

SHORTCOMINGS

Screenplay by
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Based on the book by
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MRS. WONG (glamorous, 30s) stands in the lobby of a luxury residential building. From behind a reception desk, MARTIN (a white man, 70s, suit and tie) stares at her with barely-concealed contempt.

MARTIN

Well, Mrs. Wong, thank you for inquiring about the availability of our penthouse suite. I've reviewed your application, and unfortunately...

A long, dramatic PAUSE.

MARTIN (cont'd)

Me no like-ee.

He stares at her, crumpling a piece of paper in his hands. The woman smiles, then turns and heads to the exit.

Through the glass doors, MR. WONG (30s, Asian), her handsome, well-dressed husband waits outside, smoking a cigarette.

Mrs. Wong says something to her husband. He casually pulls out his phone and makes a brief call. He puts the phone back in his pocket and nods. They stride back into the lobby.

MRS. WONG

(to Martin)

I'd like to inform you that my husband has just purchased this building. An email confirming said purchase should be arriving in your inbox presently.

Martin's computer emits a gentle audio TONE. In shock, the man glances at the screen, his eyes bulging as he reads.

MRS. WONG (cont'd)

I trust you'll see that everything is in order.

MARTIN

Yes, Mrs. Wong!

MRS. WONG

Now if you wouldn't mind, could you please attend to the overflowing trash bin out front?

MARTIN

Right away, Mrs. Wong!

Martin sprints out the front door.

TRIUMPHANT MUSIC rises as the Asian woman and her husband make their way across the lobby, into the open elevator.

MR. WONG
Happy birthday, Mrs. Wong.

MRS. WONG
I thought you said money can't buy happiness.

MR. WONG
You be the judge of that.

Music swells. They kiss passionately, as the elevator doors close.

2 EXT. SKYSCRAPER - NIGHT 2

A massive, ultra-modern tower centered within a glittering cityscape. The surrounding sky erupts with FIREWORKS.

3 INT. MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT 3

PULLING BACK, we see the previous scene playing out on a screen. As the movie-within-the-movie cuts to credits and ASIAN-INFLECTED CLUB MUSIC, the audience breaks into THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE.

The capacity crowd is comprised entirely of Asian people, who enthusiastically clap, cheer, wipe away tears. We zero in on MIKO and BEN (both early 30s, Japanese American), seated side by side. Miko smiles and applauds, as Ben slumps in his seat, a look of disbelief. The crowd goes into a standing ovation, obscuring Ben, who doesn't move.

4 INT. MOVIE THEATER - LOBBY - A FEW MINUTES LATER 4

The audience mingles under a BANNER that reads "EAST BAY ASIAN AMERICAN FILM FESTIVAL." A DJ spins. A woman hands out boba drinks. Ben and Miko make their way through the crowd, their discordant expressions still intact.

Miko notices RAMON (40s), an enthusiastic Filipino man in a *barong tagalog*, waving her over from across the room. He is surrounded by a group of Asian people of various ages.

RAMON
 Everyone, I'd like you to meet one
 of our incredible co-organizers,
 Miko Higashi.

Miko shakes hands and hobnobs amiably with the crowd.

MIKO
 Oh, and this is my boyfriend Ben.

As if snapping out of a daze, Ben smiles and waves.

BEN
 Sorry, I'm just...recovering.

RAMON
 (to Ben and Miko)
 Wasn't that amazing?

MIKO
 Yes!

Ben grimaces and shrugs, clearly holding his tongue.

RAMON
 (to Ben)
 Look, bruh, I know it's a little
 glossy, but it's OURS!
 (to everyone)
 Right? That's US, baby!

Everyone within earshot CHEERS and APPLAUDS as a dance circle
 breaks out. Clearly outnumbered, Ben smiles and CLAPS along.

5 EXT. CITY STREET - BERKELEY - NIGHT

5

Ben and Miko walk along a Berkeley street.

MIKO
 So what did you think?

BEN
 Well, Ms. Higashi. After some
 careful consideration of the film,
 I regret to inform you that...

A long, dramatic PAUSE.

BEN (cont'd)
 Me no like-ee.

MIKO

(laughing)

I know, I know. But as a community, we've waited a long time to see ourselves reflected in a--

BEN

...In a garish, mainstream rom-com that...that glorifies a capitalistic fantasy of vindication through wealth and--

MIKO

Okay! I know it wasn't exactly your thing, but that's not the point. The cultural impact--

BEN

That's completely the point!

MIKO

I guess I thought you might be able to see the bigger picture. Like, beyond your own snobby tastes.

BEN

You thought I could do that? Have we just met?

Miko laughs.

MIKO

Look, the reviews have been incredible, it's gonna be a massive hit, and that's what makes it great.

BEN

Wow.

They arrive at their car, an unremarkable sedan.

MIKO

It's a game-changer, okay? And now if some Asian American filmmaker wants to make a movie that's more your style--something "cooler" or more real or whatever--and they're suddenly able to get funding, they should get down on their knees and bow down to that garish, mainstream hit that cleared the way for them.

Ben shrugs and nods, as if conceding. They get in the car.

6 EXT. CITY STREETS - BERKELEY - NIGHT 6

Ben and Miko's car zips by.

7 INT. BEN AND MIKO'S APARTMENT - NIGHT 7

Ben and Miko enter, turning on lights, removing coats, etc. The apartment is stylish, modest, somewhat cramped.

BEN

I'm not criticizing you. Or the festival! I'm just expressing my opinion about this particular movie, but--

MIKO

Well, you could've at least faked it a little bit with Ramon. The way you reacted when he asked what you thought of it...god, I wanted to die.

BEN

(laughing)

It's good for him! He should hear a range of responses, for once.

MIKO

Well, who are *you* to criticize?

BEN

What's *that* supposed to mean?

MIKO

Sorry. That wasn't...Look, if you didn't like the movie, that's fine. I just don't understand why you have to be so--

BEN

Because it's depressing to see a room full of people lose their minds over a movie just because of "representation" or whatever.

MIKO

How about the possibility that they also just really enjoyed the movie?

BEN

Well, that's even more depressing!

MIKO

Wow. You are a piece of work...

Miko shakes her head and chuckles, in spite of herself.

A7 OPENING TITLES

A7

8 INT. BAY AREA RESTAURANT - DAY

8

Ben sits across the table from his best friend, a young Korean-American woman. This is ALICE (late 20s, glasses).

BEN

I can't even do it justice. I'm still having like, aftershock cringes.

ALICE

Really? I heard it's great--

BEN

The entire theater was going insane! It looked like a med school graduation ceremony.

ALICE

(laughs)

Well, I'm sure Miko really appreciated your in-depth critique.

BEN

What am I gonna do? Suddenly act like my judgment is as clouded as hers? I mean, she didn't give a shit about any of this... community... political...*whatever* when I met her, so it's--

NINA, a waitress (mid 20s), arrives holding two plates.

NINA

Okay, I've got a club with fries and a tofu scramble crepe.

Ben makes a face in response to Alice's order.

ALICE

That's me. I like your hair.

NINA

Really? For some reason I thought
it would be a good idea to get
drunk and cut it myself last night.

Alice laughs, a little more than warranted.

NINA (cont'd)

I should go get it fixed.

BEN

(to waitress)

Can I--

ALICE

No way! I should get you to cut *my*
hair sometime.

BEN

Sorry, but can I get some--

ALICE

We can get drunk first if it'll
help.

Nina laughs.

BEN

Ketchup! Can I please get some
ketchup.

NINA

(to Ben)

Sure. I'll be right back with that.

(to Alice, warmly)

Let me know if you need anything
else.

ALICE

I will.

As Nina walks away, Alice smiles proudly.

BEN

Do you know her?

ALICE

Not yet.

They start eating.

ALICE (cont'd)

Okay, so she's gotten a little more
politically-minded. That's good!

(MORE)

ALICE (cont'd)
I don't get why it's such an
affront to you.

BEN
It's not a...It just, it gets
tiresome, you know?

ALICE
I bet you'd change your tune if you
suddenly woke up in Alabama or
something.

BEN
I was practically the only non-
Aryan in my entire high school! I
showed you the yearbook. It was
like a...Mormon modeling agency!

ALICE
And you never felt discriminated
against, or--

BEN
I definitely did! But not because I
was Asian.

ALICE
Just your inherent bad
personality...

BEN
Exactly. I fucking *earned* that
outcast status!

Alice laughs and nods her head in agreement.

ALICE
Remember that guy from the dorms?
Alvin...something?

BEN
Elvin! How could you forget his
name? Elvin Dong!

ALICE
Yes! The guy who blamed all his
problems on racism! You're like the
total opposite of him. You refuse
to...

She trails off, noticing that she's lost his attention. She follows his eye-line to a SEXY BLONDE WOMAN who has entered the restaurant.

ALICE (cont'd)
God, you're predictable.

9 OMIT 9

10 INT. BEN AND MIKO'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT 10

Ben and Miko bustle around, preparing a meal--specifically, Japanese home-cooking.

MIKO
So Ramon thinks that our attendance might've actually *tripled* this year. And that's in spite of the fact that those jerks at *The Weekly* refused to give us a write-up.

BEN
Wow.

MIKO
How's Alice? Did you guys have lunch today?

BEN
You know...she's her usual Alice-y self. She already broke up with that girl from Benicia. And now she's--

MIKO
Oh! I forgot: remember that guy Trong? It turns out he made a mistake with the ad budget back in April, so the thing with the posters totally wasn't my fault.

They sit down with their food and begin eating.

BEN
Oh, well, that's good, I guess. I mean, good and bad.

MIKO
Yeah.

We hold on them as they eat in silence.

11 INT. BEN AND MIKO'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT 11

Ben sits in the darkened room, watching an old movie on a large TV. A stack of Criterion blu-ray discs sits on the coffee table. Miko enters, dressed in a tank top and panties.

MIKO
It's getting late.

BEN
(eyes fixed on the TV)
Look at this. They call this an
"improved digital transfer"?

MIKO
Do you want to get to bed soon?

BEN
Enh...I'm not really tired yet. I
slept in today.

MIKO
Well, we don't have to go to sleep
right away.

BEN
I'll be there in a little bit. I
still have a couple other discs I
want to check out.

Miko takes this in, then turns and exits down the hallway.

12 EXT. UNIVERSITY CINEMA - DAY 12

A small, slightly shabby movie theater. A young woman strides in. A "HELP WANTED" SIGN is visible in the box office window.

13 INT. UNIVERSITY CINEMA - PROJECTOR ROOM - DAY 13

Ben, dressed in his work uniform of black pants, white shirt and tie, sits at a desk of a makeshift office in the projector room. He's reading a book on screenwriting.

WOMAN (O.S.)
Hello!..Ben?

BEN
(not looking up)
Yeah.

The young woman, AUTUMN (mid 20s, white) leans her head into the room. Her choppy hair is bleached blonde, and her blue eyes are ringed with heavy black eyeliner.

AUTUMN

Hi! The guys downstairs said to talk to you about the, uh, job?

Ben closes his book and looks up, suddenly intrigued.

14 INT. UNIVERSITY CINEMA - LOBBY - A FEW MINUTES LATER 14

Ben and Autumn descend a staircase. Behind the refreshment counter are two employees: GENE (20s) and LAMONT (20s). Both are dressed in the requisite white shirt, necktie, and black pants.

BEN

(to Autumn)

So the restrooms are up those stairs on the other side of the concession stand--

GENE (O.S.)

So what are you into?

Ben and Autumn look towards the refreshment counter. Gene and Lamont stare expectantly at Autumn.

AUTUMN

Oh, hi again! What...?

BEN

(to Autumn, reluctantly)

That's Gene, and that's Lamont.

She smiles and waves.

BEN (cont'd)

Guys, this is Autumn. She'll be starting this weekend, so I'm--

GENE

Movie-wise. What are you into?

AUTUMN

Gee. Okay. I, uh...

She pauses to think.

GENE

I'm into genre auteurs. In other words, singular filmmakers who choose to work within the--

LAMONT

He's a Christopher Nolan fan, is what he's trying to say.

GENE

Extremely reductive, but nevertheless I--

LAMONT

I'm more into world cinema. You know...Bong Joon-Ho, Ruben Östlund, *Céline Sciamma*.

GENE

Bullshit alert! Bullshit alert!

Gene begins to make a grating SIREN SOUND with his voice.

BEN

Guys! Let's try not to scare her off before she's even started, okay?

Ben ushers Autumn towards the box office.

AUTUMN

Yikes.

BEN

Yeah, sorry. You'll be safe in here.

Autumn laughs as Ben opens the door to the tiny box office.

15 OMIT 15

16 INT. UNIVERSITY CINEMA - BOX OFFICE - CONTINUOUS 16

Ben and Autumn enter the cramped booth.

BEN

Well, I guess I don't need to explain too much. You know, it's just...selling tickets...answering questions from confused old people...

AUTUMN

I love it!

BEN

I should probably mention that we have a little video camera up there...

He gestures towards a WEBCAM that's mounted above the door.

BEN (cont'd)

We've had some problems in the past with the cash drawer, so--

AUTUMN

Who's gonna be watching me? You?

BEN

Sorry. It's just like, a rule the owners imposed.

AUTUMN

Well, I like being watched. My therapist says I have exhibitionistic tendencies.

BEN

Oh. Uh-huh?

AUTUMN

Actually, you should come check out one of my shows sometime.

