shakes his head. He grabs some DVDs and walks into the line, placing them in the rows.

The power goes out!

Ethan looks around and taps his foot.

BRICK

Perfect timing.

ETHAN

My dad wired this place himself. It should be fine.

Ethan walks over to a closet and opens it up. His eyes spot a breaker box.

SUPPLY CLOSET

Ethan opens it and looks up and down.

One of the fuses has been flipped.

Ethan flips it back.

Nothing.

He takes his phone out and calls an Electrician.

ETHAN'S OFFICE (LATER)

The lights are on.

Ethan stares at an itemized bill for \$2,000.

Luke knocks on the door.

ETHAN

It's not tax season, is it?

Luke grabs the bill. His eyes focus on it.

LUKE

If you need some help--

ETHAN

(looks at his keys)
The Mustang had its run.

Luke shakes his head.

LUKE

You can't.

ETHAN

It's an older car. I could drop my insurance payments by getting something... more practical.

LUKE

Is this place worth it?

ETHAN

It's the car or I tap into what's left of the settlement. Either way I can't just stiff this guy.

LUKE

These are all signs to walk away.

Ethan thinks for a moment.

Luke puts the bill down. He takes his wallet out and places an American Express card on it.

LUKE (CONT'D)

This is what friends do.

Ethan takes a deep breath and nods.

Cindy texts Ethan: "I've got a Groupon for half off Sushi. It needs two people. You in?"

INT. SUSHI JOINT - NIGHT

Cindy and Ethan are in a rear booth.

REAR BOOTH

Several rolls of sushi are in front of them.

Cindy expertly uses chopsticks to eat a roll.

Ethan has a pair in his hand. He looks at them oddly. His hands struggle to pick up a piece of sushi.

ETHAN

Why does everyone I meet know how to use them but me?

CINDY

My dad's first assignment was in Japan, so we kind of had to learn.

ETHAN

So you had pinball and sushi there?

Cindy eats a piece of Sushi.

CINDY

It was Smokey and the Bandit.

ETHAN

No way.

CINDY
My father loved that movie so much
that he grew a mustache.

Ethan drops his piece.

ETHAN
What did your mother think?

CINDY
Back then it was--
(mock mother's voice)
--that's nice, dear.
(normal voice)
That was my mother's way of saying
she fucking hated it.

ETHAN
It couldn't have been that bad.

Cindy takes her phone out and pulls up a family photo. She shows it to Ethan.

Ethan chuckles.

CINDY
He totally looks like the sound guy
in a seventies porn film crew.

ETHAN
He totally does.

She puts the phone away.

He tries to pick up another piece of sushi. It gets *this* close to his face before falling out.

Cindy sits down next to him. Her hands adjust his chopsticks.

CINDY
Try it like that.

They look at each other for a long moment. She kisses him.

EXT. SUSHI JOINT PARKING LOT - NIGHT

They walk to an SUV in the distance.

ETHAN
We should do this again.

CINDY
I'd like that.

ETHAN
We could grab a movie.

CINDY
My ex always said that but it was
more Netflix and chill.

ETHAN
I was thinking more like a DVD and
Dinner kind of thing.

CINDY
I'd like that.

They lightly kiss.

She walks to her SUV.

He walks to his Mustang. An idea hits him.

INT. MUSTANG - NIGHT

Ethan gets inside. He texts Luke: "I've got an idea that
might be able to pay you back!"

Luke responds: "So you're going to whore yourself out to all
of the women in the world?"

Ethan responds: "I'll make sure to get paid first."

INT. VIDEO RENTAL STORE - DAY

Brick types on his laptop.

Ethan walks in with a giant smile on his face.

ETHAN
Netflix and Chill!

Brick looks up at him.

BRICK
I don't swing that way but--

ETHAN
If we can get people in here to
rent movies for date nights, maybe
we have a shot at keeping this
place open.

Brick thinks for a moment.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

We've got great movies. What if we did something with all that social media to get people in here, looking at movies so they can find something to watch with their spouses and girlfriends and such?

BRICK

That's a lot of people.

ETHAN

We can do posts, and like a discount if you like us on Facebook or whatever.

Brick smiles.

BRICK

I can show you how to run it.

ETHAN

I was hoping you could help.

