

Backwards Compatible

Written By
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FADE IN:

INT. JUNIOR HIGH HALLWAY - NASHVILLE - DAY - 1993

A locker door opens, decorated with images of Johnny Cash, Waylon Jennings, and Willie Nelson torn from music magazines, and JAKE RILEY, 14, tosses his books in.

Nervously, he peeks down the hall at GWEN PALMER, blonde, 14 going on 25. At her own locker, she wipes her eyes and checks her reflection in a little mirror.

JAKE (V.O.)

When I was 14 years old, Gwen Palmer was the unattainable summit of female perfection. Every Sports Illustrated swimsuit model, every Bond girl, and Raquel Welch in that fur bikini from "One Million Years B.C." rolled into one. I had loved her since the third grade.

TWO GIRLS walk past her and giggle to each other. As they get closer, Jake pretends to not pay attention, but overhears --

GOSSIP GIRL #1

Gwen caught her boyfriend kissing a cheerleader after homeroom.

GOSSIP GIRL #2

They are so over.

Jake's eyes widen. He looks quickly back at Gwen.

JAKE (V.O.)

She was heartbroken. Totally vulnerable. And I knew exactly what to do. This was my chance.

Jake looks smitten. Gwen closes her locker and catches him looking at her. She offers a weak smile, and Jake watches longingly as she walks away.

EXT. SUBURBAN HOUSE - NIGHT - 1993

That night. Jake hurries up the sidewalk, an acoustic guitar in hand. He sneaks around the side of GWEN'S HOUSE and looks up at a window, a light burning in it.

Jake clears his throat, strums a CHORD, and begins SINGING

Hank Williams' "I Can't Help It (If I'm Still in Love With You)." His voice shakes.

TEENAGE JAKE

(singing)

Today I passed you on the street /
and my heart fell at your feet / I
can't help it if I'm still in love
with you.

AT THE WINDOW, Gwen appears and draws the curtains back.

Jake smiles and keeps going. This is working.

TEENAGE JAKE (CONT'D)

(singing)

Somebody else stood by kyour side /
and he looked so satisfied / I
can't help it if I'm still in love
with you

ANOTHER GIRL appears at the window. Jake falters a little.

TEENAGE JAKE (CONT'D)

A picture from the past came slowly
stealing / as I brushed your a-arm
and...

Jake trails off as ANOTHER GIRL joins them. The curtains part at the next window, THREE MORE GIRLS. Suddenly, both windows are jammed with them.

It's a slumber party.

SLUMBER PARTY GIRL #1 (O.S.)

Oh. My. God. Who is that?

SLUMBER PARTY GIRL #2 (O.S.)

What a spazz. You think if I throw
my panties at him he'll go away?

Gwen covers her mouth and LAUGHS with her friends.

Jake looks like he wants to die.

FOOTBALL GOONS (PRE-LAP)

I can't help it --

INT. JUNIOR HIGH HALLWAY - DAY - 1993

Backed against his locker, Jake looks at THREE FOOTBALL GOONS, crooning the wrong words to the song.

FOOTBALL GOONS
 -- if I really love you.

LEAD FOOTBALL GOON
 Spazz.

He SHOVES Jake into his locker, and they high-five each other down the hall, passing Gwen and her friends, also laughing at Jake.

Jake rips down the photos inside his locker. Goodbye Johnny Cash, goodbye Willie, goodbye Waylon.

JAKE (V.O.)
 That's when I realized that taking chances...is stupid.

EXT. PAWN SHOP - DAY - 1993

Carrying his guitar, Jake marches into a pawn shop.

A moment later, he marches out with no guitar, stuffing a couple hundred bucks cash in his pocket.

INT. TEENAGE JAKE'S BEDROOM - DAY - 1993

Jake sits at a desk, opens a math textbook. He starts copying down problems from the Probability chapter.

JAKE (V.O.)
 Spending the rest of junior high hiding in school work taught me something else -- even if the bottom falls out of everything you thought you knew, there is something out there that never changes. Numbers. If there is an irreducible truth in this world, it's that one plus one equals two. Everything we know, and everything we can predict, starts right there. It's comforting.

Jake's paper -- and his world -- quickly fill with numbers.

INT. JAKE'S OFFICE - PRESENT DAY - DAY

The numbers morph into the figures on an investment statement. ADULT JAKE, 32 and in a suit that costs more than most mortgage payments, hands the statement to DR. COLEMAN

GARRETT, sitting across the table.

JAKE

I don't have to tell you that in any economy, let alone this one, eighteen percent growth in a single quarter is nothing to sneeze at.

Garrett and a pair of BUSINESS PARTNERS look over the statement. Garrett wears a tweed jacket, glasses, and looks non-threatening, avuncular.

Beside Jake, his boss, TREVOR, 40, elbows him and smiles.

JAKE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

This is me a couple of months ago. One of my investment clients is a start-up internet dating site, and they thought I was a gift from God.

DR. GARRETT

Son, you are a gift from God. This is going to help us launch SouthernMates.com in Florida and Georgia by the end of the year.

Trevor leans in to Jake.

TREVOR

You are the luckiest son of a bitch I ever met. I never seen a hot streak like you're on.

JAKE

It's not luck. It's in the numbers.

A small smile crosses Jake's face. Garrett smiles, too.

DR. GARRETT

We're helping thousands of people a month find their soul mates, and I want you to know you're helping make that possible.

Jake stands up and offers his hand to Garrett.

JAKE

Thank you, sir. I wasn't going to say anything, but I'm actually on my way to a wedding where the bride and groom met on SouthernMates.

DR. GARRETT

Well, how about that? Get us their information and we'll do something nice for 'em.

JAKE

Yeah, absolutely. Thank you.

He smiles and shakes hands all around.

JAKE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

See how happy I am? That's because I have no idea how badly I'm about to wreck my life.

EXT. AUDREY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Jake pulls up at a small apartment complex in his S-Class Mercedes. He takes off his tie before getting out.

INT. AUDREY'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - DAY

AUDREY BLAKE, 30, a bit of a hippie, but with an undeniable elegance, sits at a work table covered in ripped up, cut out, and otherwise deformed pieces of paper.

Propped up on the table, a book called "Paper Sculpture: A Step-By-Step Guide," open to a page showing an impressive paper sculpture of two goldfish beneath a lily pad.

Audrey holds up her own attempt to recreate it. It's not even close. Hers is terrible. Her face falls.

AUDREY

Crap.

There's a KNOCK. She opens the door, revealing Jake.

JAKE

Hey, sexy.

He walks in, steals a kiss as he passes her, then realizes he likes it and kisses her better.

JAKE (CONT'D)

You ready?

She indicates her clothes -- a much-too-big man's shirt and paint-spattered jeans. She's not ready.

AUDREY

Ten minutes.

His shoulders slump, he pulls out his BlackBerry.

JAKE

We've got a nine minute window to get through Knoxville before rush hour hits. I'll have to --

AUDREY

Five minutes. And you don't have to look for a new route.

She covers the screen of his BlackBerry with her hand.

EXT. AUDREY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Jake leads Audrey to the car, carrying her bag.

AUDREY

I don't know what I'm going to do about Aria's present, now. I wanted it to be, you know, personal. And paper sculpture sounded neat.

JAKE

Why didn't you make her a pot or a vase or something?

AUDREY

I don't know. I guess I'm kind of over pottery.

JAKE

Three weeks ago you were going to get a booth at the farmer's market and start selling clay pots.

AUDREY

Well, you know.

JAKE

I've got a hundred dollar Target gift card I keep in the car. In case I ever forget somebody's birthday or something.