BEN

What do you mean? Like an art show?

AUTUMN

I'm part of this collective that does performance art, spoken word, that kind of stuff. We're pretty well-regarded.

BEN

Oh, cool.

AUTUMN

But I don't know. It might be too weird for you!

BEN

What's that supposed to mean?

A car horn BEEPS twice, interrupting the conversation.

17 EXT. UNIVERSITY CINEMA - DAY - CONTINUOUS 17

An unremarkable sedan idles at the curb, lights on. Ben exits the box office and approaches the car as Miko steps out from the driver's side. She holds a TAKE OUT FOOD CONTAINER.

BEN

Hey! What are you doing here?

MIKO

I was having lunch down on Fourth Street, so I got you some take-out.

BEN

With who? You're all dressed up.

MIKO

Just...Ling and Ramon and some of the other festival people. Here... eat before the tempura gets soggy.

He takes the container from her.

BEN

Thanks. I'll probably be home around one.

MIKO

I'll try to stay up.

18 INT. UNIVERSITY CINEMA - BOX OFFICE - CONTINUOUS 18

Autumn watches as Ben and Miko share a perfunctory kiss.

19 INT. BEN AND MIKO'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT 19

Miko sits in bed on her iPad, while Ben gets ready for the night.

BEN

No, Gene was actually right. Lamont's *real* favorite movies are literally all on Disney+. Meanwhile, he's--

MIKO

(laughing)
Are you serious?

BEN

I mean, I guess you can't blame him for trying, but--

MIKO

Boy, I guess everyone's got the hots for the new girl!

BEN

What do you mean, "everyone"?

MIKO

Pft, come on. I know your type.

BEN

What? I don't have a type.

Miko smirks, holding her tongue.

BEN (cont'd)

I don't!

MIKO

Then how come you didn't introduce us?

BEN

Because unlike you, I spare you the pain of having to interact with my co-workers, so--

MIKO

Well, you've introduced me to Gene, Lamont, uh...that creepy projectionist guy--

BEN

Okay, fine! I didn't know you'd be so interested in meeting some grubby, attention-seeking hipster, but--

MIKO

Oh, don't overdo it, Ben. I know what a sucker you are for those kinds of--

BEN

Jesus Christ! Give me a little credit, okay? I'm--

MIKO

All right, fine! I'm just--

BEN

You wanna know my type? You. Okay? Even when you're being an asshole.

Miko laughs. Ben joins her in bed, pulls her close and gives her a kiss. As Miko rolls towards Ben, we catch a glimpse of the modern/minimalist FLOWER-PRINT PATTERN on her pillowcase.

20

INT. ALICE'S APARTMENT - MORNING

20

A small, collegiate studio. Ben sits on a futon, dressed in a suit and tie. Alice, in a dress and heels, fusses with her hair, applies make-up, etc.--all of which seems very out of character for her.

ALICE

Thanks for doing this.

BEN

I'm honored to play a role in your bizarre, ongoing charade.

ALICE

You'd think the fact that I'm getting a Ph.D would be enough to make them happy, but nope.

Ben grabs a FRAMED PHOTO of Alice from the side table.

BEN

Why do you have a framed photo of yourself?

ALICE

Because I'm in love with her - Oh, one more thing... maybe don't mention that your last name is "Tagawa", okay?

He shoots her a baffled look.

ALICE (cont'd)

My grandpa will be there.

BEN

So?

ALICE

Does the phrase "World War II" ring a bell with you?

BEN

Oh. That.

ALICE

Yeah, that. Nothing big. Just...just the raping and pillaging my people.

BEN

Half of your people--

ALICE

Your people making us bow down and change our names to--

BEN

That wasn't "my people", okay?! My people were already in America for like, two generations when that happened! My people were, you know...getting locked up in fucking internment camps!

ALICE

I think the preferred term is "incarceration camp"...? "Internment" is a misleading -

BEN

I know! I can't defend my ancestors and be perfectly correct in my terminology at the same time, okay?

ALICE

C'mon, we're gonna be late.

Alice grabs her keys, as Ben pulls himself up off the couch.

21 OMIT 21

22 OMIT 22

23 EXT. KOREAN CHURCH - SAN FRANCISCO - DAY 23

Ben and Alice approach an austere, suburban building adorned with Korean signage and a large metal cross. Well dressed Asian people of all ages file in for a wedding.

ALICE

...Either way, they'd still rather see me with a Japanese guy than a Korean girl.

BEN

Oh. So when it comes down to it, rapists and pillagers are still preferable to gays.

ALICE

Everything is preferable to gays...

MRS. LEE (O.S.)
 (in Korean)
Alice! You're late! Always late!

MR. and MRS. LEE (both mid 60's) approach. GRANDPA LEE (80's, Korean) follows behind.

ALICE
 Hi, Mom Hi, Dad.
 (in Korean)
Hi, Grandpa!

Alice hugs her family as Ben stands awkwardly.

MRS. LEE
 So...we finally get to meet your
 mysterious boyfriend!
 (in Korean)
So handsome!

ALICE
 Uh, yeah. Everyone... this is Ben.
 Ben Park.

BEN
 Hi there--

MR. LEE
 Hello, Ben.

Mr. Lee, elated almost to the point of tears, goes in for a warm hug.

MRS. LEE
 Praise Jesus.

BEN
 Yup.

MRS. LEE
 Very nice to meet you, Ben. So
 Alice tells me you're a youth
 pastor!

Ben nods uncomfortably. He looks over at Alice, who is all smiles. Ben offers a hand to Grandpa.

BEN
 Uh, nice to meet you, sir.

But the old man doesn't oblige. He just menacingly scowls.

MRS. LEE
 Anyway, let's go inside!

Mr. And Mrs. Lee head inside. Grandpa stares daggers at Ben before turning around and following them in.

BEN
 (to Alice)
 ...What's wrong with your Grandpa?

ALICE
 He knows. Shit.

Alice drops her head, as they head into the church.

24 OMIT 24

25 INT. BEN AND MIKO'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT 25

Ben is standing at the sink, washing dishes. Miko enters, holding a laptop computer.

MIKO
 Can I talk to you for a sec?

BEN
 Uh-huh...?

MIKO
 So I had to use your computer today, and--

BEN
 What's wrong with yours?

MIKO
 I left it at work.

She sets the computer down on the counter.

MIKO (cont'd)
 You left a few pages open on your desktop.

Miko opens the laptop. Ben's desktop window is littered with windows of PORN SITES.

BEN
 ...And there goes your afternoon!
 Right?

She glares at him, unamused.

BEN (cont'd)
Look, let's not make a big deal out of this, okay? If it bothers you--

MIKO
The thing that bothers me is that all these girls are white.

BEN
That's what this is about?

MIKO
I don't like it to begin with, but yeah: it especially bothers me that all the girls are white.

BEN
Okay, first of all, that's...that's not true. There's different categories, and...

He starts to navigate the site, with great facility, as Miko glares at him.

BEN (cont'd)
...so if you're looking for something in particular, you --

She SLAMS the computer shut.

MIKO
It's not funny, Ben.

BEN
Look, this stuff is just...it's *supposed* to be different from reality! Otherwise what's the point? I mean, if you were stranded on a desert island, you wouldn't sit around dreaming about sand and sun, right?

MIKO
Is that what this feels like to you? Being stranded on a--

BEN
No, listen! My point is that sand and sun are great, it's just--

MIKO
Do you have any idea why this might offend me?

(MORE)

MIKO (cont'd)

It's like you're obsessed with the typical, Western media beauty ideal, but you're settling for me!

BEN

Oh, so now it's a whole political thing, right? Jesus. And I'm not "settling"--!

MIKO

Well, I notice what you gawk at when we're out, and it's always some white girl with--

BEN

Okay, maybe you're right. Maybe I've been brainwashed by some insidious media conspiracy into thinking that blonde-haired, blue-eyed women are attractive. I guess I should actually find Margot Robbie *disgusting*, but somehow I've been duped into--

MIKO

You're a fucking asshole.

Miko turns and walks out of the room. Ben follows her.

26

INT. BEN AND MIKO'S APARTMENT - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

26

Miko makes her way down the hall, into the bedroom. Ben starts to follow her in, but she stops him at the doorway.

BEN

Why are you blowing this up into such a...I mean, it's not like I'm cheating on you, or--

MIKO

Are you sure about that?

BEN

See? You are the crazy one! What the fuck is that?!

MIKO

This is what you always do: you act like an asshole, and then you get angry when I call you on it.

BEN
I'm angry because you always assume
the worst about me, and you end up
acting crazy over nothing!

MIKO
It's not "nothing," and I'm not
acting "crazy," so stop using that
fucking word!

She SLAMS the door in his face.

BEN
(laughing derisively)
See? You're proving my point!

27 INT. BEN AND MIKO'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - MORNING 27

Ben wakes up to find Miko's side of the bed empty and the door ajar.

He walks down the hallway to find Miko at the dining table, looking at her phone. Ben sits across from her, occasionally glancing in her direction. The room is SILENT except for the GURGLING SOUND of the coffee maker.

BEN
I'm sorry about last night...

MIKO
I know. Me too.

BEN
I think we can both--

The GURGLING SOUND tapers off, the machine BEEPS.

MIKO
Coffee's ready.

She hops up from her seat. Ben leaves his thought unfinished.

28 INT. UNIVERSITY CINEMA - PROJECTOR ROOM - NIGHT 28

Ben sits at his desk, looking at his phone. He scrolls through a grid of photos, stopping on a sultry "bathroom selfie" of Autumn.

Gene abruptly opens the door and enters.

GENE
Excuse the interruption, but--

Startled, Ben drops his phone and spins around in his chair.

BEN

Jesus, Gene! You can't just come up on me like that!

GENE

Well, perhaps under less urgent circumstances: fine. But right now, we have a situation. Autumn suddenly feels it's imperative that she go get a burrito, but if I cover for her, then I'll be leaving Lamont alone at the concession stand, and--

BEN

Gene! I'm sure Lamont can handle it for a few minutes.

GENE

Hm.

(a beat)

Interesting.

Gene closes the door as he leaves. Ben turns his attention to the computer on his desk.

On the screen, we see the VIDEO FEED from the box office booth. Gene enters and speaks to Autumn. She jumps up from her seat, and Gene takes her place. Autumn looks into the camera and blows a stagy "air kiss" off the palm of her hand.

29

EXT. CITY STREET - BERKELEY - DAY

29

Ben and Miko walk through a bustling commercial district.

BEN

It's not like I have a choice. We have to let these seismic retrofit guys inspect the theater, and we have to pay for it.

MIKO

That's annoying.

BEN

Oh, and would your Dad mind if I'm late on my rent again--

MIKO

It's fine. He's not even keeping track... Hey, do you remember that internship I applied for?

BEN

The what--?

MIKO

The Asian-American Independent Film Institute?

BEN

Maybe. What about it?

MIKO

Well, I heard back from them finally, and...I got it!

BEN

Really? That's great, right?

MIKO

Yeah!

BEN

So what does that mean? Are you--

MIKO

Well, the thing is, it's in New York.

BEN

Okay, you definitely never told me about this.

MIKO

I did. It's a three month program, and I'll get to--

Ben stops in his tracks.

BEN

Three months?! Are you kidding me?

MIKO

I know. But it's an amazing opportunity. I'm really excited about it.

BEN

It just *seems* like an amazing opportunity because it's in New York.

MIKO

Yeah! That's part of the reason I wanted it!

BEN

God, I hate the way everyone in the Bay Area worships New York.

MIKO

Well, I don't think--

BEN

Trust me: New York is over-rated. It's so *gentrified* now.

MIKO

How many times have you even been there?

BEN

Counting layovers?

MIKO

No.

BEN

Okay, it doesn't...Look: there's no way I'm moving to New York for three months, okay?

MIKO

I wasn't really asking you to.

Miko walks off.

30 INT. BAY AREA RESTAURANT - DAY

30

Ben and Alice sit in their familiar spot, eating lunch.

ALICE

So what does that mean? Are you guys like, broken up?

BEN

We're "taking some time off." Those are her words.

ALICE

Wow. When does she leave?

BEN

End of the month. Now I'm supposed to be all "supportive," but you know...(chuckling) I'm not.

ALICE

Maybe it's like a test, and she wants you to talk her out of going.

BEN

Right, then I'm the one holding her back, extinguishing her dreams...

ALICE

Yeah, you're fucked either way.

Alice waits for Ben to laugh, but he stares off, deep in thought.

ALICE (cont'd)

Well, this has been fun!

Alice gets up and takes the check over to the counter. Ben watches as she chats flirtatiously with Nina, the waitress who we recognize from the previous cafe/restaurant scene.

31 MONTAGE 31

A few quick shots of Berkeley/Oakland at various times of day: Telegraph Avenue, Lake Merritt, the Bay Bridge, etc.

32 EXT. BEN AND MIKO'S APARTMENT - DAY 32

Ben and Miko approach their car. Ben is dragging several large suitcases.

MIKO

You really didn't have to drive me.

BEN

I wanted to.

Ben unlocks the car.

MIKO

You're probably excited to have a little peace and quiet.

BEN

Yeah, right.

Ben shrugs as he loads the suitcases into the trunk.

MIKO

Well, I'm sure it'll be good for you.

They get in the car. Ben looks over at Miko, who clicks on her seatbelt.