BRICK

I don't mean to be this guy.

ETHAN

I hired you to be a clerk, right?

Brick nods.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

Now you're a senior clerk.

BRICK

Assistant manager?

ETHAN

Assistant *Senior* Manager!

Brick shrugs and then nods.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

Let's get this going, we can do a big date for it, and then hopefully it kicks off bigger things!

Cindy walks into the store and into the romantic comedy section. She looks through movies.

Ethan spots her.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
I'll handle this.

ROMANTIC COMEDY SECTION

Cindy looks at a movie. A box of wings and a list of films are in her hands.

ETHAN (O.S.)
That film's terrible.

She turns and sees him. A smile comes across her lips.

CINDY
I've got an audition for a film and they referenced some older movies. I figured you'd have at least one of them.

Ethan looks at the list, He grabs a film off the aisle and hands it to her. Her eyes look at it and then him.

CINDY (CONT'D)
This isn't on the list.

ETHAN
That whole list cribs heavily off of this one.

CINDY
Why aren't you on YouTube talking about movies?

ETHAN
Half of those guys hate movies and the others are just... weird.

Ethan grabs three movies and hands them to her.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
And here's the rest of your list.

They walk up to the counter.

COUNTER

Ethan rings her up.

ETHAN
What are you doing this week?

CINDY

This is the only day I don't have auditions all day.

ETHAN

That's good, right?

CINDY

It's nothing but paying gigs.

She hands him \$20 and grabs the DVDs.

ETHAN

That's good.

CINDY

I'll text you when my schedule clears up.

Ethan watches her leave.

TIKTOK GIRL (O.S.)

It's real!

MAIN STORE

Ethan looks up to see several TIKTOK SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS staring back at him.

ETHAN

Can I help you?

TIKTOK GIRL

We saw this place on TikTok and did not expect it to be real.

The Influencers look at him oddly.

ETHAN

Feel free to look around.

The Influencers scatter, looking at DVDs.

Brick walks over to Ethan.

BRICK

You're looking at a gift horse in the mouth, Ethan.

Ethan pulls up the GoFundMe. It hasn't gone up.

BRICK (CONT'D)

Give it some time.

ETHAN

We don't have that.

Brick points to them.

BRICK

If you want to appeal to my generation, this is the game.

One of the Influencers walks over to the documentary section. They spot "Faces of Death" and looks at it.

INFLUENCER 2

What's this?

DOCUMENTARY SECTION

Ethan shrugs and walks over. He looks at the DVD.

ETHAN

Faces of Death.

The Influencer takes their phone out.

Brick smiles and hustles back to the counter.

The Influencer aims their camera at Ethan.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

Faces of Death was a film series with real deaths in it. The first one got into stores because it had footage of Vic Morrow dying on the Twilight Zone movie set.

INFLUENCER 2

How is that legal?

ETHAN

It was the seventies.

The Influencer laughs.

INFLUENCER 2

Where can I find this?

ETHAN

If you're in the city, Gray's Video has the entire series. The first four are the only ones that have real footage.

Brick rings up several rentals.

The Influencer turns their camera off.

INFLUENCER 2
What would you recommend?

ETHAN
What do you like? I really hope
it's not old snuff films.

The Influencer laughs.

INFLUENCER 2
I love comic books but I really
don't like the Marvel films.

Ethan motions over to the superhero section.

Brick grabs his phone and discreetly follows them. His phone
has a video camera app on, recording.

SUPERHERO SECTION

Ethan and the Influencer walk over to it. He goes through the
section and finds Sky High. His hand grabs the DVD and hands
it to them.

INFLUENCER 2
It looks like a Marvel film.

ETHAN
It came out right before the Marvel
movies really popped. It's a riff
on coming-of-age films while being
a great superhero film.

The Influencer looks over the DVD.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
It's also a snapshot of what the
genre was before Marvel. Before
Iron Man a comic book movie was
more of a cartoon in how it looked
than a film. Iron Man basically
cribbed from Top Gun and Speed as
these sort of fast-paced, action
films with comic book characters.

BRICK
He's wrong.

ETHAN
You're the one said that The Dark
Knight was Die Hard with a Batman.

The Influencer types on their phone. She sighs.

INFLUENCER 2

The only place I can watch this is on Disney Plus and I've got too many apps already.