AUDREY

You are such a nerd.

She puts her arms around his neck and kisses him.

I/E. JAKE'S MERCEDES - DAY

Jake merges onto I-40 out of town.

He watches Audrey slide a burned CD into the player.

AUDREY

I made us a road trip CD.

Bob Dylan's "LAY, LADY, LAY" begins playing.

JAKE

Come on, not Bob Dylan.

AUDREY

What can you possibly have against
the most important songwriter of --

JAKE

He's got that wheezy voice...

AUDREY

His voice is a religious
experience.

JAKE

And I'm sorry, but Hank Williams
was the most important songwriter
of -- forget it. What else'd you
put on here?

AUDREY

Janis, of course. Joanna Newsom --

JAKE

Please tell me there's at least one
Johnny Cash song. Even the one
where he covered U2.

Audrey bites her lip. That's a no. But Jake relents.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Ok. Because I love you, we'll
listen to your CD, and you can
educate me. How's that?

She gives him a playful smile.

AUDREY

Well...I can try.

They continue east, out of town, as Dylan keeps playing.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BEACH - MYRTLE BEACH, SC - DAY

Jake and Audrey sit on a blanket in the sand. Around them on other blankets are a couple dozen HIPPIE WEDDING GUESTS.

Jake looks uncomfortable in his polo shirt and khakis among nothing but flowing skirts, dashikis, and ponchos.

At the edge of the water, Audrey's sister ARIA, 26, and her groom LARRY, 25, face a HIPPIE WOMAN, 45, who raises her arms above her head and begins the marriage ceremony.

HIPPIE WOMAN

O Mother Earth, as your energy
binds all reality into a vast ball
of sticky consciousness, as we
stand on the border of your vast,
dry creation --

(gestures to the ocean)

-- and your vast, moist creation,
we thank you for this binding of
cooperative auras, the linkages of
quantum awareness, and the
continuing wonder of soy.

JAKE

(to Audrey)

What is she talking about?

AUDREY

Shhhh.

Audrey and Aria's parents, LYNDON and NANCY, both 50, sit on the blanket nearest the front and dab their wet eyes.

HIPPIE WOMAN

As the Earth Poets of the Chinook
have written, "Happily my interior
becomes cool, and I walk. As in the
long, long ago...I...walk."

Aria and Larry kiss, then turn to their guests, beaming. Everyone stands and CLAPS except Jake, who's utterly lost.

AUDREY

Stand up. They're married.

Still confused, Jake does as he's told.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Skinny-dipping wedding guests swim in the ocean, but Jake

sits on the sand by a bonfire, shoes off and pants rolled up. He looks down at a jewelry box.

He flips it open, revealing an engagement ring. Audrey calls to him from the water.

AUDREY

Jake, it's only cold for a second!

JAKE

I'll...just wait for you.

She sticks her tongue out at him, then paddles over to Aria.

Jake just watches, slips the box into his pocket.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

Laughing, talking, and mostly dressed again, the family sits around the bonfire, eating some type of hummus-based meal.

NANCY

Aria, your dad and I have one last gift for you. Something we made.

Audrey lets out a tiny groan, inwardly kicking herself.

JAKE

It's ok. She liked the gift card.

Nancy produces a homemade book -- sheets of natural paper between two sturdy covers hand-stitched together.

Aria scoots closer to Larry and takes the book. She flips to the title page, with the words "The Story of Our Love."

ARIA

Aww, guys.

She kisses Larry, about to cry as she turns the page.

ARIA (CONT'D)

(reading)

Larry and I met in the ocean, like two majestic dolphins, a fleeting encounter on a spring day...

She trails off. Confused, she looks up at her parents.

JAKE

(quietly, to Audrey)

I thought they met online.

AUDREY

They did.

ARIA

Mom? What is this?

NANCY

Our gift. The story of how the universe brought you together.

LARRY

A...website brought us together.

LYNDON

Sure, but Nancy and I think --

NANCY

We think it's...a little sad, honey. And we raised you better.

ARIA

At least Larry and I didn't meet on the way to jail like you and Dad.

NANCY

Don't get excited. We can say you met at Burning Man, if you want.

JAKE

(again, to Audrey)

What's wrong with meeting online?

Audrey shrugs.

LARRY

Meeting in the ocean sounds nice.

ARIA

Mom. Dad. There's nothing wrong with how we met.

NANCY

Honey, how does a computer know if people are in love?

It's getting awkward, so Jake tries to help.

JAKE

Actually, it's pretty straightforward.

Everyone turns to Jake, and he gets a bit of a "deer-in-the-headlights" look.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Yeah, I mean, that site is actually a client. They basically do the same thing I do, but with people instead of dollars and cents. You take a set of variables and find the probability of success or failure. It's actually kinda neat.

NANCY

It's technology. And technology is soulless and evil.

JAKE

You're kidding.

NANCY

It's true. Computers have no souls.

JAKE

Yeah, but neither does the ocean.

The circle goes quiet. Jake has blasphemed.

AUDREY

I think what Jake means is --

LYNDON

And we're not saying it couldn't have guessed right one time.

JAKE

It doesn't guess. That's the point.

NANCY

So any two people meant to be with each other, you think a computer could put together?

JAKE

Look, think of a relationship like a river. And each person brings tributaries to the river. If you statistically match two people going the same direction down the river, that's a good relationship.

AUDREY

Right. Like I'm sure me and Jake would get matched. We both like...

They look at each other, and Audrey hesitates, thinking.

JAKE
We like...music.

AUDREY
Right. Different music, but music.
And...art?

JAKE
Not so much. But we both like...

AUDREY
...each other. We both totally love
each other.

JAKE
Right.

They both look back at the group simultaneously.

NANCY
Well I think that's retarded.

It sounds like she's telling Jake what she thinks of him,
too. She and Jake stare each other down.

INT. AUDREY'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jake plops down on Audrey's couch, flipping open his laptop.

AUDREY
How are you still upset about this?
She meant computers were retarded,
not you.

She sits at a small desk in the corner, where a pair of
dirty blue jeans cover a beat-up old computer.

JAKE
She always finds some way to hint
that everything I've built my life
on belongs in a...compost heap, or
wherever hippies put things they
don't like.

AUDREY
(playful)
I didn't realize you'd built your
life on internet dating.

JAKE
We'll take the test, we'll get
matched, and then she'll have to

(MORE)

JAKE (CONT'D)

leave me alone.

AUDREY

Ok, my mom could've been nicer. But that's what karma's for. In time --

JAKE

I'm begging you.

AUDREY

But love is a mystery. That's why it's Love and why we have Romeo and Juliet and the Taj Mahal and ...France. Did you ever consider that maybe my mom's right?

Jake shoots her a look.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

I shouldn't have -- I'm sorry.

Audrey thinks it over for a minute.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

Ok. If it means that much to you.

She plucks the jeans off her computer. Jake looks grateful.

MONTAGE:

- ON SCREEN, an avatar of Dr. Garrett walks out. He wears the same tweed jacket he did in Jake's office.

DR. GARRETT

Welcome to SouthernMates.com. Take our personality survey for Hearts in the Heart of Dixie!

- Jake clicks a button that says "FALL IN LOVE."
- Jake answers various scale of 1-to-10 questions: How outgoing are you? How important is communication?
- Audrey pauses at "Rate your level of self-awareness."

AUDREY

How can anybody really know their level of self-awareness?

- A status bar in the corner of the page marked "PERCENT COMPLETED" changes from 35% to 37%.