BEN

Hey... I don't think I ever said congratulations on the internship... I'm glad you're happy about it but... I'm gonna miss you.

MIKO

It's just a few months. You're gonna love being a bachelor again.

Ben nods, clicks on his seatbelt and starts the engine.

BEN

Maybe I'll try to get back to writing.

MIKO

Yeah.

33 EXT. FREEWAY - SOUTHBOUND 880 - DAY 33

POV from inside a moving car: we pass under an illuminated SIGN indicating that we're headed towards the OAKLAND INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT.

34 INT. BEN AND MIKO'S CAR - DAY 34

On a highway close to the airport, Ben drives, as Miko looks out the window.

BEN

...And I'll see about coming out for a weekend or something.

MIKO

That sounds great.

BEN

Fuck--that asshole just cut me off! You saw that, right?

MIKO

It's fine, Ben--

BEN

It's all these tech assholes taking over the Bay, with their piece of shit McMansions in Hayward, or wherever the fuck they live--FUCK YOU, ASSHOLE!

He honks the horn several times.

MIKO

Relax, Ben--

BEN

And why are all these idiots in such a hurry to get away from their "artisinal brew pubs" and fucking apricot jams or-- HEY! YOU CUT ME OFF SHITHEAD!

Ben keeps pounding on the horn, as Miko stares ahead, meditatively counting the minutes.

35 OMIT 35

36 OMIT 36

37 INT. BEN AND MIKO'S APARTMENT / ALICE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT 37

A dark apartment. The light clicks on. Ben enters and slumps on the couch, all alone. He reaches in his pocket, pulls out his phone and dials Alice.

BEN

Hey, it's me.

(pause)

Yeah, I just got back.

Alice paces around in her kitchen. We cut back and forth as they talk on the phone.

ALICE

So what's the deal? Are you standing on a chair with a noose around your neck?

BEN

No, I...I'm fine.

ALICE

Okay, cool! Can I--

BEN
I mean, I'm not *fine*, but I'm--

ALICE
Listen, can I call you later?

She turns a corner for more privacy.

ALICE (cont'd)
(whispering)
You won't believe who's here right now!

In the background, we see Nina from the cafe/restaurant sitting on a futon, drinking a beer.

BEN
Wow. Well, good luck.
(pause)
Yeah, I guess you don't.

38 INT. BEN AND MIKO'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - MORNING 38

Ben groggily awakens. He rolls onto his side and looks pensively at the empty space beside him in the bed.

39 INT. BEN AND MIKO'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Ben sits down with a cup of coffee. He picks up his phone, thinks for a beat, and then begins tapping on the screen.

CLOSE ON Ben's phone as he composes a TEXT MESSAGE:

"Hey Autumn, just wondering when that show of yours is happening!"

He reconsiders, changing the EXCLAMATION MARK to a PERIOD. He sends the message. Almost immediately, we see the THREE PULSING DOTS of a response being typed. Autumn's TEXT MESSAGE pops up:

"sorry who's this" (shrug emoji)

Ben stares at the phone with a look of exasperation.

40 INT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT 40

Autumn stands spotlit on a darkened stage, her make-up and clothing suggesting a mix of 90s grunge and Japanese anime. A battered electric guitar hangs from her neck. Behind her, we see the shadowy outlines of various other performers.

AUTUMN
 (into microphone)
 This next piece is entitled
 "Asylum."
 (dramatic pause)
 It's about immigration.

The stage suddenly explodes with light and NOISE. Accompanied by a full band, Autumn begins wailing on her guitar, creating a FEEDBACK-DRENCHED CACOPHONY. As the band performs their ATONAL, ARHYTHMIC MUSIC, a NAKED MAN appears and prances around the stage, striking theatrical poses, and dancing.

We move through the enthusiastic audience, finally settling on Ben, whose face is contorted with pain and disbelief.

41 INT. WAREHOUSE - LATER

41

The house lights have come up, and Ben stands near the stage as Autumn packs up her various cords and pedals.

AUTUMN
 Really? Oh my god! The whole time I was thinking, "He's totally hating this!"

BEN
 No no no! I was just...overwhelmed! It was like a combination of, of...experimental music, performance art--

AUTUMN
 Well, we're taking the physicality of modern dance and the improvisation of free jazz and infusing it with a punk sensibility.

Ben struggles not to wince.

BEN
 You know, I have to admit, I didn't really know what to expect, but that was...amazing.

She leaps off the stage, surprising Ben with a hug.

AUTUMN
 That's so cool!

42 INT. BAY AREA RESTAURANT #2 - DAY

42

Ben and Alice sit across from each other in a booth, eating and drinking. This is a new setting, different from where we've seen them having lunch before.

BEN

Something wrong with the usual place?

ALICE

I'm just kind of dodging that waitress.

BEN

Why? I thought you were--

ALICE

Enh. She started getting all *attached*.

BEN

You've got problems.

ALICE

What, just because I'm not a serial monogamist like you?

BEN

I'm not--that's the old me, okay?

ALICE

Right.

BEN

You think I'm gonna sit around pining away for Miko while she's off traipsing around New York?

ALICE

What does *that* mean? I thought you said you guys weren't broken up.

BEN

I told you: we're *taking some time off*. I don't know what's so confusing about--

ALICE

Okay, okay! Jeez...

BEN

I'm just saying...while the cat's away, the mouse will play.

ALICE
Yeah, with himself, probably.

BEN
Ha ha.

ALICE
So is there a dating app for the miserable?

BEN
What if I told you I already went out with someone?

ALICE
Wait...what?

BEN
Yeah, Autumn. She's--

ALICE
That girl from the theater? Ew, how old is she?

BEN
She's like 23, 24. 25. Probably older than your waitress.

ALICE
Yeah, but it's different.

BEN
How's it different?

ALICE
Everything's less creepy without the hetero power dynamics.

Ben takes a beat to consider this.

ALICE (cont'd)
So how many times have you gone out with her?

BEN
Just once, really...but--

ALICE
You going out again?

BEN
Probably.

ALICE
You gonna make a move?

BEN
Why are you interrogating me--

ALICE
I just don't want you to be
banished to "neutered Asian friend"
territory forever. I've seen you
there, Ben, and it's pathetic.

Ben considers this for a moment, gravely.

ALICE (cont'd)
Next thing you know, she's texting
you little updates about some guy
she likes...showing you
pictures...asking your advice...
Fuck that place. Right?

Ben nods.

ALICE (cont'd)
Come on, Ben. Say it with me:

ALICE (cont'd)
FUCK THAT PLACE!

BEN
(self-consciously)
Fuck that place.

Customers glance over in Alice's direction.

43 INT. BEN AND MIKO'S APARTMENT / NYC APARTMENT - NIGHT 43

We cut back and forth as Ben and Miko talk on the phone. We see just enough of Miko's surroundings to register them as more lavish than expected.

BEN
They're doing those inspections at
the theater now, which is a total
nightmare. We've had to cancel a
few screenings because they
interfered with *their* schedule.

MIKO
Jeez.

BEN
How's the internship going? You
haven't told me much about it.

MIKO

Oh, I've learned not to bore you.
But it's incredible.

BEN

That's great.

MIKO

I keep having these moments where
I'll stop and think, "Wow...I'm in
New York City!"

BEN

Well, that *is* where you are...

MIKO

I know, Ben. You don't have to get
all sarcastic just because I'm
enjoying myself.

BEN

I'm just kidding around! I wasn't--
You started it with that "I've
learned not to bore you" comment!

MIKO

"You started it"?

BEN

I'm just trying to act interested,
okay? And you--

MIKO

Why can't you ever just be
genuinely interested?

BEN

(exasperated sigh) You really want
me to answer that?

MIKO

You know what? Maybe we should just
not talk for awhile.

BEN

What? Okay, well that's up to--

The call abruptly ends with a BEEP. Ben looks at his phone in
disbelief, then tosses it aside.

44 EXT. CITY STREETS - OAKLAND - NIGHT

44

Ben and Autumn exit a seedy bar and walk through the desolate neighborhood.

BEN

I probably didn't need that last drink.

AUTUMN

You mean that second Amstel Light?

Ben laughs at Autumn's teasing. He stops in front of a wall covered in GRAFFITI.

BEN

God, look at that.

AUTUMN

I know. It really is like the last real folk art in America.

Caught off guard, Ben nods in agreement.

They move away, revealing the spray painted words on the wall: "SUCK MY DICK."

45 INT. AUTUMN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

45

Ben and Autumn enter the dark, cramped apartment. The room is cluttered with pop culture ephemera: concert posters, records, magazines, collectibles, etc.

AUTUMN

Let me grab us something to drink, and we can go to my room.

As he browses around, Ben notices a bunch of Japanese toys, manga, and kitschy Asian snack food packages.

BEN

Okay.

Ben turns and sees a wall covered with hundreds of POLAROID PHOTOS, neatly arranged in a grid.

BEN (cont'd)

Wow. What's all this?

AUTUMN

Oh! That's one of my works-in-progress. I wake up every morning, go pee, and then I take a picture.

In closer detail, we see that each Polaroid is a PHOTO OF A TOILET BOWL, and that there is a HAND-WRITTEN DATE (e.g. "THURS 2/18") scrawled beneath each image.

BEN

Are you...You're serious?

AUTUMN

Yeah, look: patterns start to emerge, like when I'm dehydrated, or when I get my period...

BEN

Yeah...

AUTUMN

It'll be a huge installation someday. Right now the working title is "Epistemology." It's kind of a pun...

Ben takes a beat to process this.

BEN

How about "Urine Sane"?

AUTUMN

Yeah, right.
(a beat)
That wasn't very nice.

BEN

Sorry. I was just trying to...forget it. I think it's really amazing. There's so much subtext to it, and I think it's a real commentary on--

AUTUMN

...Consumption and waste!

BEN

Yeah.

AUTUMN

Let's go in the kitchen. I think my roommate might be sleeping.

46

INT. AUTUMN'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

46

Autumn rummages through the refrigerator. Ben stands nearby.

AUTUMN

Dang, I'm sure I had some soju here somewhere.

She eventually finds a bottle.

BEN

Autumn.

He steps closer, a serious look on his face.

AUTUMN

Yeah?

They lock eyes. The tension is palpable. Finally, Ben leans in for a kiss. Autumn recoils, lurching backwards abruptly.

AUTUMN (cont'd)

Oh! Um...

BEN

I'm sorry. God, I...

AUTUMN

What about your girlfriend?

BEN

Oh, we're taking some...I mean, basically, we split up. She...she moved to New York.

AUTUMN

Oh. I didn't know that.

They lock eyes again.

AUTUMN (cont'd)

But also...I'm just not really...into that kind of stuff. You know...germs.

Ben nods.

AUTUMN (cont'd)

And...bac...teria.

A horrible, awkward SILENCE descends.

BEN

Okay, yeah...

AUTUMN (cont'd)

I'm sorry, okay?

BEN

No, no. Really. I'm the one who should apolo--

JEFFERY, still naked, whom we recognize from Autumn's stage performance, enters and opens the refrigerator.

JEFFERY
Hey, Autumn.

AUTUMN
Hi, Jeffrey. Ben, this is my
roommate Jeffrey.

JEFFERY
Hey, man. Nice to meet you.

Ben and Jeffrey shake hands.

JEFFERY (cont'd)
(noticing the bottle in
Autumn's hand)
Ooh, soju!

BEN
...Do you ever wear clothes?

47 INT. BEN AND MIKO'S APARTMENT / EXT. COLLEGE CAMPUS - DAY 47

We cut back and forth between Ben and Alice (wearing AirPods)
as they talk on the phone.

ALICE
Ah, it's for the best. I mean, how
could you even get it up for
someone who does that kind of
cringey bullshit art?

BEN
You'd be amazed by what I can
overlook.

ALICE
Well, it's probably not a good look
to be dating an employee anyway.

Alice waves and mouths "Hi" to a young woman passing by.

BEN
Yeah, now you bring that up. You
know, I look to you to...you're a
very unreliable moral compass.

ALICE
I never signed up for that job!

BEN
God, I'm an idiot.

ALICE

You're out of practice. Come with me to this party on Saturday, and you can watch the master in action.

48 INT. UNIVERSITY CINEMA - BOX OFFICE - NIGHT

48

Ben approaches the booth, TAPPING on the door. Autumn, seated inside, spins around.

AUTUMN

Oh, hi.

Autumn opens the door. Ben leans against the doorframe.

BEN

Hey, how was the crowd for the 7:30?

AUTUMN

Not bad. Maybe like, eight or nine tickets.

BEN

Listen, I just wanted to say...I'm really sorry about...the other night--

AUTUMN

It's totally cool.

BEN

No, I think I misread things, and--

AUTUMN

No, you didn't. It just..in the moment? It didn't feel right.

In the background, we see Gene sweeping the floor.

BEN

Yeah, that makes sense. I just--

AUTUMN

Sometimes I think the body knows better than the mind. You know, when it comes to sexual attraction.

Gene looks up from sweeping, very intrigued.

BEN

Oh. Okay.

AUTUMN

And then sometimes the mind is like, "Well, maybe," but then the body is like, (slowly shakes her head) "Nope."

Gene continues to sweep, a smirk on his face.

BEN

Right.

AUTUMN

I wasn't always able to do this, but I'm really trying to be more mindful of this stuff.

BEN

No, that's really great.