Ethan taps on the DVD.

ETHAN

This is the power of physical media. You can hold this in your hands and watch it whenever you want to.

INFLUENCER 2

I'm going to rent this.

The Influencer walks to the counter, getting in line with the rest of their friends.

Ethan smiles.

Brick uploads it to the store's Facebook account.

ETHAN'S OFFICE (LATER)

Ethan types on his computer. He gets a text from Luke: "I saw you on TikTok."

He responds: "Some kids stopped by the store."

Luke texts him: "Want to grab a pizza? Beer's on me."

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ethan and Luke eat delivery pizza.

Several half-full beers are in front of them.

LUKE

You're at two grand now.

Ethan's eyes turn to his phone. No new messages.

ETHAN

It's yours when--

LUKE

I don't need to be paid back.

ETHAN

Then you get a free rental any time you want.

LUKE

I'll settle for that.

Ethan looks at his phone again.

LUKE (CONT'D)

Anyone important?

ETHAN

Cindy said she'd buzz me when she's free but... so far nothing.

LUKE

Ghosting is the new normal.

ETHAN

It's bullshit!

LUKE

Don't shoot the messenger.

INT. CHICKEN JOINT - DAY

Empty except for Harold making wings.

Ethan walks up to the counter.

ETHAN

Throw on two orders of the Harold's Special Spicy for me.

HAROLD

A man of taste.

ETHAN

I want to remember what they taste like before the guys your son hired fuck up the formula for good.

Harold nods.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

We've got more digital traffic this week than we have in a decade.

HAROLD

Congratulations.

ETHAN

We got twenty million views on social media and somehow that translates into zero money.

HAROLD

That's why I don't advertise on the Internet anymore. Lots of talk but not much adding to my bottom line.

ETHAN

I never did, either, and part of me thinks it might be why I'm so fucked right now.

Harold stops.

HAROLD

Do you know what were the biggest sports in 1900?

Ethan shrugs.

HAROLD (CONT'D)

Professional wrestling, when it was real, plus boxing and horse racing.

ETHAN

And what, life happens?

HAROLD

The taste of the people can change radically overnight, or slowly over a long period of time.

(beat)

For a decade straight there were lines out of the door at all hours here. Now? Now I could sing and dance without a soul hearing me.

ETHAN

You're not the only one.

HAROLD

You have to look at the man in the mirror and figure out whether it's time or not.

ETHAN

What if he says no?

HAROLD

Then, at some point, you'll be the guy trying to promote pro wrestling as real to three fans, too.

ETHAN

What if you were me?

Harold thinks for a moment.

HAROLD

A young guy like you is going to waste a portion of it, and use the rest to fund something awesome. If you can find a way to mix both, I think you'll be alright.

ETHAN

What if I can't figure that out?

HAROLD

There's a lot worse problems in this world than figuring out what to do with a large stack of money.

Ethan thinks.

INT. VIDEO RENTAL STORE - NIGHT

Ethan and Brick look around.

The store is empty.

BRICK

A hundred people said on our page that they were going to come, too.

ETHAN

I'm going to call it.

BRICK

Do you need me to help you close?

ETHAN

Any other person would've jumped ship by now, Brick.

BRICK

Most of my friends from film school have shitty jobs and shitty bosses. I lucked out for a minute.

Brick leaves.

Ethan walks over to the photos. He looks at a picture of a younger him and his father.

ETHAN
I'm trying, Dad, I really am.
(beat)
I just need a sign, any sign.

The power goes on and off.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
I was hoping for a better one than
that. Maybe a big bag of money
falls out of the sky.

A ceiling tile falls off and lands on the ground.

ETHAN'S OFFICE

Ethan walks in and looks at his computer. It's on the Blue Screen of Death.

He takes his phone out and pulls up "Basic Computer Repair" on an internet search engine.

INT. SPORTS BAR - NIGHT

Ethan sits at the counter, drinking a beer.

Several empty beers and a half-eaten order of nachos are in front of him.

His eyes turn to the television.

A hockey game is on.

An ENGAGED WOMAN (35) taps him on the shoulder.

Ethan turns to her.

ETHAN
Can I help you?

ENGAGED WOMAN
I'm engaged, do you want to change
my mind?

Ethan looks around.