- Jake's bleary-eyed. The questions keep coming: How much do you enjoy the following activities? Woodworking? Piloting

small aircraft? Skeet shooting? He rubs his eyes.

- Weary, Audrey smiles. She gives "10s" to Yoga, Nature Hikes, and Vegetarianism.

- Jake smiles. He gives "10s" to Logic Puzzles, Science, and College Sports. He clicks "NEXT."

- Jake pours Audrey coffee, drinks from a cup of his own.

- A video window of Dr. Garrett, smiling.

DR. GARRETT

You're doing great. There's a light
at the end of the tunnel.

- On Jake's screen: "What was your most embarrassing moment?" He freezes. Remembers...

EXT. SUBURBAN HOUSE - NIGHT - 1992

The slumber party heckles Teenage Jake, guitar in hand.

INT. AUDREY'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - BACK TO SCENE

- Jake takes a deep breath, and for his most embarrassing moment, he types: "Tried singing in public."

- Audrey stares at "What is your life ambition?" She starts typing, but stops and deletes it. After a long moment, she finally just types "Undeclared."

- Exhausted, Jake reads: "If your home were on fire, what one thing would you save?" Jake thinks, then finally types "My music collection." The status bar changes to 100%.

Jake closes his laptop with a sigh of relief, and Audrey flips off her computer only a moment later.

It's MORNING. Outside, BIRDS SING.

Jake and Audrey sit in silence for several moments. Then --

AUDREY

Holy crap that was long.

JAKE

Amen. Now we just have to wait a
few hours for the results to post.

Jake collapses back on the couch. A moment later, his WATCH BEGINS BEEPING. He looks at it.

JAKE (CONT'D)

I have to go to work.

He rolls off the couch.

INT. JAKE'S OFFICE - DAY

Jake sits behind his desk, head kicked back in his chair, eyes closed, fast asleep.

Trevor KNOCKS on his open door, Jake snaps awake.

TREVOR

Somebody must've done a lot of getting engaged drinking.

Jake shakes his head.

JAKE

It didn't happen.

TREVOR

What?

JAKE

I had a fight with my would-be mother-in-law and joined an online dating community.

TREVOR

You guys broke up?

JAKE

No, we both joined the dating site.

TREVOR

Is there a part of that story you forgot to tell?

Jake's PHONE RINGS. He stifles a yawn, motions for Trevor to give him one second, and answers.

JAKE

(into the phone)

Jake Riley.

INTERCUTTING:

INT. AUDREY'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - DAY

Audrey sits at her computer, sipping a mug of tea.

AUDREY
How you holding up?

JAKE
My boss caught me asleep at my desk, but apart from that...

AUDREY
Did you check to see if we're matched yet?

JAKE
Not yet.

AUDREY
Great! I wanted to do it together. I'm totally excited about this now.

ON AUDREY'S COMPUTER SCREEN,

Another video Dr. Garrett walks out across the page.

DR. GARRETT
Welcome back. You have new matches, so start falling in love!

AUDREY
That's creepy.

She clicks the close icon next to Dr. Garrett and he dissolves away, revealing her matches.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
I've already got fifteen matches!

She scrolls through a long list of guys, then smiles. There it is -- "Jake, Nashville, TN"

AUDREY (CONT'D)
You were right. There you are!

ON HIS SCREEN,

Dr. Garrett walks out, like he did for Audrey, but he says:

DR. GARRETT
Welcome back. One of your matches has sent you a message!

Jake looks confused.

JAKE
Did you send me a message?

AUDREY

No. You want me to?

Jake closes Dr. Garrett's window, and it reveals only three matches: Tiffany, Sabrina, and Gwen.

Next to Gwen, "LET'S TALK" flashes.

JAKE

You're not here.

AUDREY

Come on, they wouldn't send you to me and not me to you.

Hesitantly, Jake clicks on "LET'S TALK." A woman's picture appears -- she's pretty, blonde, and...the girl he ruined his childhood trying to seduce. Gwen Palmer at 32.

JAKE

Oh my God.

Her message reads: "Jake -- Your profile looks great. I'd love to talk if you're interested."

Jake's stunned.

ON HER SCREEN, Audrey clicks on Jake's profile, then frowns.

This guy may be named Jake, but he clearly isn't HER Jake. The picture shows a short and heavy SMILING MEXICAN DUDE.

AUDREY

Oh, wait a second. This isn't you.

Upset, Jake looks to Trevor.

JAKE

We weren't matched.

EXT. ROOFTOP DRIVING RANGE - DAY

Trevor stands at a tee, driver in hand.

TREVOR

Good luck ever living that down.

He WHAPS his golf ball into orbit.

Behind him, Jake stares across the street at a billboard with a giant picture of Dr. Garrett for SouthernMates.com.

TREVOR (CONT'D)
 Devon's step mom never let me
 forget the time I drank too much at
 Easter and yarfed in her gardenias.
 But she's dead now, so it's cool.

He steps aside so Jake can tee up, but Jake doesn't move.

JAKE
 I was positive we'd get matched.

TREVOR
 I don't know. You and Audrey are
 pretty different.

JAKE
 Right. We complement each other.

Jake now steps forward to tee up his ball.

TREVOR
 Sure. But me and my first wife
 complemented each other, too.

JAKE
 That's not fair.

TREVOR
 I'm just saying.

JAKE
 Your first wife left you for a guy
 who spoke Klingon.

TREVOR
 She left me for a doctor. Who spoke
 Klingon. You know what? Forget I
 said anything.

Jake stares down at the tee, then just drops his ball to the
 ground, looking completely defeated. Trevor looks worried.

JAKE
 But it's numbers. Numbers don't
 lie. And the numbers...didn't add
 up to Audrey.

TREVOR
 You're taking this way too hard.

JAKE
 It's just...one of my matches is
 this girl I was hopelessly,
 (MORE)

JAKE (CONT'D)

embarrassingly in love with when I was a kid. And she wants to talk.

TREVOR

You guys ever go out?

JAKE

No.

Jake finally tees up his ball, gets ready to swing.

TREVOR

You ever wonder what would've happened if you did, or...?

Jake freezes in his backswing -- pointedly not answering -- and finally SWINGS. He and Trevor watch the ball.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

Wow. Shanked it.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING, ELEVATOR - DAY

Jake and Trevor ride up to their offices.

TREVOR

This girl wants to go out, I say go out with her.

JAKE

I'm not going to cheat on Audrey.

TREVOR

One date's not cheating. It's like trying on an old pair of pants to make sure they don't fit before you throw them out. You get those pants out of your system.

JAKE

Two days ago I was going to ask Audrey to marry me. That's the biggest risk I've taken since I was a kid. What...what if I was wrong?

TREVOR

That's what I'm saying. There's gonna come a day when Audrey's screaming at you about something stupid like not closing the door to pee -- and I mean, hide the kitchen knives screaming -- and believe me,

(MORE)

TREVOR (CONT'D)

you're gonna ask yourself, "what if I'd tried on that one pair of pants I never got to wear?"

Jake studies Trevor, looks like he's really thinking about this. Then his BlackBerry RINGS. As he digs it out --

JAKE

What's weird is, I know that in some confused, backwards way you're actually trying to help me.

TREVOR

If you're confused, all I'm saying is, you go see this girl one time. You'll see she isn't right for you, and knock out that what-if forever.

The elevator DINGS, the doors slide open, Trevor steps off. Jake shoots him a lingering look, then answers his phone.

JAKE

(into phone)

Hi, babe.

(listens)

No, I don't have any plans tonight.

He walks off the elevator.