49 INT. BEN AND MIKO'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT 49

Ben is sprawled out on the couch, watching a movie. From the TV, we hear a FLATULENT SOUND EFFECT.

Ben chuckles. He picks up his phone and taps the screen.

CLOSE ON Ben's phone as he composes a TEXT MESSAGE to Miko:

"Watching OHAYO again."

He stares at the phone. No reply.

CLOSE ON Ben's phone again as he types:

"How's it going?"

He stares at the phone for a beat, then tosses the phone back onto the coffee table.

50 EXT. PARTY HOUSE - OAKLAND - NIGHT 50

Alice and Ben get out of his car and walk towards a large, decrepit house.

BEN

Well, wish me luck.

ALICE

Yeah. About that...

BEN
What? Is this a...you brought me to
a gay thing?

ALICE
That's a pretty narrow,
exclusionary term, Ben.

BEN
Shit...sorry. I meant--

ALICE
But basically, yeah.

BEN
Unbelievable.

ALICE
Can't you ever just be like, a
person? And enjoy a nice social
experience without obsessing about
hooking up or--

BEN
Oh my god, look who's talking!

ALICE
Just because I'm a hypocrite
doesn't make me wrong!

Ben laughs.

51 EXT. PARTY HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - OAKLAND - NIGHT 51

Ben stands behind Alice as she RINGS the doorbell. The door
is opened by MAX (early 30s.) LOUD MUSIC emanates from within
the house.

MAX
All right! Alice Lee has arrived!

ALICE
Hey!

Alice and Max embrace.

BEN
Uh...hi.

ALICE
Max, this is my friend Ben.

MAX

Oh yeah! I heard all about you,
dude!

BEN

Really?

MAX

Yeah, there's definitely gonna be
some white chicks here tonight!

Max and Alice erupt into laughter. Ben smiles uncomfortably.

52 INT. PARTY HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

52

Ben and Alice follow Max into the dark, crowded house. The diegetic MUSIC and general CHATTER are almost deafening.

BEN

(to Alice)

This is just great. Thank you.

ALICE

Relax.

MAX

(addressing the party)

Look who's here!

The room responds with great excitement, as if a celebrity has arrived. Alice charges ahead, disappearing into the ethnically-diverse crowd.

Ben, apparently the only cisgender male in the room, suddenly finds himself surrounded by strangers, all of whom appear to be younger, more stylish, and very tight-knit. He moves through the crowd, smiling and nodding awkwardly as he makes occasional, fleeting eye contact.

53 INT. PARTY HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

53

Ben wanders into the brighter, quieter room. A small group of people stand around, talking and drinking. Among the group, closest to where Ben stands, is ESTHER (early 20s).

ESTHER

Hello.

BEN

Hi. I was just looking for, uh...

ESTHER
The kitchen?

Ben smirks, as if to say "Yeah, right."

BEN
A beer. There they are!

He pulls a bottle out of an ice chest on the floor.

BEN (cont'd)
Uh, my name's Ben.

ESTHER
Okay.

BEN
I'm a friend of Alice's...?

ESTHER
Uh-huh?

BEN
Do you know...is there a bottle
opener...?

ESTHER
What for? It's twist-off.

BEN
Oh, it is?

He smiles as he struggles to remove the bottle cap. He doubles over, straining with all his might.

BEN (cont'd)
Unngggh!

The room bursts into barely-stifled LAUGHTER. Esther hands Ben a bottle opener.

ESTHER
Sorry. I'm just fucking with you.

Ben smiles, opens his beer and leaves.

54

EXT. PARTY HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

54

Ben sits alone on the front steps, drinking his beer. An effortlessly beautiful blonde woman exits the house and lights a cigarette. This is SASHA (late 20s, white).

SASHA
You must be Alice's friend.

He turns to look as she sits next to him.

BEN
Tch...supposedly.

SASHA
I overheard some talk of an interloper.

BEN
That would probably be me.

SASHA
My name's Sasha.

BEN
Oh, hi. Ben.

She sits down nearby, but on a different step.

SASHA
I bet you we have something in common.

BEN
Yeah? What's that?

SASHA
We're probably the only two people at this party that Alice Lee hasn't seduced.

Ben, caught off guard, lets out a little SNORT.

BEN
Really? You've managed to--

SASHA
Oh, I dodged that bullet. No offense.

BEN
No, that's...apparently that's quite an accomplishment around here.

SASHA
Yeah.

BEN

Are you, uh...do you go to school with...?

SASHA

Yeah...Comp. Lit., with a focus on Latin American Marxism.

BEN

Oh! That's actually my favorite... kind of Marxism, so--

SASHA

Seriously?

BEN

No. I have no idea. I'm probably the least informed person here...

SASHA

Hm, I doubt that.

She stubs out her cigarette on the steps.

SASHA (cont'd)

So, what are you...Alice's designated driver?

BEN

Maybe. I'm not even sure what I'm doing here, to be honest.

Suddenly, Alice storms out of the house, onto the porch.

ALICE

There you are!

She grabs Ben by the arm, pulling him to his feet.

ALICE (cont'd)

(to Ben)

Let's go.

(to Sasha)

Hi Sasha.

SASHA

Hi Alice.

BEN

I guess we're leaving, but...I work at the University Cinema. Come see a movie for free sometime!

SASHA

Okay.

Ben continues talking over his shoulder as Alice pulls him further down the sidewalk.

BEN

And popcorn, too! Free popcorn!

55 INT. BEN'S AND MIKO'S CAR - OAKLAND/BERKELEY - NIGHT 55

Ben and Alice enter the car.

BEN

Why'd we have to leave all of a sudden? I was just about to--

ALICE

No, you weren't.

BEN

But--

ALICE

Trust me. You do not want to get involved with Sasha. She's a fence-sitter, okay?

BEN

Weren't you the one who was just giving me shit about "narrow, exclusionary terms" or whatever?

ALICE

I'm allowed. And I'm telling you, she's total bad news...

They click on their seatbelts, and Ben starts the engine. Alice bursts out laughing.

ALICE (cont'd)

"Free popcorn."

BEN

Shut up.

They drive off.

56 OMIT 56

57 OMIT 57

58 I/E. UNIVERSITY CINEMA - BOX OFFICE - DAY

58

Autumn sits at the ticket window as Ben, standing nearby, counts out dollar bills for the register.

BEN
...fifteen...sixteen...

AUTUMN
So, we've got another show coming up pretty soon.

BEN
...eighteen...nineteen...twenty. Oh yeah? That's great.

AUTUMN
I know you really liked our last show, and this is kind of like...similar, but more intense.

BEN
Wow. What night is it? Because I might have to--

AUTUMN
It's actually a month-long residency, so...

BEN
Oh, perfect! Well, let me--

Ben is rescued by a TAPPING on the box office window. It's Sasha, looking more radiant than ever.

SASHA
Hi. Remember me?

Ben haphazardly shoves the dollar bills into the register.

BEN
Of course! Hi!

SASHA
I was just passing by.

BEN
Wanna see a movie?

She surveys the marquee, grimacing at the options.

SASHA
Mmm. Maybe another time.

BEN

Hang on a second.

He exits the booth. Through the glass, Autumn watches Ben and Sasha's inaudible conversation. Eventually, Ben and Sasha walk away together, talking animatedly.

59 INT. MEXICAN RESTAURANT - DAY

59

Ben and Sasha sit across from each other in the crowded, brightly-decorated restaurant.

SASHA

(taking a bite)

Mm, that's good.

BEN

Have you never been here before?

SASHA

I was in a relationship, and...she became a vegetarian, then a vegan, then a raw-food vegan...

BEN

And now what does she eat? Dirt?

SASHA

(laughing)

Needless to say, places like this were off limits. It still feels a little transgressive, actually.

BEN

Yeah, my ex basically liked two kinds of food: Japanese from a restaurant or Japanese cooked at home.

SASHA

Sounds better than vegan cashew cheese.

BEN

Yeah. So how long ago did you and...?

SASHA

Pilar? Uh...

BEN

Am I prying here? I don't want to be intrusive.

SASHA

No, it's fine. We've been broken up a couple months.

(a beat)

I should probably say it's been longer, right? So it doesn't seem like I'm just jumping from one thing to another?

BEN

Good thought, but then if you make it too long, you start to run the risk of looking kind of--

SASHA

I know. Like, "Hi! I haven't had a date in three years! Wanna meet my cats?"

BEN

Wait, do you actually have cats?

SASHA

(covering her face)
Maybe!

Ben laughs, very much charmed.

SASHA (cont'd)

So what about you? How long have you been...?

BEN

Oh, about ten years.

Sasha freezes, mid-bite, then starts to laugh.

BEN (cont'd)

I'm kidding. Same as you: couple, uh...couple months.

SASHA

Do you have to get back to work, or...?

BEN

Yeah, unfortunately.

SASHA

Okay. Well--

BEN

But tomorrow! Tomorrow's my day off!

SASHA (cont'd)

(startled)
Oh!

Ben closes his eyes and winces, sure that he's blown it.

BEN

I'm...I'm a little out of practice
with this.

Sasha smiles, charmed.

SASHA

...Me too.

BEN

But if I haven't made it clear, I
am free tomorrow.

Sasha laughs.

60

INT. BOOKSTORE - NEXT DAY

60

From a distance, we see Ben and Sasha wander through the
aisles, browsing as they chat. As we move closer, we hear:

SASHA

But before that, there's a peer
review, and I'm not sure I trust
them to--sorry. I'm sure it's
fascinating to hear me go on and on
about grad school politics.

Ben pretends to nod off.

BEN

Huh? What?

SASHA

God, I always do this! It's like,
I'm living in this bubble, and--

BEN

No, it's good. It kind of reminds
me why I dropped out.

SASHA

What did you say you were studying?

BEN

Film. I got through two years, and
then I had this epiphany, and I was
like, "Academia is the enemy of
art! I need to stop studying and
start creating!"

SASHA

And...?

BEN

I should've kept studying.

Sasha laughs.

BEN (cont'd)

I wrote a script, and then I did the whole "maxing out my credit cards" thing...rented a bunch of equipment, roped a bunch of friends into helping me...

SASHA

And what? It didn't...?

BEN

(laughs) It was a fucking disaster. I wanted--I was trying to be the next Eric Rohmer or something...

SASHA

Yeah?

BEN

...and eventually I had to accept that I was just...the current Ben Tagawa.

Ben looks down, contemplating. She touches his shoulder.

SASHA

Oh god, that's so sad.

BEN

Thanks for that! That's really--

SASHA

(laughing)
No, I just mean--

61

INT. BEN AND MIKO'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

61

Ben and Sasha sit on the living room sofa. Half-empty cartons of CHINESE TAKE-OUT clutter the coffee table. Sasha pours two glasses of red wine. She hands one to Ben.

SASHA

There you go.

Ben takes a big gulp just as he notices that Sasha is delicately aerating the wine in her glass. He quickly follows suit and begins jiggling his glass awkwardly.

SASHA (cont'd)

Relax.

She touches his hand. A look of surprise crosses her face. She sets down her glass, and strokes Ben's hand.

SASHA (cont'd)

Oh my god.

BEN

Now what?

SASHA

You have the softest skin I've ever felt!

BEN

It's a...lifetime of work avoidance...

Sasha, still holding Ben's hand, is now staring straight into his eyes. She smiles patiently. The SILENCE is unbearable.

BEN (cont'd)

Do you think we should, uh...I mean, can I...give you a kiss?

Sasha lets go of his hand and winces. Ben looks like he wants to jump out the window.

BEN (cont'd)

Jesus, I'm sorry. I--

SASHA

No no no. (clears throat, opens eyes) Consent granted.

BEN

Really?

SASHA

It's appreciated. Yes. Nice job.

He finally leans in and they share a long kiss.

SASHA (cont'd)

But don't do it next time.

BEN

Okay.

They kiss again, with escalating intensity. Sasha moves her mouth towards Ben's ear, seductively.

SASHA
(whispering)
The smell of that moo shu pork is
killing me.

They both laugh.

62

INT. BEN AND MIKO'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

62

Ben and Sasha enter the pitch-black room. Ben stumbles around in the dark, bumping into something.

BEN
Ow, fuck!

SASHA
(laughing)
Are you okay?

BEN
Yeah. Let me just...

He turns on a small bedside lamp.

SASHA
I like that lamp.

BEN
Oh. Thanks.

In the dimly-lit room, they start kissing, as Sasha begins to matter-of-factly remove her shirt.

SASHA
Are you okay? I think you're
actually shaking.

BEN
I didn't tell you about my, uh,
Parkinson's? It's just a mild
case...

She chuckles politely, with a hint of impatience.

BEN (cont'd)
Sorry, it's just...this is the
first time I've ever been with...

SASHA
With...?

BEN

I mean...never mind. I just meant,
it's been awhile since--

SASHA

Shhhh. I know what you were gonna
say. This'll be a first for me,
too.

BEN

Wait...what? I thought--

Ben takes off his shirt, as they kiss, landing into the bed.
Sasha's blonde hair spills across the flower-patterned
pillowcase.

63 OMIT

63

64 INT. UNIVERSITY CINEMA - PROJECTOR ROOM / ALICE'S APARTMENT 64-
DAY

We cut back and forth as Ben and Alice talk on the phone.

BEN

So... it happened.

ALICE

What happened.

BEN

C'mon. You know.

ALICE

Ben, what-- Ew! Are you serious?