Several of the Engaged Woman's FRIENDS are in the rear, recording it. They give him a thumbs up.

Ethan turns back to the game.

ENGAGED WOMAN (CONT'D)
I'm serious and--

ETHAN
I'm trying to watch a game.

She sighs and walks away.

He takes a long sip of his beer.

A finger taps him on the shoulder.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
I thought I said--

KELLY (O.S.)
Will wonders ever cease?

Ethan turns to see Kelly approach him.

They embrace.

She sits down next to him.

ETHAN
This is a surprise.

KELLY
How've you been?

He shrugs.

ETHAN
Just... winding some things down.

KELLY
I didn't know whether to call or--

ETHAN
I shouldn't have done that. I'm
sorry and--

KELLY
It felt nice.

ETHAN
Oh.

KELLY
I know it was a long time ago but--

ETHAN
I think I know.

KELLY
Do you want to grab dinner?

ETHAN
I just finished up.

Kelly looks over and spots a FRIEND walking in.

KELLY
I'm meeting up with a friend but
how about this weekend? Chad has
the kid, so I don't have to worry
about him getting into trouble.

ETHAN
I'd like that.

Ethan tosses some cash onto the counter.

She hugs him. Her hands squeeze. He relaxes and smiles.

INT. VIDEO RENTAL STORE - DAY

Brick places some DVDs away.

A PRODUCER in a Tom Ford suit is near him.

PRODUCER
We're a signatory, too, so it's a
WGA deal for you.

BRICK
How about the DGA?

PRODUCER
I had a line producer break it down
and it's right on that low-budget
and mid-budget tier. Have you been
on a set that size? It's a lot of
responsibility that can overwhelm a
first-time director.

BRICK
I think you can do it for a lot
less than that.

PRODUCER

And nobody will see it unless you get very lucky. Or a name decides to cut their number.

Brick thinks for a moment. He turns to the producer.

BRICK

I've got storyboards and--

PRODUCER

If it's a hit, you'll be able to pick your next project. Tarantino had Natural Born Killers and True Romance before he got to direct.

BRICK

And if it's a hit, they'll remember the guy who directed it and not the guy who wrote it.

PRODUCER

We'll be sending you an offer by the end of business for the script.

Ethan walks in and spots Brick. He walks into the office.

They shake hands.

ETHAN'S OFFICE

Ethan pulls up his email.

A message from James comes up. "Offer?" is the subject line.

Brick knocks on the door.

ETHAN

He didn't look like a customer.

BRICK

He wants to make my movie.

Ethan reaches into his desk and pulls out an old, expensive bottle of Scotch. He takes two glasses out and pours a drink for the both of them.

Brick looks at them oddly.

ETHAN

My father had this to celebrate the big moments in life.

BRICK
I really don't drink.

ETHAN
This bottle was one of two things
my father left me.

BRICK
And the other is what, the store?

Ethan nods.

ETHAN
I can't wait to watch your movie.

BRICK
I'm going to say no.

Ethan takes a sip and sighs.

ETHAN
His suit was more expensive than my
entire wardrobe.

BRICK
I want to direct and they're all
looking at just massive budgets. I
don't have any experience on a set
like that, so I'm out apparently.

ETHAN
How much do you need?

BRICK
Five hundred thousand dollars.
(beat)
I met a line producer while working
on a short and he broke it down for
me as a favor.

ETHAN
That's a familiar number.

BRICK
I saw the Go Fund Me is at \$2,500.

ETHAN
One problem at a time.

BRICK
What should I do?

ETHAN

Write another amazing script! You did it once, and there's nothing I can see to stop you from doing it again.

BRICK

It's a golden ticket and I want to be the one that cashes it in.

Ethan pushes the drink towards him.

Brick takes a sip. He gags.

Ethan gets a text from Kelly: "Same place as I saw you last?"
He replies: "Sure. When?"

Kelly texts Ethan back: "Sure. 8ish?"

ETHAN

That's... valid.

BRICK

I should tell them no.

Ethan responds: "See you there."

ETHAN

Sleep on it first.

BRICK

I need to talk to my folks.

ETHAN

Take the day.

BRICK

Thanks.

Brick leaves.

CITY INSPECTOR (O.S.)

Mister Cross?