INT. ABANDONED STOREFRONT - NIGHT

Audrey opens the back door of a darkened shop and leads Jake in, his hand over his eyes. He kicks a board on the ground.

JAKE

Owww.

AUDREY

Sorry. Don't peek.

JAKE

If I was peeking I wouldn't have kicked that thing.

Audrey finds a light switch and flips it.

AUDREY

Surprise! You can look.

Jake does, and the place looks terrible. Eight hundred square feet of peeling paint, exposed wiring, and trash.

JAKE

Where are we?

Audrey swells with pride.

AUDREY

My art gallery. Or, it will be.

JAKE

Your what?

AUDREY

I know it needs work, but when I walked in this afternoon, it told me it wanted to be mine.

JAKE

Where did wanting to open an art gallery come from all of a sudden?

AUDREY

When we filled out our profiles, I had no idea what my life's ambition was, and that was really scary. I mean, I'm thirty. So I really thought about it, and --

JAKE

You decided it was opening an art gallery.

Shaking his head, Jake walks to the picture window at the front of the space, checking it out. There's a pile of boxes in front of it, and Jake gently kicks them, thinking.

JAKE (CONT'D)

You didn't sign anything, did you? Because -- Oh my God!!

Suddenly, the pile of boxes bursts apart, and a CONFUSED HOBO sits up, shaking his head and waking up.

HOBO

Oh, man!

Jake and Audrey stumble backward, shocked.

JAKE

Ahh! Aaahh!

HOBO

You guys cops?

He quickly realizes the cowering couple aren't cops.

HOBO (CONT'D)

Oh, I get it. Need a spot for a quickie, right? I gotcha.

He nods at them knowingly. Jake gives Audrey an "are you kidding me?" look. She can only shrug a little.

EXT. ANTEBELLUM ART GALLERY - NIGHT

Guests in evening finery enter an old plantation home converted into an art gallery and museum.

INT. ANTEBELLUM ART GALLERY - NIGHT

Audrey leads Jake by the hand through the upscale crowd. A banner behind them reads "EMERGING ARTISTS SHOWCASE."

AUDREY

I promise, this will all make sense when you see this.

They reach a wall, and Audrey smiles, gesturing to a painting we can't see yet. Jake looks confused.

After a moment:

JAKE

What, this? Are you kidding me?

AUDREY

It's neo-postmodern anti-structuralism. It subverts traditional composition while referencing 20th century abstraction. This is the artist I want for my gallery.

They look at a huge canvas streaked with brown paint.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

His name's Dan Callahan. But he paints under "Beauchamp."

She scans the room, spots a throng of GALLERY PATRONS around DAN CALLAHAN, 28 and remarkably scraggly.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

That's him.

JAKE
Jeez, is he homeless, too?

AUDREY
His work costs more than my car.

JAKE
Well, you're car's not that --
She shows Jake her program. His eyes go big.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Wow.

Audrey bounces a little on the balls of her feet, looks at Jake expectantly.

AUDREY
So what do you say?

JAKE
A week ago your life's ambition was making pottery.

AUDREY
That was different.

JAKE
And landscape painting before that.

AUDREY
Which is harder than Bob Ross made it look.

JAKE
And a children's book author --

AUDREY
Now you're being a jerk.

JAKE
Look, I just think if this is something you really want to do --
She nods, trying to convince him it is.

JAKE (CONT'D)
-- then you'll still want to do it after we get mar --

Jake bites his tongue before he slips and says "married." He tries to recover before Audrey notices anything.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Um...after we get...more time to really think about it. And we should probably talk about it then.

Her face falls.

EXT. ANTEBELLUM ART GALLERY - NIGHT

Audrey strides across the lawn, Jake trailing after.

AUDREY

I can be good at this.

JAKE

And if you're not, we're out a hundred grand at least to renovate that "gallery" you just showed me.

AUDREY

You've got more than that invested in all kinds of things.

JAKE

Yeah, but I would be insane to invest it in this. What's the chance of return on an art gallery? Is it like a restaurant? Or a start-up, or --

AUDREY

I'm sorry, I forgot you need to run the numbers before you can even buy a toothbrush.

JAKE

That was one time. And you have to admit this idea's nuts.

Audrey wheels on him, her look admitting no such thing.

AUDREY

Thank you for calling my purpose in life "insane" and "nuts." Awesome.

Jake takes a deep breath.

JAKE

Audrey --

She marches to his car and yanks on the door handle. It doesn't open. She closes her eyes, embarrassed.

Jake just stares at her, thinking.

Without turning around, Audrey points at the door handle.

Jake clicks the remote, the car BEEPS, and Audrey gets in.

I/E. JAKE'S MERCEDES - CONTINUOUS

Jake slides behind the wheel. Silence.

JAKE

You want to come to my place? We
can talk about it more, or --

AUDREY

Not tonight.

Disappointed, he cranks the ignition and pulls away.

INT. JAKE'S CONDO, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Walking into his upscale condo alone, Jake throws himself down on the couch, still stuck in the fight with Audrey.

He spots his computer on the coffee table, and grabs it.

JAKE

I can think about work.

He pulls up the current trading on the Tokyo stock exchange -- lots of charts and real-time quotes. Suddenly his email dings at him -- SouthernMates.com says Gwen has prodded him.

Hesitant, Jake opens the message, revealing Gwen's picture.

A call-out box boasts "Our Compatibility Projection for Jake and Gwen: 94/100! "Reply Now and Start Falling in Love!"

Jake thinks for a long, long time, conflicted. Then he hits "Reply" and types: "Hi, Gwen. It's great we got matched. How about grabbing some dinner?"

He immediately deletes "dinner" and types "coffee."

JAKE (CONT'D)

Coffee's better. Definitely coffee.

He takes a deep breath, wavers, but finally clicks "Send."

INT. CREMA COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Jake sits alone, nervous, in his suit and a red tie. He

checks his watch and looks up just as a HEAVYSET BLONDE, 31, in a red dress and clearly looking for someone walks in.

Jake leans back in his chair, smooths out his tie, drawing attention to it. The Woman smiles, walks toward him.

Jake smiles, too. Relief washing over him.

JAKE

(under his breath)

You certainly used an old picture.

He rises, but she walks past him without even a glance.

Confused, Jake turns to see her join a HEAVYSET GUY in line.

Realizing his mistake, Jake quickly sits down again and looks back at the door. He freezes.

There, taking off her sunglasses, stands the real GWEN, 31. She's also in red, she's stunning, and, no mistake this time, she's looking right at him.

Jake brushes his tie, and Gwen smiles. It's a smile that would stop traffic. She walks toward him.

GWEN

Hi, Jake?

JAKE

And you're Gwen.

They shake hands.

JAKE (CONT'D)

This isn't a line, and I don't want you to think I'm nuts, but --

Gwen starts to sit, but stops halfway.

GWEN

You're not going to ask me to get married, are you? I know we got scientifically matched, but --

JAKE

No. You probably don't remember, but we actually...we've met.

She finally sits down and looks at him, trying hard to place him. But she's drawing a blank.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Fairview Middle School. Nineteen

(MORE)

JAKE (CONT'D)
 eighty-nine to ninety-three.

Gwen looks like she does kind of think he's nuts.

GWEN
 Middle school? I...
 (realizing)
 Oh my God. Jake...Riley?

Jake nods.

JAKE
 Hi.

Gwen tries to think of something to say, but she laughs -- a joyful, amazed, inviting laugh.

INT. CREMA COFFEE SHOP - LATER

Jake and Gwen have coffee, pastries, and conversation going.

GWEN
 You completely gave up because of me? That makes me feel horrible.