BEN

Oh my god. You're actually jealous
of *me* for once!

ALICE

Oh, please. Do you really think I
give a shit about some trendy
dabbler?

BEN

Jesus! Can I just bask in my glory
for one fucking minute?

ALICE

Sorry. I'm in a shitty mood.

BEN

Yeah, I was gonna regale you with details, too--

ALICE

I got kicked out of school.

BEN

What? What do you mean?

ALICE

Just...can you come over after work?

65 INT. ALICE'S APARTMENT - DAY

65

Ben and Alice sit closely on a futon, drinking beer.

ALICE

Remember when I took you to that stupid party?

BEN

The fateful night. It all began there.

ALICE

Well, I got into an argument with this super annoying bitch there, and--

BEN

About what?

ALICE

Oh, I guess she's roommates with Nina, and--

BEN

Who?

ALICE

The waitress.

BEN

Oh yeah. The one you ghosted because she was allowing the relationship to progress in a mature way, and--

ALICE

Point is...her roommate got up in my face and started giving me shit about stuff that's none of her fucking business, and I was like, "Fuck no." Anyway, I saw her on campus--

BEN

The waitress?

ALICE

The roommate! I saw her the other day, and it kind of...escalated.

BEN

What does *that* mean?

ALICE

She started talking shit again, so I kicked her in the pussy.

BEN

(nearly spitting out his beer)
Jesus! What the fuck!

ALICE

I warned her! All she had to do was back off.

BEN

Okay, but was she...Did she go to the hospital, or--

ALICE

No! She wasn't even--it was more like, I was sitting there, and she was coming at me, and I pushed her back with my foot. In the pussy.

Ben raises his eyebrows and takes a drink.

ALICE (cont'd)

Anyway, she filed a report with campus police, so now I'm temporarily banned.

BEN

So you're not really expelled.

ALICE

No, but I...there's obviously something wrong with me, right?

BEN

I mean...

ALICE

I'm gonna go to New York for awhile, just to get my head together. I've got some friends I can stay with.

BEN

Unbelievable. Does everyone in Berkeley have a hard-on for New York? Why doesn't the entire Bay Area just pack up and move to New York and get it over with?

ALICE

That's your response to everything I just said?

BEN

Sorry.

ALICE

Why don't you come with me? It'll be good for us.

BEN

Tch...you're not really going. I can tell you're just drunk.

ALICE

I already booked my flight. I leave on Tuesday.

66 EXT. FLEA MARKET - BERKELEY - DAY

66

Ben and Sasha stroll hand-in-hand, as Sasha sips a large boba tea.

SASHA

Well, that sucks. I know you guys are close.

BEN

Yeah...

SASHA

But it's not like she's--

BEN

I just think she's making a mistake, you know? She runs away from shit. That's her thing.

An Asian American COUPLE browses the tables at another aisle. The MAN stop and looks towards Ben and Sasha, briefly making eye contact with Ben, before the WOMAN calls him over.

BEN (cont'd)

Did you see that guy? The way he looked at us?

SASHA

Who? What're you talking about?

BEN

That guy that over there. He was like, openly judging me.

SASHA

"Judging" you? For what?

BEN

You know...

Ben makes a hand gesture to imply "the two of us, together."

SASHA

Oh, come on. This isn't 1949...

BEN

Okay, well, either that or he had white-girl envy. Maybe it was more like a...

Ben raises his eyebrows and makes a "thumbs up" gesture.

SASHA

Ew.

They walk in silence again. She lights a cigarette.

BEN

I'm just kidding around. Who the hell knows what--

SASHA

Is that what I am?

BEN

What?

SASHA
A white girl?

Ben puts his arm around Sasha's shoulder, smiling.

BEN
Well, not *just* that.

Sasha looks away.

BEN (cont'd)
I'm sorry! Come on...I was just...

SASHA
What?

He takes her hand. They stop walking.

BEN
You're just so incredibly beautiful, I assume every guy we pass hates my fucking guts.

She can't help but laugh.

67 INT. BEN AND MIKO'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT 67

Ben lies on the couch, looking at his phone. We see that he's looking at MIKO'S INSTAGRAM, specifically a series of artfully-composed shots of either fancy restaurant food or New York landmarks (no people).

He scrolls further, eventually arriving at pictures from a few years prior: a selfie of Ben and Miko in front of the Grand Lake Theater, Ben at the beach (looking annoyed), Ben and Miko in their current apartment (bare-walled and empty except for stacks of moving boxes).

Ben looks up from his phone wistfully. He taps on Miko's contact and brings the phone up to his ear.

MIKO'S VOICEMAIL (V.O.)
Moshi-moshi! This is Miko. Leave me a message.

Ben hangs up, an irritated look on his face.

68 INT. BEN AND MIKO'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY 68

At the sink, Ben washes a single bowl and spoon by hand. There's a KNOCK at the door.

69 INT. BEN AND MIKO'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS 69

Ben approaches the front door and look through the peephole, his mood suddenly brightened. He unlocks and opens the door, excitedly, to reveal Sasha.

BEN

Hey! I thought you were at school today.

SASHA

I had an impulsive urge to see you.

She steps inside, giving Ben a peck on the cheek.

SASHA (cont'd)

Also, my class was cancelled.

BEN

Lucky me.

He abruptly kisses her on the mouth, pushing her back against the wall. As they continue to kiss, Ben takes Sasha's purse from her shoulder and dramatically tosses it aside. The contents of the bag clatter everywhere, and a puzzled/irritated look crosses Sasha's face.

BEN (cont'd)

Shit! Sorry...

Ben squats down and begins collecting the spilled items (phone, keys, etc.) and placing them back in the purse.

SASHA

I was actually thinking maybe we could get lunch.

BEN

Oh. Yeah. Sorry.

70 INT. UNIVERSITY CINEMA - MAIN THEATER - NIGHT 70

Ben stands facing the handful of EMPLOYEES who are scattered among the first few rows of seats. Amongst them, DANNY, the creepy projectionist stares off into the middle distance, casually eating a hot dog.

BEN

So, uh, I'm afraid I have some disappointing news.

(MORE)

BEN (cont'd)

Apparently the inspectors have deemed the building "structurally unsound," and it looks like we have to shut down for some pretty significant retrofitting.

Unfortunately, it doesn't look like the head office wants to pay for it at this point. Ticket sales haven't really been what they used to be, as you've probably noticed... we're still sorting things, but...

(emotional) I'm really sorry, guys. I know this place means a lot to all of us.

A few employees look at each other and shrug, as if to say, "Not really."

BEN (cont'd)

So when we figure out when our last night is gonna be, we can talk about having a party or something. Maybe a special after-hours screening...?

Gene raises his hand. Ben's face tenses with irritation.

BEN (cont'd)

Yes, Gene.

GENE

(standing up)

Greetings, everyone. I just wanted to inform you that I have accepted a position as assistant manager at the E-Flix Multiplex, and, more to the point, we are currently hiring.

The employees break into excited CHATTER at the news.

GENE (cont'd)

Danny, we're even looking for another projectionist.

DANIEL

(still eating)

I'm in.

BEN

Okay, well--

GENE

If anyone else is interested, or if you have any further queries, I will be out in the lobby, imminently.

BEN

Okay, well. Thanks, everyone.

The employees rise from their seats and start filing out. Ben watches as Autumn exits, deep in conversation with Lamont.

AUTUMN

So I saw *Girlhood* last night.

LAMONT

And?

AUTUMN

You were right-- I loved it! Oh my god, that 'Diamonds' scene will stick with me forever!

LAMONT

Sublime, right?!

Once everyone leaves, Ben remains in the theater. He sits in a seat and looks around, taking it all in for one last time.

71 EXT. MARINA PARK - BERKELEY - DAY

71

Ben and Sasha sit on a grassy hill overlooking the bay. Sasha smokes a cigarette. Nearby, several families fly kites.

SASHA

So... I need to talk to you.

BEN

Whenever someone says that, it always means "I'm about to really bum you out."

SASHA

Well...maybe. I don't know. It's about Pilar.

BEN

What about her?

SASHA

Well, she's been in Ecuador doing research, and I didn't really know where we stood when she left.

BEN
And...now she's back?

SASHA
Yeah.

Ben chuckles with disbelief.

SASHA (cont'd)
What?

BEN
It just seems kind of deceptive. I mean, you made it pretty clear that you two had broken up. It would've been nice to know that I was the back-up plan.

SASHA
It's a problem of mine. I'm not good at being alone.

BEN
Oh, really? That's strange, because I love being alone! And the only thing I love more is getting strung along by some--

SASHA
Come on, Ben. It's been a few weeks. It's not like you wasted your whole life on me.

BEN
Well, that's great. Have fun back on the other side of the fence.

Sasha abruptly stands up.

SASHA
Okay. I should go.

He fans her cigarette smoke away from his face.

BEN
Maybe quit smoking, too. Jesus...

She walks a few steps, then stops. She turns around and comes back to where Ben is sitting. He looks up, hopefully.

SASHA

Listen, Ben. I know you're gonna blame this on society, or on my sexuality, or on your race, or whatever...but I want you to know that it's really just about you.

Sasha turns and walks away again, leaving Ben alone.

72 EXT. UNIVERSITY THEATER - DAY 72

Ben locks up the darkened theater and walks away. The marquee is blank and unlit. The whole place looks suddenly shabby.

73 INT. BEN AND MIKO'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT 73

Ben, in his pajamas, sits at the kitchen table, hunched over his laptop. Various notebooks, pens, multi-colored notecards, and screenwriting books clutter the table's surface. Ben stares into the screen pensively, but doesn't type.

74 INT. BAY AREA RESTAURANT - DAY 74

Ben sits alone at the table he usually shares with Alice. He struggles to hold a book open with one hand while eating a sandwich with the other.

75 INT. BEN AND MIKO'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT 75

Ben paces back and forth, holding the phone to his ear. We hear several RINGS, and then...

MIKO'S VOICEMAIL (V.O.)

Moshi-moshi! This is Miko. Leave me a message.

BEN

Hi, it's me again. I don't know if there's a problem with your voicemail or something, but if you get this, can you just give me a call? You know, maybe...let me know you're okay? I mean, I know you're okay because you keep posting pictures of all the fucking delightful food you're eating. But if you could just do me the courtesy of calling back, that would be great.

He pauses, trying to recalibrate.

BEN (cont'd)
 Uh, anyway, I know you're probably
 really busy, so just...give me a
 call when you get a chance. Love
 you!

He ends the call, wincing with regret.

BEN (cont'd)
 Fuck!

He tosses the phone across the room. It tumbles across the
 rug, and then immediately RINGS.

Ben lunges onto the floor, fumbling excitedly with the phone.
 He glances at the screen and sees that it's Alice calling.

BEN (cont'd)
 (into phone, disappointed)
 Oh, hey.

76 INT. BEN AND MIKO'S APARTMENT / EXT. CITY STREETS - 76
 MANHATTAN - NIGHT

Continuing their phone conversation, we cut between Ben and
 Alice. He's still sprawled on the floor, she's strolling
 along a bustling street wearing AirPods.

ALICE
 Nice to hear from you too, asshole!

BEN
 Sorry. What's up.

ALICE
 I had like, three minutes with
 absolutely nothing better to do, so
 I thought I'd give you a call.

BEN
 Well...here I am.

ALICE
 Oh my god, you sound like one of
 those hostage videos! (flat)
 "I...am...being...treated well..."

BEN
 Listen, uh...if I...if I came out
 there, could I maybe...stay with
 you for a little while?

Ben waits for a response. Alice looks taken aback.

ALICE
(laughing)
Holy shit. Is this your rock
bottom?

BEN
No. High school was my rock bottom.

ALICE
(still laughing)
Oh, right. And you've gone nowhere
but up!

77 INT. AIRPLANE - DAY 77

Ben looks up from a magazine, staring ahead pensively.

78 EXT. SUBWAY ENTRANCE - BROOKLYN - DAY 78

Dragging a small suitcase on wheels, Ben emerges from a subway entrance. He spots Alice, waiting nearby, looking at her phone. She glances up, and Ben's face instantly brightens. They stride towards each other and hug.

79 EXT. MEREDITH'S BUILDING - BROOKLYN - A FEW MINUTES LATER 79

Ben (pulling suitcase) and Alice walk through a commercial district, into a leafy residential area.

ALICE
You're here! In New York! What the
fuck!

BEN
All right...

Alice reaches into her tote bag and hands Ben A SET OF KEYS.

ALICE
Wait, before I forget: front door,
apartment door.

Ben takes the keys, nodding.

ALICE (cont'd)
Meredith wants you to feel free to
come and go at your leisure.

BEN

Who?

ALICE

Meredith! Meredith Ames! I told you about her. It's her apartment.

BEN

I thought you came out here to "clear your head."

ALICE

I did. And then I went to a party and I met Meredith and I went home with her and I've been there ever since!

BEN

Unbelievable.

They stop at an intersection, waiting for the light to change.

ALICE

So when are you gonna call her?

BEN

Who?

ALICE

(chuckling)
"Who."

80 INT. MEREDITH'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

80

Alice and Ben (pulling his suitcase) enter the tiny but impeccably-furnished apartment.

ALICE

We're home!

MEREDITH (O.S.)

Oh, hey!

Meredith (mid 30s, half Asian/half white, stylishly bookish) gets up from her cluttered writing desk, smiling warmly.