Ethan walks into the store.

MAIN STORE

The City Inspector looks around. A thick folder filled with paperwork is in his hands. Underneath it is a clipboard.

Ethan walks in.

ETHAN
Can I help you?

CITY INSPECTOR
We completed our inspection.

ETHAN
That's fast.

The Inspector hands Ethan the folder.

CITY INSPECTOR
I'll need you to sign this, too.

The Inspector hands Ethan the clipboard.

Ethan signs.

ETHAN
So what happens from here?

CITY INSPECTOR
You've got 30 days to have all of
the work specified fixed or you
will no longer be able to run your
business until it's done.

Ethan looks at the folder.

ETHAN
Is there any chance that will
happen?

CITY INSPECTOR
I'm just the messenger.
(beat)
We have estimates from contractors
on similar work in there, so you
can at least be sure they're not
going to try to fuck you.

The Inspector leaves.

Ethan opens the folder and looks inside. He quickly goes
through, landing on the final page. They focus on something.

Estimated repair costs: \$750,000.

INT. SPORTS BAR - NIGHT

An MMA Fight is on every TV.

Kelly and Ethan are in a booth in the back.

REAR BOOTH

Burgers, wings, and a pair of drinks are in front of them.

KELLY
Chad's teaching our son to drive.

ETHAN
He's not that old, is he?

KELLY
He's 15.

ETHAN
Welcome to the things you miss when
you don't live on social media.

KELLY
I've had to become my mother around
him, which I swore I'd never do.

Ethan chuckles.

KELLY (CONT'D)
You laugh but because I said so was
my mantra for a decade with him.

ETHAN
You could do a lot worse than
become your mother.

KELLY
She and my father moved to Arizona.

ETHAN
He's retired by now, right?

KELLY
That was ten years ago.

ETHAN
No, it wasn't.

She shrugs.

EXT. SPORTS BAR PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Ethan and Kelly walk to Ethan's car.

KELLY
This feels like college.

ETHAN

Except we're not walking back to
the dorms.

KELLY

I know we didn't end things well
but I just--

ETHAN

We were kids, right?

KELLY

We were adults, technically.

ETHAN

Not really.

KELLY

I wish we could've said goodbye the
first time, face to face.

She stops.

They look at each other for a long moment.

ETHAN

Things happen for a reason.

KELLY

Right after that some quack doctor
wanted to put me on these loser
pills and I told him to fuck off.

He lightly touches her face.

ETHAN

You're... beautiful.

They lightly kiss and then passionately make out. She stops
him for a moment.

KELLY

Why doesn't it feel like 20 years?

He shrugs.

They make out some more.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

A trail of clothes leads to the bed.

Kelly and Ethan make out passionately.

She stops and looks around.

KELLY
Where's your toy chest?

ETHAN
My what?

KELLY
Nothing's hotter than filling up
all three of my holes at once!

He looks around.

ETHAN
Can't we just start more... basic?

She sighs.

KELLY
Fine.

Ethan and Kelly have missionary-style sex.

ETHAN
You feel amazing!

She closes her eyes and takes a deep breath. Her hands grip his face tightly.

KELLY
Come on, fuck me properly!

ETHAN
I'm not?

After a moment she rolls on top of him and slaps Ethan across the face as hard as she can.

KELLY
(screaming)
Fuck me like an Ethiopian pool boy!

ETHAN
What?

She slaps him harder. Her hands grab his face and squeeze as hard as they can.

KELLY
(screaming)
FUCK! ME! LIKE! AN! ETHIOPIAN!
POOL! BOY!

Sheer terror comes over his face.

Kelly slaps the absolute piss out of him.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT (LATER)

The front door closing is faintly heard.

Ethan gingerly walks to the fridge. He opens it up, taking a beer out. His phone buzzes with an email from James.

The subject line is "revised offer."

He opens it up.

ETHAN

(reading, lightly)

I haven't heard back from you. Blah
blah blah. We're revising our offer
in light of blah blah blah.

His eyes spot a PDF file marked "Offer." He opens it up.

A contractual offer for \$3.25 million for the store from James is inside.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

Holy shit.

Ethan takes a long breath, his eyes focused on the phone.

KELLY (O.S.)

Am I not that interesting to you?