JAKE
 The appeal of being a musician is that you get girls. But if it doesn't work, what's the point?

GWEN
 I am a terrible person. I crushed your dreams.

JAKE
 Nah. I wasn't cut out for it.

GWEN
 How do you know?

Jake starts to say something, but stops.

JAKE
 You got me. I guess I don't.

GWEN
 What are you doing now?

JAKE
 Investment banking.

GWEN
 Country star to investment banker.
 (MORE)

GWEN (CONT'D)

That's kind of a big jump.

JAKE

Yeah, but if I remember, I think your plan was to marry a prince or something. How's that working out?

GWEN

About as well as you'd think. I guess "princess" to "lawyer" is kind of a big jump, too.

JAKE

Really? Criminal law, or...

GWEN

No, I'm at Mercury Records, actually. Rights and clearances. Stuff like that.

JAKE

Wow. Maybe I planted a seed.

GWEN

Maybe you did.

They share a moment. It's full of possibilities. Jake breaks the eye contact.

GWEN (CONT'D)

So...did you have some revelation that made you want to do...banking?

JAKE

I don't think it's a field that's big in epiphanies. I had three job offers after college, and took the one with the most zeroes.

GWEN

I know I'm a lawyer, but even for me that's...yikes.

JAKE

It was safe. And it's not that awful. I always loved numbers, how the whole world, if you look close enough, it's...math.

GWEN

And society is just laws. Completely understand.

JAKE

But now the only thing I do with numbers is squeeze dollars out of them. So maybe it is that awful.

GWEN

I'm glad you do what you do. My girlfriends made me promise to stop dating musicians.

She makes a hand gesture that says "no more."

JAKE

Hey, let me ask you --

GWEN

Were you lying earlier? Are you really going to propose?

JAKE

No. Who's your favorite Monkee?

GWEN

(confused)

Um...Orangutans? I guess. Is that some kind of -- ?

JAKE

No, like "Hey, hey we're the Monkees..."

GWEN

Oh! Oh, yeah. Peter. Definitely.

Jake leans back in his chair, lets out a low whistle.

GWEN (CONT'D)

I know, all the girls liked Davey, but -- why, who's your favorite?

Jake looks right at her.

JAKE

Peter. All the way.

GWEN

Really?

Jake nods. Gwen smiles, amazed. That's creepy, but good.

GWEN (CONT'D)

(after a moment)

If I ask you something, will you be

(MORE)

GWEN (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
honest with me?

JAKE
Just don't ask about my tax return.

GWEN
Why did you even want to see me
again? I...I wasn't nice to you.

JAKE
A cup of coffee didn't seem like
too much of a risk.

GWEN
I hope it's not just a cup of
coffee.

She smiles shyly, and Jake can't help smiling, too. But there's worry behind his eyes.

INT. HOME DEPOT - DAY

Trevor leads Jake past the lawn and garden equipment.

TREVOR
I said "I'm not bagging the damn
lawn clippings one more time."
Oooh, this has a hedge-trimmer.

JAKE
I saw Gwen.

TREVOR
You went on a date?

JAKE
No. Just...coffee.

Trevor starts moving again, heading for a display of big, wooden fence posts.

JAKE (CONT'D)
But if it had been a date...it
would've been the best first date I
ever had.

Trevor stops and turns to him, Jake looking guilty.

TREVOR
So it...didn't...get her out of
your system.

JAKE

She makes me feel like a different person.

TREVOR

Getting a prostate exam makes me feel like a different person. It's not always a good thing.

JAKE

I feel so guilty. Man, now I'm going to have to sign the lease on that art gallery Audrey wants.

TREVOR

Sure. It's like having a kid. That'll fix everything.

Jake shoots him a look -- he doesn't need sarcasm right now.

INT. REAL ESTATE OFFICE - DAY

Reading some paperwork, Audrey sits across from a RENTAL AGENT. It looks like the bright red of the agent's jacket and hair came from the same bottle.

AUDREY

Does this mean they actually found asbestos in the building?

RENTAL AGENT

That's a form acknowledgement the state requires.

Jake enters, spots Audrey, and hurries over.

JAKE

Hi, babe. Sorry I'm late.

AUDREY

Oh my God, thank you, thank you, thank you so much for this.

JAKE

Yeah.

She throws her arms around him and kisses him. Jake hugs her a little tentatively, then quickly works one arm free to shake hands with the Rental Agent.

RENTAL AGENT

Have a pen.

She offers a handful of gaudy pens, Jake takes one and sits.

RENTAL AGENT (CONT'D)

When you click it, a light comes on. So you can write in the dark.

Jake tries to hand it off to Audrey.

AUDREY

Already have one.

She produces hers and clicks it. A tiny light comes on.

She signs the lease, hands the papers to Jake.

He clicks his pen on, goes to sign, but pauses. Audrey and the Agent watch him eagerly. He doesn't move.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

(pointing)

Right there. Next to mine.

After another moment, he signs quickly and hands the lease to the Agent. She smiles and produces a set of keys.

RENTAL AGENT

Congratulations.

Beaming, Audrey takes the keys.

INT. GRIMY HALLWAY - DAY

Audrey creeps down a dusty hallway dotted with five-gallon buckets, drop cloths, and other miscellaneous debris.

Checking a scrap of paper in her hand, she glances at faint numbers stenciled on each door she passes.

Audrey stops in front of room 511 and KNOCKS.

Nothing. She knocks again, and a moment later --

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

(pained)

One second.

There's a heavy THUD, followed by SHUFFLING FOOTSTEPS.

The door opens, and Dan Callahan -- Beauchamp -- stands there in a rubber sumo suit, drenched with green paint.

DAN

What's up?

AUDREY
Mister Beauchamp?

DAN
You the one who called?

AUDREY
Yes.

DAN
Call me Dan. "Beauchamp" is just
something to put on the paintings.

INT. BEAUCHAMP'S STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Audrey steps into a studio that looks only a little better than the hallway. Stacks of large canvases line the walls.

AUDREY
This is a great space.

DAN
There's no heat and the plumbing
has a sense of humor, but it's big
and I don't have any neighbors.

She approaches a huge sheet of unstretched canvas spread on the floor. It's surrounded by work lights and a ladder.

AUDREY
What are you working on?

There's a big green smudge and a big purple smudge, and inflated balloons stuck to it. Dan waddles up, and Audrey realizes the green paint on him is what's on the canvas.

DAN
You want to try it?

Audrey laughs, then realizes he kind of looks serious.

INT. BEAUCHAMP'S STUDIO - LATER

Audrey stands on the ladder, wearing the sumo suit.

AUDREY
You're sure I'm not going to break
something?

DAN
Just the balloons. And then you
bounce.

Out of the sumo suit and up close, Dan's not a bad-looking guy under his ever-present scruff. He looks at the canvas.

AUDREY
What if I mess it up?

DAN
Mess it up? Are you kidding?

AUDREY
Ok. Ready?

DAN
You're the one jumping.

Audrey takes a deep breath and JUMPS. She goes SPLAT on the canvas, and the balloons EXPLODE. They all had paint in them, and the impact sprays different colors everywhere.

DAN (CONT'D)
Perfect!

AUDREY
(laughing)
Owww.

DAN
Did it hurt?

AUDREY
Yes.

She waves her arms and legs around like a upturned bug. Dan runs over and helps her sit up.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
I feel like an idiot. I came here to talk business and I'm rolling around in paint.

DAN
We could talk business over dinner, maybe. Or pie, if you like pie.

Audrey gets the implication.

AUDREY
Oh. No, actually...