MEREDITH (cont'd)

This must be the infamous Ben Tagawa!

BEN

Hi! Great to meet you.

Ben extends his hand. Meredith gives him a hug.

MEREDITH
Please...I feel like I already know
you. She talks about you
incessantly!

BEN
Oh, god...

MEREDITH
She does!

ALICE
(to Ben)
Sorry...

MEREDITH
I mean, to be honest, I probably
know a *lot* more about you than I
should!

BEN
Well...

MEREDITH
She told me that you're--

BEN
(abruptly)
I'm actually attracted to women of
all races.

SILENCE, then Alice bursts into laughter.

MEREDITH
Well, that's...good to know.

BEN
Sorry, I thought that was...

ALICE
Isn't this like the perfect New
York lesbian apartment?

BEN
Yeah, it's...it's a great place.

MEREDITH
I'm sorry I don't have a room for
you, Ben, but the couch is pretty
comfortable, and--

BEN
No, that's fine. And listen...I
could easily stay at a hotel. I
don't want to impose...

MEREDITH

No, the more the merrier! It'll be like a slumber party.

ALICE

Well, don't say *that*. He'll think he's gonna get some hot three-way action or something!

Meredith laughs.

BEN

No! I...she's...you know. The couch is great.

81 EXT. MEREDITH'S BUILDING - ROOFTOP - NIGHT

81

With a breathtaking view of the city behind them, Ben, Alice, and Meredith sit around a small outdoor table. MUSIC hums from a small bluetooth speaker. There's an elegant spread of wine and cheese before them.

MEREDITH

So that's a goat gouda and that's a *délice de bourgogne*.

Meredith pours a glass of wine for everyone.

ALICE

Our gracious hostess!

They clink glasses.

BEN

Yeah, thanks. It's nice to be here.

MEREDITH

So, Ben. Alice tells me you're involved in the theater?

BEN

Is that what she...? (laughs) I manage a crappy movie theater. Or, at least I used to...

MEREDITH

Right! No, I knew that. I mean, not that it's crappy, but--

ALICE

Meredith's working on a novel.

MEREDITH

I mean, that's what I say to avoid the very real possibility that I might just be a teacher.

ALICE

Well, a professor at Barnard.

BEN

(to Alice)

Wow, you're really trading up! I'm impressed!

ALICE

Yeah.

MEREDITH

So what do you guys have planned for tomorrow? I've gotta work, unfortunately, but--

ALICE

Well, Ben's basically here to stalk his ex-girlfriend, so--

BEN

She's not my "ex"-girlfriend! We're just...taking some time off.

ALICE

(to Meredith)

If you were in a dysfunctional long-term relationship and--

BEN

Don't call it that!

ALICE

...and your partner said she was "taking some time off" and then moved across the country--

BEN

For an internship!

ALICE

...Wouldn't you assume...I mean, that's a break-up, right?

MEREDITH

(to Ben)

How were things when she left?

ALICE

Terrible!

BEN

Not terrible. I mean, we were kind of drifting apart a little bit. And we were definitely fighting a lot.

(cheerfully)

But, you know, otherwise...

Alice and Meredith laugh.

MEREDITH

I actually think the drifting is worse than the fighting. I mean, Alice and I have had our share of fights already, but I think they've been really productive.

BEN

(to Alice)

Oh, now you're having "productive" fights?

Alice smiles proudly and leans her head on Meredith's shoulder.

ALICE

It's called "maturity." Maybe I can give you some pointers when you're ready.

Meredith laughs and kisses Alice on the top of her head.

BEN

(to Meredith)

When you guys were having these "productive" fights, did she ever kick you in the pussy?

Ben's attempt at humor falls flat. STUNNED SILENCE.

MEREDITH

Uh...

ALICE

(to Meredith)
Sorry. Just...

MEREDITH (cont'd)

I think I'd remember if she did, but...

ALICE

Just ignore him.

MEREDITH

That's a pretty...heavy word to throw around...

BEN

No, no...that's not *my* phrase. That's something that *she* said (pointing at Alice) when she got banned from--

ALICE

Let it go, Ben.

82

INT. BROOKLYN DINER - MORNING

82

Ben and Alice sit across from each other, eating breakfast.

ALICE

Anything you want to say?

He takes a beat to formulate his answer.

BEN

(chewing)
Good bagel...?

Alice glares at him.

BEN (cont'd)

Okay! I'm sorry! I guess she doesn't really get our sense of humor, so--

ALICE

Nope. Not about her.

BEN

I thought we were all...joking around, and I...went out on a limb.

ALICE

Let me just clarify for you, okay? About Meredith? This is different.

BEN

Right.

ALICE

She's perfect. I mean, she's not *perfect*, but she's perfect for me.

BEN

So you're still in *that* phase, huh?

ALICE

I'm serious. And it feels like it's my chance to...I don't know...climb out of the hole I've been living in, and to be like, a real...adult human. So let's at least *attempt* to not fuck this up for me, okay?

Ben nods his head contritely, then resumes eating.

BEN

You're more fun in California.

ALICE

You're about the same.

83 INT. SUBWAY - DAY

83

Ben and Alice sit in an uncrowded train, headed from Brooklyn to Manhattan. Ben is looking at his phone, scrolling through Miko's Instagram.

BEN

See? You can't really tell anything from this. Food...food...some clouds...

Alice grabs Ben's phone and scrolls on the screen.

ALICE

Who is "@leon212" and why is he liking all her pics?

She taps and scrolls a bit more, eventually landing on something that makes her jaw drop.

He leans over to see what Alice is looking at. He snatches the phone back out of her hand and examines the screen, scrolling with increasing agitation and disbelief.

BEN

Do you know where.. (looks closely at phone) Orchard Street is?

84 MONTAGE

84

In full frame, we see a series of STILL IMAGES of an Asian woman (almost certainly Miko) in a variety of provocative outfits and poses. An amateurish, sexually-charged aesthetic pervades the photos.

85 EXT. COMMERCIAL SPACE - DAY

85

PULLING BACK, we see the above images popping on and off a large digital screen, on a loop. The screen is suspended inside the window of a spartan Lower East Side storefront. Standing side-by-side on the sidewalk, Ben and Alice stare into the window intently.

ALICE

It's definitely her, right? I mean, I know all Asian girls look the same to you, but--

BEN

Will you shut up for a minute while I try to...process this?

ALICE

(looking closer)

God, I had no idea how hot she was. No offense, dude, but you have always punched above your weight--

BEN

I said, shut up!

86 INT. LEON'S STORE - CONTINUOUS

86

Ben and Alice push through a glass door, into a large, open space. A few clothing racks are positioned, seemingly at random, around the room. Ben and Alice approach the lone employee ZOA (early 20s), who is seated behind a desk littered with photos of models, Miko among them.

ZOA

Can I help you?

ALICE

We were just curious about the photos in the window...?

ZOA

Aren't they totally amazing?

Alice smiles politely, Ben makes a face like "Not really."

ALICE

Do you know anything about them? Where they came from?

ZOA

Oh, Leon handles all the promo himself.

BEN
And Leon is...?

ZOA
Leon Alexander? He designs the
clothes. This is his boutique.

The employee points to a MASSIVE BLACK AND WHITE PHOTO on the wall of a tall, confident BEARDED MAN (early 40s, white), working on his designs at a draft table.

ALICE
Ah...humility!

BEN
What about the...model on the
screen? Do you--

ZOA
Oh, I have no idea where he finds
them!

87 EXT. CITY STREETS - CHINATOWN - DAY

87

Ben and Alice walk along a bustling Chinatown street. Ben eats a large steamed pork bun.

ALICE
So, is it over, or...?

BEN
Why would it be over?

ALICE
Uh, maybe because she's been living
some skanky double life out here?

BEN
So she wanted to try...modeling or
whatever. She probably thought I
wouldn't be "supportive" if she
told me about it.

ALICE
And she'd be wrong?

BEN
No, I would've been a total prick
about it! In a way, I basically
forced her to lie.

ALICE

It's just so weird to think of her doing that. It's like if I found out you were a mime or something.

BEN

Look, it's embarrassing, but, you know...I acted like I was Autumn's biggest fan. Do I have to remind you of the pee photos?

ALICE

Nope.

BEN

And I sat there and listened intently while Sasha droned on and on about grad school. So I have to be supportive of some stupid shit. That's just what you do in a relationship.

ALICE

Uh, those weren't "relationships--"

BEN

You know what I mean.

ALICE

But also, you were horny for those other girls. That's like the ultimate motivator.

BEN

(loudly)

I never said I wasn't horny for--

A passerby turns and looks in Ben's direction. Alice laughs, as they descend into a Brooklyn-bound subway station.

88 EXT. CITY STREETS - BROOKLYN - NIGHT

88

A few quick shots at dusk: The Fulton Mall, Prospect Park, Greenwood Cemetery, skyline from DUMBO, etc.

89 EXT. ASIAN-AMERICAN INDEPENDENT FILM INSTITUTE - MANHATTAN 89 DAY

Ben and Alice walk through a crowded business district. Ben, holding a BOUQUET OF FLOWERS, glances up from his phone as they arrive at a nondescript doorway.

ALICE
This is so unlike you.

BEN
That's the point.

He examines the building directory, eventually finding what he's looking for. He shoots Alice a nervous look. He enters the building while Alice waits out front, scrolling on her phone.

90 INT. ASIAN-AMERICAN INDEPENDENT FILM INSTITUTE - DAY 90

Ben enters the office through a door emblazoned with the organization's logo and name. An intern named JASON (Asian, mid-20s) sits at the front desk, looking at his phone.

JASON
(referencing the flowers)
You shouldn't have.

BEN
I'm here to see Miko?

JASON
Who?

BEN
Miko Higashi? She's an intern here.

JASON
Actually, I'm the only intern here right now.

BEN
Okay, do you know when she'll be back?

JASON
Try listening: there's exactly one intern working here at this point in time, and you're looking at him.

Ben takes a moment to absorb this.

BEN
Can you check to see if maybe she worked here before you?

JASON
I'm not supposed to give out that kind of information, but... actually, what the fuck do I care?

He turns to his computer, typing and clicking.

JASON (cont'd)

Nope.

91 EXT. ASIAN-AMERICAN INDEPENDENT FILM INSTITUTE - DAY 91

Ben strides out of the building. Alice catches up with him as he shoves the bouquet of flowers into a trash can.

92 EXT. MADISON SQUARE PARK - DAY 92

Ben and Alice sit on the bustling park steps. Ben stares off, simmering.

BEN

Well, so much for my big move.

ALICE

Fucking lying bitch--

BEN

Hey, watch it!

ALICE

Just kidding. So now what?

BEN

Can I use your phone?

She hands him her phone.

ALICE

What's wrong with yours?

BEN

I tried that.

He dials Miko's number. It RINGS three times, and then...

93 EXT. MADISON SQUARE / INT. NYC APARTMENT - DAY 93

We cut back and forth as Ben and Miko talk on the phone. Miko is in a spacious, modern bathroom, drying her hands at the sink. She is dressed casually.

MIKO

Hello?

BEN

Hey, it's me.

MIKO

Oh, hi! What's this number you're calling from?

BEN

Oh, sorry...I'm out with Alice and I forgot my phone at home.

MIKO

I'm surprised you still want to talk to me after that last message.

BEN

I know. I'm sorry. I was having a bad day, and--

MIKO

No, I should've called. I just felt like we weren't communicating very well over the phone, and--

BEN

No, it's fine. I know you're busy.

MIKO

Well, we should talk. I'm in the middle of something at work right now, but...

BEN

You mean the internship?

MIKO

Uh-huh. But let me call you later tonight.

BEN

Okay, but wait. The reason I called is 'cause we're at the post office. You got some mail that looks kind of important...tax stuff or something. I was gonna forward it to you, but I...I wasn't sure where to send it...Hang on...let me get a pen.

Instead, he shoots Alice a raised-eyebrow look.

Ben and Alice sit at a table next to a huge window, which looks out onto a beautiful West Village street.

ALICE

I can't believe she can afford to live around here!

BEN

Yeah, she must be really dipping into the ol' trust fund.

ALICE

God, I'd give anything to have a rich, absent alcoholic dad who tries to buy my love.

BEN

Can you see the door?

She cranes her neck to look behind Ben, out the window.

ALICE

Relax. I've got it all staked out.

Ben nods, taking this very seriously.

ALICE (cont'd)

So listen...I'm thinking about maybe not going back to school.

BEN

What?

ALICE

Well, when I'm honest with myself, there's really only one reason I even went to grad school in the first place.

BEN

Sex.

ALICE

No. My parents, idiot. I've been living my whole life under the delusion that it's possible to placate them, and it's obviously not--

BEN

Okay, so your solution is to just give up, hide out in New York, and--

ALICE

Maybe. At least *I'd* be happy.

BEN
 You could also...just be honest
 with them.

Alice laughs, as if that was the most absurd idea in the world.

ALICE
 Right.

BEN
 I don't know. I mean -

Alice is suddenly distracted. She cranes her neck again, looking past Ben out the window.

ALICE
 Oh shit.

BEN
 (turning to look)
 What? Are you fucking with me?

From BEN'S POV we see a doorway across the street where Miko is exiting a building arm-in-arm with a tall, bearded man. This is LEON, (early 40s, white).

BEN (cont'd)
 What do we do? What do we do?

Alice is already on her feet.

ALICE
 Come on.