Ethan looks up to see Kelly walk in wearing nothing but his shirt. He looks at her for a long moment.

KELLY (CONT'D)

What?

ETHAN

I'm the luckiest guy ever, I think.

KELLY

Catch me if you can.

She smiles and turns around.

The shirt hits the floor.

He follows her back into the bedroom.

After a moment the sounds of loud, rough sex pierce the air.

INT. VIDEO RENTAL STORE - DAY

Ethan walks in. He looks around.

ETHAN
Brick?

BRICK (O.S.)
Down here.

Ethan walks over to the counter and looks down.

Brick is staring at an option agreement.

Ethan looks at it.

ETHAN
Congratulations, again.

Kelly texts Ethan: "Hey."

Ethan puts his phone on mute.

BRICK
They have a director who really
wants to make this.

ETHAN
That's great!

BRICK
He's got less experience than me.

Ethan places his phone on the counter. He sits down next to
Brick and takes a deep breath.

ETHAN
I know it sucks but--

BRICK
It's my film and they're going to
fuck it up!

Ethan's phone has five new texts.

ETHAN
You don't know that.

BRICK
I can feel it.

Ethan's phone has a dozen new texts and a missed call.

ETHAN

I thought the world was over when
Kelly and I split. Then I met
Danielle and things were better.

BRICK

But you lost her.

ETHAN

She never went away.

(beat)

The script might be someone else's
but it'll always be yours.

BRICK

They never talk about a writer
unless the film is bad.

ETHAN

Maybe they spend a bunch of years
trying to make it, you become like
a Tarantino type, and then you get
it back once your contract expires.

(beat)

They expire, right?

Brick nods.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

I know it's something you don't
want to hear, but letting go of it
might be the best thing for you.

Ethan's phone has twenty new texts and three missed calls.

BRICK

I don't see it.

ETHAN

Five years down the road, you can
be a lot of things but will that
script in a drawer be doing
anything for you besides remind you
of what could've been?

Ethan's phone has fifty new texts and four missed calls.

BRICK

I don't have any ideas as good as
this one.

ETHAN

You've watched enough bad movies
here to know what a good one feels
like. I've got faith.

Ethan stands up and looks at his phone.

Sixty texts, five missed calls, and a voicemail all from
Kelly stick out.

He scrolls down. The first message is "We need to talk about
last night." His eyes spot "It was a mistake," "Why aren't
you responding?" and "You just wanted to fuck, admit it!"
among the texts.

Brick looks up.

BRICK

Anyone important?

Ethan thinks for a moment.

ETHAN

Do you want some wings?

Brick nods.

EXT. CHICKEN JOINT - DAY

Ethan walks up and opens the door. He looks inside.

ETHAN

Harold?

Silence.

INT. CHICKEN JOINT - DAY

Ethan walks inside and looks behind the counter.

Harold's body is on the ground, dead.

ETHAN

Harold!

Nothing.

He takes his phone out and calls 911.

INT. VIDEO RENTAL STORE - DAY

Ethan walks in.

Brick looks at him oddly.

ETHAN
Harold's is closed.

BRICK
For the day?

ETHAN
Forever.

BRICK
They had great wings.

ETHAN
I'll figure something out.

Ethan walks into his office.

ETHAN'S OFFICE

Ethan sits down in front of his computer. He looks at some mail on his desk.

Overdue notices are on everything.

He pulls up his banking account on the computer.

\$50 is in the store's checking and saving.

Ethan pulls up his personal checking account. He looks at his savings account. His fingers go to make a transfer into his business account. A confirmation notice comes up.

His eyes turn to the inspection folder. He opens it up and looks inside, going through. His eyes look around, landing on his laptop screen. He takes a deep breath.

ETHAN
It's time.

He pulls up James's card and looks at it. His hand grabs his cell phone. His fingers call the number.

JAMES (V.O.)
This is James.

ETHAN

It's Ethan Cross. Do you have a moment to talk?

JAMES (V.O.)

I'm sorry I haven't called you back. It's been swamped here with a couple of closings.

ETHAN

How'd you like to add one more to your list?

JAMES (V.O.)

Let's talk.

INT. MUSTANG - DAY

Ethan gets inside. His phone buzzes with a text from Cindy.