DAN
Sure. Or we can get you cleaned up and talk business now.

She smiles and he helps her to her feet.

INT. JAKE'S OFFICE - DAY

Jake sits at his computer, studying several line graphs.

Behind him, his printer spits out copies. No sound but the IRRITATING DRONE of his LaserJet. Jake looks from the computer to the printer, bored.

Then he gets an idea. He looks out his office door toward the cubicle bullpen, makes sure nobody's looking at him.

JAKE
What the hell.

He closes his work on the computer and opens a browser window, types in WWW.EBAY.COM.

The world's online marketplace pops up. Jake types "GUITAR."

He gets 464,914 results. Too many.

He types "ACOUSTIC GUITAR." 27,152 results. He looks out toward everybody in the cubicles again.

He thinks for a second, then without getting up, scoots his chair to the door, closes it, and slides back behind his desk. He starts scrolling through his eBay results.

Then something catches his eye -- a black C.F Martin acoustic for \$1300. Jake clicks on it.

The page reads: "Great guitar. Vintage sound, pristine."

Jake moves his mouse over the PLACE BID button, and stops, his finger hovering over his mouse button.

He looks at his upraised finger, then frowns. He loses his nerve. He closes the browser window and goes back to work.

INT. ABANDONED STOREFRONT - DAY

Audrey opens the back door and sticks her head into the dingy space, which looks the way she and Jake left it.

AUDREY
Hello? Hello?!

Dan peeks his head in around her.

DAN
Who are you talking to?

AUDREY
Checking for hobos. I...never mind.

There's no sign of life, and the boxes are scattered so there's clearly no hobo in them. It's safe.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
Ok, come in. It needs work, but...

Audrey steps aside so Dan can walk past. He looks at a hole in the wall and chips some drywall off with his finger.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
I'm going to get that fixed.

Dan nods, thinking hard. He walks over by the street windows and holds up his hand, like he's reading the light on it.

He accidentally nudges the pile of boxes the hobo had been in, and a rat suddenly scurries out. Audrey SCREAMS.

The rat runs by her and dashes through a crack in the wall.

Audrey looks at Dan, horrified, and lets her shoulders sag.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
I think I'm wasting your time.

DAN
My favorite museum in the world's
an old a train station. I bet they
had rats when they moved in, too.

Audrey looks up at him, a little spark of hope. He smiles, holds out his hand to shake on it.

AUDREY
Really?

DAN
Yeah. I'm in.

Almost overwhelmed, Audrey keeps it together long enough to shake his hand.

Then she can't help it -- she hugs him. Dan tenses up, surprised, then looks happy.

DAN (CONT'D)
Ok, not too tight.

He pats her on the back.

INT. ARIA AND LARRY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Audrey bursts into her sister's small apartment.

AUDREY
Aria!? Aria!

Excited, she heads straight into a living room filled with packing boxes. There's no furniture, but there is a tent.

And the tent's a-rockin. Audrey stops cold.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
...Aria?

The RUSTLING in the tent suddenly stops, too.

LARRY (O.S.)
(confidentially, in the
tent)
Did you invite somebody else?

ARIA (O.S.)
Shh, it's my sister.

LARRY (O.S.)
Oh, cool.

Followed by the sound of a SLAP.

AUDREY
Is this a bad time, or -- ?

ARIA (O.S.)
No, one second.

After a moment, Aria unzips the tent flap and crawls out, wrapped tightly in a blanket.

ARIA (CONT'D)
Sorry. We were celebrating.

AUDREY
What's the occasion?

INT. ARIA AND LARRY'S APARTMENT, KITCHENETTE - LATER

Still in her blanket, Aria hands Audrey a cup of tea.

ARIA

SouthernMates.com wants us to do a commercial. I guess they heard about us from Jake and called.

AUDREY

That's cool.

ARIA

I know. We even get to say "For Hearts in the Heart of Dixie." Which I always thought was stupid, but now I kinda like it.

AUDREY

You know Mom still won't be impressed.

ARIA

No, she'll tell me we're being exploited by corporate America.

AUDREY

Which is kind of true.

ARIA

I know, but we get to be on TV!

AUDREY

I have news, too.

Audrey smiles and takes a sip of her tea.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

I got an artist for my opening. It'll be his first solo show.

Aria lights up. But before she can say anything --

LARRY (O.S.)

Hey, that's kick ass.

Larry comes into the kitchen -- naked, which can't make anybody happy -- and heads for the fridge.

LARRY (CONT'D)

Congrats.

Audrey averts her eyes as he bends over to look inside. Aria seems to not even notice him.

ARIA

I am so proud of you.

AUDREY

I am, too.

INT. JAKE'S CONDO, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jake rushes in from work and makes a beeline for the couch.

He slings his laptop out of its case and flips it open on his coffee table. He types quickly, and

ON THE SCREEN

The same eBay auction he looked at earlier loads. But now, in red type, it reads "Bidding has ended for this item."

JAKE

No. Dammit!

Jake reflexively jumps up on the couch. Just as he does, Audrey walks through his front door, carrying food.

Jake looks at her, guilty, but doesn't think to get off the couch. She stifles laughter and gives him a look.

AUDREY

You're...home.

JAKE

Yeah. No, I...I lost an eBay thing. It's nothing. It was stupid.

AUDREY

And yet you jump on your couch.

He jumps down and lowers the laptop monitor.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

I wanted to be waiting for you when you got home and surprise you.

She holds up the bags she's carrying.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

We're celebrating with sushi.

JAKE

I still don't actually like sushi.

Audrey shrugs and heads into the kitchen.

INT. JAKE'S CONDO, LIVING ROOM - LATER

At the table, Audrey makes quick work of the sushi while Jake eats a bowl of cereal.

AUDREY

I went to see Aria today. She and Larry are going to be in one of the SouthernMates TV commercials.

JAKE

That should be funny.

Jake tries hard to act casual.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Hey, I meant to ask -- us not getting matched the other day, did that bother you at all?

AUDREY

No. I thought it'd be neat if we did, but who cares?

She pops a piece of sushi in her mouth, then looks at Jake and notices something's off with him.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

You care, don't you?

JAKE

No. You know. We're pretty different.

AUDREY

We complement each other. Like, if I hadn't bought you that coffee grinder, you'd still be making instant for yourself. Ick.

Jake nods a little. That's not exactly earth-shattering.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

And just think where I'd be without that IRA you set up for me. Or my memory foam pillow.

(serious as the grave)

I love my memory foam pillow.

Jake smiles at her.

JAKE

Yeah, I'm sorry. Forget about it.

AUDREY

Already did. I don't need a computer to tell me I'm in love with you. And, honestly, I have no idea how you survived without me.

Jake half-smiles, feeling very awkward.

INT. AUDREY'S GALLERY - DAY

WORKERS scrape up the flooring, patch holes in the wall, and scurry up ladders to knock out the ceiling.

Audrey emerges from her back office, flipping through a legal pad. Her CONTRACTOR -- swarthy, cheap tattoos of bikini girls, wearing a utility belt -- spots her.

CONTRACTOR

Hey sweetheart, we going east-west with this thing or north-south?

AUDREY

What?

Two workers bump Audrey as they carry a wall past her.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

Oh, um...

She flips through the legal pad.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

East-west. No, what piece is that?

CONTRACTOR

This thing ain't made of cotton.

AUDREY

Two seconds.

She keeps flipping through the pad.

WORKER CARRYING WALL

Lady, where we putting this thing?!

AUDREY

One second.

One of the guys carrying the wall drops his end, busting up the corner. He looks at his boss, guilty. Audrey gapes.