95 EXT. CITY STREETS - MANHATTAN - DAY

95

Ben and Alice follow Miko and Leon, occasionally ducking into doorways, behind cars, etc. to avoid being spotted. From BEN AND ALICE'S POV, we get quick glimpses of Leon and Miko's sweet interaction:

They talk animatedly as they walk to a street market.

She poses at a sunglass stand as he takes a snapshot of her.

She makes him laugh, as they look at knick knacks, his arm around her.

They stop at a stall that sells movie posters, where Miko gestures towards the poster displayed out front. She describes the obscure movie to Leon, who listens intently.

96 INT. ART AND DESIGN STORE - DAY

96

Miko and Leon stroll through the store, browsing the furniture.

LEON
(in Japanese)
So where do you want to eat?

MIKO
(in Japanese)
*Can we go to that Japanese place
that's upstairs? Near St. Mark's?*

LEON)
(in Japanese)
*Yeah, let's get a drink at the bar
first.*

They continue to chat as they head towards the exit, arms around each other.

Ben and Alice, their backs turned, lurk a few displays down.

ALICE
(whispering)
What did they say?

BEN
(whispering)
How the fuck would I know?

97 INT. O'DALY'S BAR - NIGHT

97

Ben, Alice, and Meredith stand near the bar, waiting for drinks.

BEN
I can't believe she's with a
fucking rice king.

ALICE
Well, we don't know that he's
necessarily a--

BEN
He was speaking Japanese! He's a
white guy with big beard who was
speaking Japanese!

ALICE
Wait, what does a big beard have to
do with it?

BEN
I don't know!

MEREDITH
Well, I can see why you're upset,
but there's nothing inherently
wrong with someone having a type.
If there's real love between two
people, then--

BEN
Yeah yeah yeah. But let's be
honest, okay? (quietly) Just
between us? I mean, you see a white
guy with an Asian girl....you just
assume "rice king." Right?

ALICE
Oh boy...

Meredith blanches.

MEREDITH
And when you see an Asian man with
a white woman, you think...?

BEN
Good for him! Good for both of
them! And you know...you never
second-guess that relationship,
right? It's like, "Wow, he must be
a really cool guy! And she's so
evolved!"

The bartender places the drinks on the bar: bottled beer for
Ben and Alice, a vodka soda for Meredith.

ALICE
(to Meredith)
I know for a fact that he actually
agrees with you. He's just in his
over-the-top provocative mode.

98 INT. O'DALY'S BAR - A FEW MINUTES LATER

98

Ben, Alice, and Meredith are now seated in a booth.

BEN
Come on. You know there's something
kinda creepy about a big, older
white guy who's horny for skinny
Asian girls. I mean, what do you
think *that's* about?

MEREDITH

I actually don't think it's "about" anything.

Ben laughs incredulously.

MEREDITH (cont'd)

If you're implying an undercurrent of--what? fetishism? pedophilia?-- then what's the flip-side to that line of thinking?

BEN

I don't know. What--?

MEREDITH

Is your attraction to white women a sublimated form of assimilation? Are you trying to elevate yourself in society's eyes by--

BEN

What are you...where'd *that* come from?

ALICE

(to Ben)

Sorry...

BEN

Jesus...you don't have to turn this into a personal attack on *me*! I'm just...

MEREDITH

No, no...it's not an attack. I just think it gets a little tricky when you start making moralistic generalizations based on your own wounded ego.

BEN

Wow.

ALICE

(to Meredith)

He's had a hard day.

MEREDITH

I know, and I'm sorry. I just don't know if it's appropriate for someone--particularly a cishet male--to ascribe negative psychological implications to other people's sexuality. I mean, it's a slippery slope when you start to--

BEN

It's not a...I'm 100% just talking about rice kings, okay? I'm not--

MEREDITH

Also, I know you think you're being funny or whatever, but there's a long history of pejorative slang used to demean the sexuality of "the other," and to me it's completely retrograde.

BEN

I can't say "rice king"? I'm not allowed to--

ALICE

Ben. Um...Meredith's dad is British... So...

MEREDITH

But that's beside the point.

BEN

How is that beside the point? That totally *is* the point. You don't want to have to think of your parents (he makes an awkward thrusting gesture) "gettin' it on", and so you--

MEREDITH

(simmering)

I'm very close to throwing this drink in your face.

She grabs her glass, suddenly.

BEN

Jesus christ!

ALICE

What the fuck?

Alice grabs Meredith's hand and removes the glass.

MEREDITH

I'm sorry.

They all sit in SILENCE for a beat.

BEN
 (to Alice)
 You know, some people say that
 lesbians can be kinda...humorless,
 but I...I disagree, you know?

Alice stifles a laugh. Meredith looks at her with disbelief,
 then abruptly rises and storms away.

ALICE
 Meredith!

Alice shoots Ben an angry look, then gets up and chases after
 Meredith. Ben, now alone in the booth, takes another drink.

99

INT. MEREDITH'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

99

In the darkened room, Ben lies on his makeshift bed. He
 glances over at the closed bedroom door, a faint glow of
 light beneath it. MUTED VOICES emanate from that direction.

MEREDITH (O.S.)
 I guess I just don't understand why
 it's funny. At all.

ALICE (O.S.)
 Just because I laugh at something
 doesn't mean I endorse it. I mean,
 I hate to say it, but you are kind
 of rigid about--

MEREDITH (O.S.)
 Oh, so it's my problem? He can--

ALICE (O.S.)
 That's not what I said.

MEREDITH (O.S.)
 He can rant and spew all that toxic
 bullshit, and I'm too rigid?

ALICE (O.S.)
 Well, you're not very
 sympathetic...

MEREDITH (O.S.)
 Are you fucking kidding me?

Ben pulls the pillow up around his head, covering his ears.

100 INT. MEREDITH'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - MORNING 100

Early morning. A pot of coffee in a metal percolator is on the stove. As he waits for it to boil, he looks at his phone.

We see that Ben is looking at @leon212's pictures of Miko again. He focuses on one image in particular: Miko staring up from a messy bed, one bra strap off her shoulder. Ben "unpinches" to zoom in, revealing a familiar FLOWER-PATTERNED PILLOWCASE beneath Miko's tousled hair. Ben looks up from the phone, a stunned, fuming expression on his face, as the percolator starts to GURGLE.

101 EXT. MEREDITH'S BUILDING - BROOKLYN - MOMENTS LATER 101

Ben exits Meredith's building, gets his bearings, then sprints in the direction of the subway.

102 INT. DAILY PROVISIONS CAFE - DAY 102

Ben sits in the chair where Alice sat previously, his gaze fixed out the window. Eventually, something out the window catches his attention. He springs to his feet.

103 EXT. LEON'S BUILDING - MANHATTAN - CONTINUOUS 103

Ben exits the cafe, walking with determination. He crosses the street towards Leon and Miko, who are talking amiably.

BEN
(to Leon)
Did you fuck her in my bed?

MIKO
(startled)
Oh my god, Ben! Are you crazy?

BEN
Did you take the shitty photos first, and then fuck her, or...?

LEON
(in Japanese, to Ben)
Ben, *let's just calm down.*

MIKO
No--he doesn't understand--

LEON
(kicking himself)
Sorry, I shouldn't have assumed--

MIKO

What the hell is this, Ben? Did you come all the way here to spy on me? Are you that much of an asshole?

BEN

Absolutely, I am a giant asshole! But I think it's warranted in this case--

Leon protectively pushes himself between Ben and Miko.

LEON

Now, I appreciate that this is an awkward situation for all of us. We're not meeting on the best of terms here.

BEN

Yeah, I generally prefer a more formal introduction to the guy who's fucking my girlfriend.

LEON

Okay. Let's all just take a deep breath...Ben, look--

He gently puts his hand on Ben's shoulder.

BEN

Don't fucking touch me!

Ben angrily swats Leon's hand away. Leon springs into a "kung fu" pose, crouching down with his hands raised, a fierce expression on his face. He holds the pose, as if expecting Ben to attack. Ben and Miko both look at Leon, perplexed.

BEN (cont'd)

What? You gonna do some tai chi on me? Or...

Leon chuckles, dropping his pose.

LEON

Okay, yeah, that was absurd... I'm sorry, it's just a reflex from decades of training.

BEN

(to Miko)

Of course he's a martial arts guy.

MIKO

That's enough, Ben--

BEN

(to Leon)

No, come on. You wanna go, let's go, man. I know you're dying to do your version of that Tarantino movie.

LEON

What?

BEN

Oh, you know the scene where Brad Pitt kicks Bruce Lee's ass. I bet that's like your *fantasy*, isn't it--

Miko looks exasperated, like she's heard Ben rant about this a million times.

LEON

Actually, no, no, it is not.

Ben looks intrigued.

LEON (cont'd)

I mean, overall, I thought it was a great film, but I despised the idea of aggrandizing a fictional white protagonist by denigrating a real Asian American icon. Now, I know there's some theories out there that it was actually--

BEN

All right, shut the fuck up!

Miko rubs her eyes, wearily. Leon takes a breath.

LEON

Ben... I just want to say, I'm sorry for this. I understand your anger, and--

Leon puts his hand on Ben's shoulder again.

BEN

I said don't!

Ben swats it away, and Leon once again, jumps into a fighting pose. Again, he catches himself, laughing.

LEON

Ha! I did it again!..Okay, you know what, I'm making things worse. You two need to talk.

MIKO

Yeah.

LEON

Why don't you two go my place--
Have a drink, the kitchen's yours.
Take all the time you need.

(to Miko)

Call me if you need anything.

Miko nods. Leon makes brief eye contact with Ben, nods, and then turns and walks away.

BEN

(shouting, to Leon)

Sayonara!

104 INT. LEON'S APARTMENT - DAY

104

Ben follows Miko into a massive duplex loft. The decor is sleekly modern, accented with Japanese lamps, furniture, and artwork.

BEN

So I'm guessing this is his place?

MIKO

Yes.

BEN

Nice. I can see he really likes his
Oriental accessories.

Miko glares at Ben, unamused by his quip.

BEN (cont'd)

So you never even had your own
place out here, did you? Does he
make you pay rent, or do you
just...walk on his back and--

MIKO

Come on, Ben. What the hell are you
doing here?

BEN

Just...trying to get my head around
all this. So you basically came out
here to be with him, right?

MIKO

Look. I owe you an apology, and--

BEN

Oh, we'll get to that. But just...clear things up a little for me. How does one cross paths with a...Leon Alexander?

MIKO

(quietly)
...visiting a friend...

BEN

What?

MIKO

He was visiting someone who had a film in the festival.

BEN

Ah.

MIKO

We met for coffee a few times while he was in town, but it was nothing.

BEN

You've gotta stop bullshitting, Miko. I saw the photos. I think I can recognize our own fucking bed, okay?

MIKO

We took a few pictures, but that's it. We agreed to wait until I'd resolved things with you.

BEN

Oh. So, are you still "waiting"? Because *I* don't feel resolved, do you? Holy shit, the blue-balls on poor Leon...

MIKO

Ben, we were taking some time off. You knew that.

BEN

I guess I didn't realize that "taking some time off" meant "fucking other people."

MIKO

Tch...are you sure about that?

BEN

What's *that* supposed to mean?

MIKO

It means my friend Koji saw you holding hands with someone at the flea market. She sounded like just your type, too.

BEN

Okay, that's bullshit. Don't try to turn this around on me, Miko.

MIKO

Look, it's fine. I think it's obvious that this has been a good change for both of us. I mean, we went about it in a totally stupid way, but somehow it all worked out for the best.

BEN

But of all the people to...I mean, a white guy is one thing, but he's such an *obvious* Asian fetishist!

MIKO

Do you realize how insulting that is to *me*? That the only reason someone could *possibly* be attracted to me is because of some objectifying abnormality?

BEN

I didn't say that's the *only* reason!

MIKO

I think that says a lot more about you than it does about me. That's--

BEN

I'm criticizing him, not you! So don't--

MIKO

I know you think you're in a position to always be judging people, but you don't know anything about him, okay? And if it really matters to you, he's not white.

BEN

What? Are we talking about the same guy?

MIKO

He's Jewish and Indigenous American.

BEN

Oh, that's hilarious! Is that what he put on his college application? Or wait...do they even have affirmative action in fashion school?

MIKO

You should probably go.

Miko opens the front door. Ben walks slowly through the doorway.

BEN

Oh, how's the internship, by the way?

MIKO

It's great.

BEN

Sticking with your story. Nice.

Miko looks caught off guard.

MIKO

Ben...wait.

He stops and turns, a hopeful look on his face.

MIKO (cont'd)

I should've been more direct with you a long time ago, and I apologize for not doing that. But even at my most frustrated, I felt a lot of...pity for you, and I realize that's how you kept me trapped.

BEN

"Trapped"? Don't try to play the victim now, Miko. It's fucking embarrassing.

MIKO

You know what's embarrassing?
Trying to hold onto something just
because you're pathologically
afraid of change. That's what you
do, and it...it felt like fucking
death to me!

BEN

So that's my big crime, huh? I
don't just give up? Ooh...what a
monster I am!

MIKO

No, I think you also have a problem
with depression and anger...weird
self-hatred issues...and just the
relentless negativity--

BEN

You know, you could benefit from a
little self-hatred!

MIKO

It's passive-aggressive, Ben. Your
refusal to grow, to change...the
way you just gave up on any kind of
career...it's hostile.