"Sorry I went silent but I've been so busy I haven't paid my bills. I've got a dozen horror stories about auditions and being on set I need someone to tell them to. You free?"

He smiles.

LUKE (PRE-LAP)

I thought you were going to keep fighting for it.

INT. DIVE BAR - NIGHT

Ethan and Luke sit at the counter. Spicy chicken wings and cold beers are in front of them.

ETHAN

I kept telling Brick that sometimes you have to sign it and I couldn't be a hypocrite about it. It's time.

LUKE

I think you made the right call.

Ethan takes a bite of a wing. His phone buzzes with a text message from Cindy: "I've got the tickets." He texts her back: "Terrific! Looking forward to it."

Luke spots it.

LUKE (CONT'D)

Who's that?

ETHAN

The actress wants to see a movie.

LUKE

So the other guy didn't work out.

ETHAN

Don't be that guy!

LUKE

It's the only guy I can be.

Ethan takes a sip of his beer.

EXT. MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT

Ethan looks around, tapping his foot. His phone buzzes with a text from Kelly: "I'm sorry I lost it. Can we talk?"

He looks around for a moment and takes a deep breath.

CINDY (O.S.)

Traffic was a nightmare.

Ethan looks up to see Cindy approach him. He quickly deletes Kelly's text.

ETHAN

I parked two blocks away.

CINDY

That's closer than me.

They walk inside.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT

MOVIEGOERS are all over.

Ethan and Cindy sit down.

ETHAN

So why did you get into acting?

CINDY

That's a long story.

ETHAN

And we don't have a lot of time.

CINDY

It's a story to tell over dinner.

ETHAN
That long, huh?

CINDY
It's got an arc and everything.

The lights dim.

She reaches over and grabs his hand.

He looks at her and smiles.

EXT. MOVIE THEATER PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Ethan and Cindy walk arm-in-arm toward Ethan's car.

ETHAN
That was as bad as I thought.

CINDY
The DVD has a director's commentary
about the film.

ETHAN
Those are the best.

They arrive at Ethan's Mustang.

She looks it over.

CINDY
My dad had one like this.

ETHAN
It was originally my father's. He
loved this thing.

They lightly kiss.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
You need to tell me about how you
got into acting.

CINDY
How about over dinner?

ETHAN
How about tomorrow?

She thinks for a moment.

CINDY
It's a date.

ETHAN
 Absolutely.

They lightly kiss again.

She walks away.

His eyes follow her.

His heart beats so loudly he can't hear anything.

EXT. VIDEO RENTAL STORE - DAY

Brick walks up to the front door and tries to open it.

Nothing.

He looks inside for a moment.

 ETHAN (O.S.)
 Please tell me you didn't sign that
 option you got.

Brick turns to see Ethan approach him.

 BRICK
 Am I fired or--

 ETHAN
 I'm selling the building.
 (beat)
 Technically, you are fired.
 (hands him an envelope)
 This is your severance.

Brick opens it up and looks inside.

 BRICK
 I don't know what to say.

 ETHAN
 If you need a reference at any
 point, I'll be glad to tell anyone
 that you were a good employee that
 I probably didn't deserve.

Brick nods.

Ethan hands him a second envelope.

Brick opens it up. Inside is a check for \$550,000 and a
 contract to produce a movie.

BRICK
What's this?

ETHAN
I want to see your vision of the
script that got a 9.

Tears come down Brick's face.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
The lawyer who handled the sale is
setting up an LLC for you to put it
into. That way you've got legal
protections and such.
(beat)
Your industry is full of predators
who'll try to take all of your
money to make the movie.

BRICK
I don't know what to say.

ETHAN
Someone once told me I was going to
do something stupid and something
amazing with the money. I figure
this is a little bit of both.

Brick hugs Ethan.

BRICK
It'll be the best movie ever!

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Properly prepared Chicken Salvatore del Guerra is on the
table next to a good bottle of wine.

Cindy and Ethan eat and drink.

ETHAN
So how did you become an actress?
You said it's a long story.

CINDY
So it's the spring of my Freshman
year of college and--

INT. BEDROOM - DAWN

Ethan wakes up and looks around. His eyes spot Cindy next to him. A smile slowly comes over his face. He wraps his arms around her.

Her hands instinctively grab his.

He goes back to sleep.

FADE OUT.