CONTRACTOR

Nobody'll see that part.

AUDREY

Excuse me.

Overwhelmed, she spins around and retreats to her office.

INT. AUDREY'S GALLERY, OFFICE - DAY

The dingy closet of a room looks empty, but there's a phone on the desk with no handset, and a cord runs under the desk.

AUDREY (O.S.)

Hi, Daddy?

Audrey sits under the desk, knees pulled up to her chest, phone to her ear.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

I just realized...I have no idea what I'm doing. I thought since you and mom have the shop --

INTERCUTTING:

INT. THE BIG SUR BOUTIQUE - DAY

Audrey's parents' touristy, hippie-themed shop. Audrey's dad Lyndon arranges a display of gemstones.

LYNDON

Sure, sure. What do you want to know, Moonbeam?

AUDREY

I just thought I could be a responsible adult and do this.

LYNDON

Raindrop, you can do anything. You're my little girl.

AUDREY

Thanks, daddy.

LYNDON

Did you want advice or cheering up?

AUDREY

Both.

LYNDON

Then here's my advice. Remember, the path to fiduciary wholeness

(MORE)

LYNDON (CONT'D)

lies in ancillary revenue streams.

AUDREY

I'm sorry, what?

LYNDON

Selling different things. Branching out. Five years ago, I talked your mother into exploring smoke augmentation.

AUDREY

Not the bongos...

LYNDON

That's what she said, too. You know how she is about new ideas.

Lyndon finishes with the gemstone display, moves to the next cabinet -- an array of novelty sculptures that have all been turned into bongos -- skulls, hula dancers, etc.

He pulls out a rag and dusts in the display case.

LYNDON (CONT'D)

But these little guys are padding our bank accounts like you wouldn't believe. Especially during Spring Break. This is ancient wisdom.

Audrey closes her eyes, wincing.

INT. AUDREY'S GALLERY - DAY

Dan opens the door to the gallery. A CHIME sounds, then WARBLER, and sparks suddenly rain down on him.

Dan covers his head, freaked out. The Worker up on the ladder looks over at him, unfazed.

WORKER ON LADDER

(to the Contractor)

Hey, this chime's got a short.

The Contractor looks up at Dan.

CONTRACTOR

Help you?

DAN

Audrey?

The Contractor jerks his thumb toward the back. Dan creeps

past the workers and ducks into Audrey's office.

INT. AUDREY'S GALLERY, OFFICE - DAY

Dan peeks around the office, which still looks empty.

DAN
(cautious)
Hello?

AUDREY (O.S.)
...I think he's warming up to the
whole idea. Maybe.

Dan looks confused, but follows Audrey's voice.

AUDREY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
But he will. I know his heart.

Dan comes around the edge of the desk, stops when he sees
Audrey's feet poking out from underneath.

Audrey's head appears and looks up at him. She smiles.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
(into phone)
Oh, Daddy, have to go. Love you.

She reaches blindly for the base on her desk, hangs up.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
Hi.

DAN
(the construction)
It's madness out there.

AUDREY
(gestures to her hideout)
I know.

INT. AUDREY'S GALLERY - DAY

Dan and Audrey walk back out, Dan slightly in the lead.

CONTRACTOR
You figure out the wall, lady?

AUDREY
Uh...I don't --

DAN
 (to the Contractor)
 North-south, parallel, so you can
 see the back wall from the street.
 Give a strong focal spot.

Two workers spring into action, grabbing the wall.

Audrey smiles at Dan, deeply grateful.

AUDREY
 Thank you.

Dan nods, takes in the space with a smile. Audrey does, too.
 Then her PHONE RINGS.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
 Excuse me.

Audrey hurries back into --

INT. AUDREY'S GALLERY, OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

-- and grabs the phone.

AUDREY
 Hello?

INTERCUTTING:

INT. JAKE'S OFFICE - DAY

Jake sits at his desk, phone to his ear.

JAKE
 Hi, babe.

AUDREY
 Hey, what's going on?

JAKE
 I need to wrap something up
 tonight, but I should be free for a
 late dinner, maybe, if you're --

There's a LOUD CRASH from the gallery.

CONTRACTOR (O.S.)
 It's ok! That was just glass!

AUDREY
 Yeah, I can't tonight. Dan's here,
 (MORE)

AUDREY (CONT'D)

helping me with the contractor. And then me and about twenty permit applications will be having a slumber party here tonight.

JAKE

I could help with the paperwork.

AUDREY

Anything I don't get done, I promise you can help with. But I kind of want to do this myself.

JAKE

Ok, I guess. So...

AUDREY

I'll call you tomorrow.

She blows a kiss into the phone and hangs up.

Jake hangs up, too, surprised and a little disappointed. He looks at the phone for several moments, thinking, then he picks it up again slowly and dials.

INT. SUZY WONG'S HOUSE OF YUM - NIGHT

Jake sits at a table in a trendy Asian fusion place, leaning forward on the table, looking earnest.

JAKE

Gwen, I'm sorry, but we're not the same people we used to be. And I know we were matched and believe me, I think you're perfect, but --

The WAITRESS stands across from him, sitting in for Gwen.

WAITRESS

If she's perfect, why are you dumping her?

JAKE

I'm seeing somebody else.

WAITRESS

...Yeah. You want some advice? Tell her you're secretly gay. Makes it a lot simpler. Get you another beer?

JAKE

Yes. Thanks for listening.

WAITRESS

No problem.

She takes Jake's empty glass and walks off.

Jake scans the crowd, then hears TAPPING at the window. Gwen stands outside, smiling, beckoning for him to join her.

Confused, Jake waves to the waitress to wait a moment, and ducks out to join Gwen.

EXT. SUZY WONG'S - CONTINUOUS

Looking suspicious, Jake steps out onto the sidewalk.

JAKE

What's going on?

She quickly gives him a kiss on the cheek, taking him aback.

GWEN

I know it could wait until after dinner, but can you come to my car? I want to...give you something.

Jake arches his eyebrows, not following.

GWEN (CONT'D)

Oh. It's not sex.

JAKE

What?!

GWEN

I just realized how that probably sounded. Not sex.

JAKE

No, I --

GWEN

It's ok. Come on.

She grabs his hand and leads him around the corner to her BMW X5. She opens the back, then stands aside for Jake.

Sitting inside is a long, black guitar case.

GWEN (CONT'D)

Surprise.

JAKE

What...?

GWEN

Open it.

Slowly, he raises the lid.

Inside, almost giving off a light of it's own, is a black Martin acoustic guitar.

GWEN (CONT'D)

An ex-boyfriend who was a session guy left it with me so it wouldn't get repossessed.

Jake shakes his head. He's floored.

JAKE

I...there's no way I can take this.

GWEN

Consider it an apology all these years in the making.

JAKE

But...this is a black Martin D-35 dreadnought. This is the kind of guitar Johnny Cash played, it...

GWEN

...It can be the kind of guitar that you play.

Jake looks like he's afraid to touch it. But he gently picks it up and feels its weight.

JAKE

There aren't...I don't have words.

GWEN

So you like it.

She smiles, proud of herself.

INT. SUZY WONG'S - NIGHT

As Jake and Gwen finish eating, both happy, Jake signals for the check. The Waitress Jake practiced the breakup with shakes her head disapprovingly, and Jake can only shrug.

GWEN

Did you ever even play in a band?
Before I crushed your dream?

JAKE
I wanted to, but no.

Jake takes the check from the Waitress.

GWEN
If you wanted to do something for fun, it's only a outlaw cover band, but I know somebody.