BEN

So, it's all *me* doing stuff to *you*!
You're not at *all* self-centered or
entitled or deceptive--

MIKO

Listen to me, Ben. You never did
anything to make me want to stay.
You never even asked me not to go.
You just did nothing, and then
resented me for--

BEN

(yelling)

Are you done? Are you done with the
fucking rationalizing? Or are you
gonna finally--

Ben's voice trails off as he notices a hint of a smile on
Miko's face.

BEN (cont'd)

What?

MEREDITH (O.S.)

I don't need to! Because everything is about *him* and *his opinions* and *his grievances* and--

ALICE (O.S.)

Well, he sticks to what he knows! I mean, you've gotta give him credit for--

MEREDITH (O.S.)

But there's no insight! He has an amazing ability to judge all the people that have somehow offended him--the people he thinks he's better than--but he's absolutely incapable of turning that critical gaze on himself!

Ben turns around presses the elevator. It opens, and he gets back inside. The sound of Alice's voice fades as the elevator doors close. Then just as it's about to shut, Ben stops it with his hand. He approaches Meredith's door.

MEREDITH (O.S.) (cont'd)

I couldn't care less about his stupid opinions! I'm talking about what he's doing to us.

ALICE (O.S.)

Just ignore him. He's going through a rough time, and--

MEREDITH (O.S.)

And he wants to blow us up so you'll go back home with him!

ALICE (O.S.)

Yeah, I don't think he's quite as possessive as you.

MEREDITH (O.S.)

Well, maybe not consciously. And maybe you're not aware of his influence on you.

ALICE (O.S.)

Are you fucking serious?

Ben takes a deep breath and unlocks the door.

108 INT. MEREDITH'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS 108

SILENCE as Ben enters. Alice is on her feet, clearly agitated, and Meredith sits on the couch. Uncomfortable glances all around.

BEN
(pointing at Meredith)
She's right.

ALICE
What?

BEN
She's right, and I'm gonna do the most helpful thing I can think of... I'm gonna go home.

Ben pulls out his phone and taps on the screen.

BEN (cont'd)
Okay. Gonna take the next flight I could get.

He taps and swipes, deep in concentration.

ALICE
What? No...

MEREDITH
Ben, I don't want you to misunderstand--

BEN
Definitely no misunderstanding.

Ben continues to tap on his phone, and then looks up.

BEN (cont'd)
(to Meredith)
Meredith. I'm sorry you had to meet me at this point in my life. I mean, (chuckles) I'm sure you would've hated me anyway, but--

MEREDITH
No...

BEN Yes you would've - ALICE It's true.

BEN
...but the fact is, you happened to catch me at my absolute...

Alice and Meredith wait as Ben struggles to find the word.

BEN (cont'd)

...uh...

MEREDITH

Nadir?

BEN (cont'd)

Nadir! I'm always afraid I'm gonna mispronounce it.

Meredith smiles, unsure what else to say.

ALICE

(to Ben, cautiously)

Did you see her?

Ben nods, solemnly. The room falls SILENT.

At last, Ben notices something that we've already seen in the background: several dozen pastel-colored HELIUM BALLOONS, bundled together and tied by ribbons to a chair.

BEN

What's with all the fucking balloons?

109

INT. O'DALY'S BAR - NIGHT

109

A diverse group of friends fills the dark, neon-lit room, talking and drinking. The helium balloons from the previous scene decorate the space.

Meredith stands up on a stool as the CHATTER and MUSIC die down.

MEREDITH

Uh, I just wanted to say thanks for being here. I don't know if getting another year older is really something to celebrate at this point, but I will still allow you to buy me drinks.

LIGHT LAUGHTER from the crowd.

MEREDITH (cont'd)

Um, so last month I got dragged to a party I didn't really want to go to, and I got introduced to a friend of a friend from California even though I didn't really want to be introduced to anyone, least of all someone from California. Sorry...

ANGLE ON: the crowd. People reacting with LAUGHTER.

MEREDITH (cont'd)

Now I'm gonna say something that I don't say very often: I was wrong. I was wrong about the party, I was wrong about getting introduced. I might still be right about California, but anyway...that's how I met Alice, and, as most of you know, I've since fallen head-over-heels for her.

ALICE

She's falling down drunk!

ANGLE ON: the crowd. People reacting with HOOTS and LAUGHTER.

MEREDITH

But listen...she just told me that she's moving here, and that's honestly the best present I could imagine. So...YOUR LOSS, CALIFORNIA!

LAUGHTER and APPLAUSE.

MEREDITH (cont'd)

So keep buying me drinks, but buy Alice a drink, too, and welcome her to her new home!

Meredith climbs down from her chair, into Alice's arms. They kiss and the APPLAUSE grows louder.

We move through the exuberant crowd, finally arriving on Ben. Once again, he seems to be the only person not clapping. Eventually, he sets his beer down and joins in the applause.

110 INT. O'DALY'S BAR - A FEW MINUTES LATER 110

The diegetic MUSIC is now louder than ever. Surrounded by jubilant well-wishers, Ben taps Alice on the shoulder. They embrace. Ben extends his hand to Meredith, who instead pulls Ben in for a hug.

111 EXT. O'DALY'S BAR - A FEW MINUTES LATER 111

Ben exits the bar and begins walking up the street. Alice follows him out and catches up.

ALICE
Hey, where you going?

BEN
I'm gonna go back to the apartment
and get packed up.

ALICE
I'm not moving just for her, you
know. I mean, whatever happens,
I'll still be in like, the best
city in the world.

BEN
Okay. I mean, I disagree...

ALICE
Yes, you do.

They both laugh.

BEN
Look, I...I'm glad you're giving it
a shot.

ALICE
I'll be back next month to get my
stuff. Start planning now! We can
get a U-Haul, and--

BEN
I can't move 3,000 miles for
someone I'm not having intercourse
with.

ALICE
Speaking of someone you're not
having intercourse with.

Ben laughs.

ALICE (cont'd)
So... is it officially over?

BEN
(shrugs)
Yeah.

ALICE
So you're not gonna do the thing
where you run through the city to
make one last heartfelt attempt to
win her back and--

BEN
 (laughs)
 What? No.

They stand in SILENCE for a beat.

BEN (cont'd)
 Anyway--

ALICE
 I should get back in there.

He nods and watches as she goes back into the bar. His forced smile quickly melts into a look of sadness.

112 INT. MEREDITH'S APARTMENT - MORNING 112

The room cast in pre-dawn light. Ben lies on the couch, wide awake. He sits up, notices a FRAMED PHOTO sitting on the side table. It's a photo of Alice and Meredith staring back at him. Alice radiates joy, happier than he's ever known her to be. He mulls something over. Inspired, checks the time on his phone, then comes to a decision.

113 INT. MEREDITH'S APARTMENT - A FEW MINUTES LATER 113

Ben, now fully dressed and moving with a rising sense of urgency, walks across the apartment and approaches the bedroom door. He's about to knock, then reconsiders.

He grabs a pencil and paper from the kitchen counter. He cogitates--as if composing the perfect, heartfelt good-bye-- then hastily scrawls "THANKS SORRY BEN." He drops the apartment keys on top of the note and dashes off with his suitcase.

114 EXT. SUBWAY ENTRANCE - BROOKLYN - DAY 114

Ben exits Meredith's building, pulling his suitcase, and walks briskly in the direction of the subway.

115 EXT. SUBWAY ENTRANCE - MANHATTAN - DAY 115

Ben exits the subway station, suitcase in tow.

A115 EXT. CITY STREETS - MANHATTAN - DAY A115

Ben runs with increasing speed through the city streets.

116 EXT. LEON'S BUILDING - DAY 116

Ben arrives at Leon's apartment, out of breath. With great urgency, Ben presses a button on the buzzer repeatedly. No answer. He presses the buzzer again and again. Finally, he gives up.

He turns to leave, but suddenly stops in his tracks. He looks across the street.

ANGLE ON: Miko and Leon seated side-by-side in the cafe window. Miko is drinking coffee while Leon fusses with an elaborate pot of green tea. Their interaction is warm and comfortable, and a radiant smile breaks across Miko's face.

Ben takes a last look, nodding his head. The reality of the situation sinks in, and at last, he seems at peace. He turns and walks off, dragging his suitcase.

117 OMIT 117

118 OMIT 118

119 INT. TAXI - MANHATTAN - DAY 119

As the sun sets, Ben sits in the back of a taxi.

CAB DRIVER (O.S.)
Which terminal, sir?

120 INT. AIRPORT - FOOD COURT - NIGHT 120

Ben sits surrounded by cheerful, chatty groups of travelers. In the background, we see the garish neon of a Panda Express-style establishment. Chopsticks in hand, Ben hunches forward and starts to eat from a styrofoam box.

TAM (O.S.)
Is anyone sitting here?

Ben looks up, startled, his mouth full of food. He stares into the eyes of an unbelievably beautiful woman named TAM (Asian, early 30s). She smiles sweetly at Ben, waiting for his reply.

BEN
(cheerfully)
No!

He wipes his mouth with a napkin, gesturing towards the empty chair. Tam smiles again.

TAM

Thanks.

Then she abruptly drags the chair to a nearby table, where she settles in with her happy Asian-American family (husband, two kids). Ben's face falls, and he returns to his meal.

121 INT. AIRPLANE - NIGHT 121

The cabin lights are dim. Ben sits, pensive.

He glances over at an ELDERLY ASIAN WOMAN sitting in the row ahead from his POV, her profile is illuminated by the SEAT BACK SCREEN in front of her. She smiles, wiping a tear from her eye. Ben leans over to get a look at what she's watching.

CLOSE ON: the screen, again from Ben's POV. It's the movie that Ben and Miko saw at the Asian Film Festival.

Ben sits back, his mind suddenly awash in thoughts.

122 EXT. MEXICAN RESTAURANT - BAR - OAKLAND - NIGHT 122

Sasha sits at a bar with PILAR (28), while surrounded by a group of friends. They laugh and talk warmly, as they both casually swirl and sniff their glasses of wine.

123 INT. ART GALLERY - OAKLAND - NIGHT 123

A mix of scuzzy bohemians and elite art collectors fill the glowing, white-walled space. Within the crowd, we spot Autumn, who greets a group of friends (including Lamont, Gene and Jeffery, now fully clothed) enthusiastically. She gestures to the gallery wall behind her, where we see a massive INSTALLATION OF POLAROIDS.

124 INT. CITY STREET - MANHATTAN - NIGHT 124

Miko, more stylish and fashionable than ever, strolls confidently down a picturesque West Village street. She ducks into an unassuming doorway.

125 INT. RESTAURANT - MANHATTAN - NIGHT 125

Miko enters a tiny, austere sushi bar. Leon is the only customer, and he greets Miko with a kiss.

The wizened JAPANESE CHEF places two astonishingly perfect pieces of sushi in front of them. Miko and Leon each take a bite of sushi, responding with eye-rolling ecstasy.

126 INT. MEREDITH'S BUILDING - HALLWAY - BROOKLYN - NIGHT 126

In the hallway, Meredith adjusts the nameplate frame of her apartment door, with Alice standing by. They admire it, embrace and kiss sweetly.

As they head into the apartment, we push in to reveal the new strip of paper in the frame, which reads: "LEE/AMES."

A126 INT. AIRPLANE - MORNING (POSSIBLE ALT ENDING) A126

Ben has dozed off.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT'S VOICE
(over intercom)
Ladies and gentlemen, we are
beginning our descent into Oakland
International Airport, where the
local time is 6:14am.

The cabin lights come on, as Ben's eyes slowly open. We hear various lights blink on in the cabin. A passenger opens a window, and the morning sunlights pours in.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT'S VOICE (cont'd)
(over intercom)
As we prepare for landing, please
ensure that your seat backs are up
and your tray tables are secured.

Ben brings his seat upright, as the surrounding passengers get ready for landing.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT'S VOICE (cont'd)
(over intercom)
Remain seated with your seatbelt
fastened until we've come to a full
and complete stop.

Ben tightens his seatbelt, and looks ahead, as we slowly move in on his face, pensive, thinking about what happens from here on out.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT'S VOICE (cont'd)
(over intercom)
Prepare for landing.

The camera lands in a CLOSE UP on Ben, as he is suddenly jostled amidst the turbulence of the plane touching ground. As he rattles in his seat, we register a brief look of hope, as Ben steels himself for all that's ahead.

127 INT. CAR - OAKLAND - MORNING - CONTINUOUS 127

Sunrise. Ben sits in the back of an Uber, which speeds along the freeway in peak "blue hour" light. He checks his voicemail and sees one from Alice. He puts on his AirPods and presses play. *

ALICE'S VOICEMAIL

Hey. I think you're still up in the air, so I just wanted to leave you a message and let you know that you will die out there without me-- I'm kidding! Learn to take a joke, Ben!

128 OMIT 128

129 OMIT 129

130 EXT. MARINA PARK - LATER IN THE DAY 130

Ben walks up to the shore and sits on a rock, staring out, pensive.

ALICE'S VOICEMAIL (CONT'D)

But seriously, know that even though I'm across the country living my best life, I'm always here for you, pal. And who knows, maybe some change will be good for you...Love you. Bye. *

Ben sits up, and we move in on his face. He notices, perhaps for the first time, the breathtaking Bay and its infinite possibilities. *

CUT TO CREDITS