JAKE
I don't know. It'd be great, but --

GWEN
You can if you want. Nobody's going to laugh at you, or tell you it's too dangerous, or --

JAKE
I don't think I could.

GWEN
I'm giving you permission. Go out on a limb.

Jake looks at her for a long moment. He smiles, overwhelmed.

JAKE
I'll think about it.

Gwen smiles, checks her watch.

GWEN
What are you doing now?

Jake shakes his head -- no plans.

GWEN (CONT'D)
This is going to sound dumb, but I've been working really late nights and I've been promising my dog I'd make it up to him with an epic walk. Would you come along?

Jake thinks about that a moment, then --

JAKE
Sure. Yeah.

EXT. CENTENNIAL PARK - NIGHT

Gwen's giant Wolfhound THOR scrambles over a hill toward

Nashville's full-scale replica of the Parthenon, Gwen behind him. Jake follows several steps behind, panting.

JAKE

Kind of a hike from your place,
isn't it? You know, for the dog?

GWEN

No, Thor likes it. I dated a
guitarist who used to love to come
here. One night I found him in a
shower with half a bachelorette
party, so that was the end of that,
but I still like to bring Thor.

She looks out at the lights of the city. Jake joins her.

JAKE

That the guy who left you the
guitar?

Thor nuzzles up to Jake, who pets him.

GWEN

He likes you. No, that guy was two
back. But they were both...the kind
of guy I usually get. Or, used to.

She looks at Jake. Timid, hopeful.

JAKE

Gwen...

She suddenly leans in and kisses him. His eyes widen, and he
kisses her back for a moment, but then suddenly eases away.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Wait, Gwen --

GWEN

What is it?

JAKE

I should maybe...go back.

GWEN

Why? It's a beautiful night,
beautiful view, and...

She kisses him again, but somehow, through nothing but force
of will, Jake breaks off.

JAKE

No. Wait a second. Hang on. Hang on, really. Time out.

GWEN

What? Why?

JAKE

I can't do this. I'm not --

GWEN

What is it? We've had two dates and you've barely hugged me.

JAKE

I'm sorry, I -- Dates? Really?

GWEN

Yes, dates. What are you --
(pleading)
What's wrong with me?

At that, Jake realizes he's hurt her. Badly.

JAKE

(being honest)
Nothing that I can see.

GWEN

Then why are you running away?

JAKE

Look. I know I'm an idiot. There should be two hundred guys lining up to kick my butt because when a gorgeous woman wants to kiss you, you let her. But it's a little fast...for me...right now.

GWEN

It's been sixteen years. Eighteen. God, now I feel old.

JAKE

The thing is, truthfully --

GWEN

Don't say "truthfully." Whenever guys announce they're going to tell the truth...

JAKE

Gwen, believe me, there is nothing
(MORE)

JAKE (CONT'D)

wrong with you. It's just...

He swallows hard. He's going to tell her.

JAKE (CONT'D)

It's just right now I'm...
technically...

GWEN

Just tell me if you feel something
between us. Because I do. I think
we're good for each other. You have
to feel that.

JAKE

I do. But --

She softens, takes his hand in hers. Jake's confused.

GWEN

You want to take a step back?

JAKE

Yes.

GWEN

I'm ok with that. I like you. And
we can just...spend some time
together.

She holds his gaze for a long moment. Jake relaxes.

JAKE

Yeah. Ok.

INT. JAKE'S CONDO, HALLWAY - NIGHT

The elevator doors slide open, revealing a tired and
confused Jake. He steps off the elevator carrying his new
guitar case.

He leans the case against his door as he gets his keys out.
When he unlocks the door and grabs the case again, it's like
he notices it again for the first time. He smiles.

INT. JAKE'S CONDO, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

He unlatches the case and raises the lid reverently. He
picks up the guitar again and savors it.

INT. JAKE'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jake kneels in his closet, digging.

He finds a shoebox and drags it out, tosses the top aside.

Inside, books. Mostly college books, yellow "USED" stickers on the spines. Accounting, Finance, Number Theory.

He pulls those out, and at the bottom of the stack, worn and neglected, a book called "FOLK & COUNTRY GUITAR."

INT. JAKE'S CONDO, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

He sits at his dinner table, the book propped up in front of him, and starts picking out a simple melody, reading from the book. He's rusty, but not awful.

JAKE

(singing)

I hear that train a-coming / It's
rollin' round the bend / and I
ain't seen the sunshine since I
don't know when / I'm stuck in
Folsom Prison...

"Folsom Prison Blues," by Johnny Cash. Jake smiles.

INT. AUDREY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Jake digs through piles of paperwork on Audrey's work table. Audrey watches, sipping coffee. Jake skims a form.

JAKE

No, you're right. This sign permit
stuff doesn't make any sense.

AUDREY

Right? It's going to cost a fortune
just to put the gallery name up.
What if -- what if I just paint the
name on the front of the building?

Good idea. Jake flips through a few papers, scanning.

JAKE

I think that's fine. Nice.

AUDREY

Thank you.

Jake tosses the papers down, relieved, and casually looks around. Dirty clothes and takeout stuff are everywhere.

JAKE

I think your apartment's finally crossed that line in the sand between "artistically cluttered" and "recently vandalized."

AUDREY

I've been busy.

Jake gathers up the discarded forms and empty takeout containers from the table.

JAKE

Then what say we pick this place up and go have a drink?

AUDREY

You don't have to do that.

JAKE

I want to.

AUDREY

That would be awesome. Thank you.

She hugs him tightly, but suddenly BELLS CHIME from somewhere. Audrey pulls a new iPhone from her pocket.

JAKE

What is that?

AUDREY

I know -- I'm super professional now. Hang on, it's Dan.

JAKE

Dan, like "Beauchamp" Dan?

Audrey answers the phone, very bubbly.

AUDREY

Hey, what's up?

She listens as Dan apparently reminds her of something, and she winces a little.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

Uh-huh. Oh my gosh, I did. Hang on.

(to Jake)

I'm so sorry. I was supposed to meet Dan ten minutes ago. Can I get a rain check on drinks?

After a hesitation, Jake acts like it's nothing.

JAKE
Yeah, of course.

AUDREY
Thank you.
(back into phone)
I'm sorry. Walking out the door...
(calling to Jake)
Can you lock up?

She ducks out the door, not waiting for an answer. Jake stares at the door as it closes behind her, and then his expression sours.

He flings the takeout container he's been holding into the trash can with some force. Dan again.

DAN (PRE-LAP)
I see big canvases. Real big.

EXT. TACO STAND - NIGHT

Audrey and Dan sit at a plastic table with foil-wrapped tacos and giant Styrofoam cups.

AUDREY
Ok...Anything else?

DAN
No. Just big.

AUDREY
Could you do smaller ones, too?

DAN
Small paintings can't contain my vision.

AUDREY
I thought, since we're trying to sell things, it might be good to give people options.

That seems to give him an idea, but he doesn't share.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
Dan?

DAN
What about sculpture?

AUDREY

Sure.

DAN

What are you doing right now? We should look for sculptures.

AUDREY

Look for sculptures?

DAN

Well I'm not going to make them.

Audrey thinks about that for a second.

EXT. ABANDONED PLAYGROUND - NIGHT

Dan's beat-to-hell Ford Festiva skids to a stop and he jumps out. It's an old, forgotten playground. Monkey bars, wood, and rocks, the kind of place they haven't built in 20 years.

Dan heads toward the playground, Audrey follows.

AUDREY

What is this place?

DAN

They put a pool and a new playground over there --
(points beyond some trees)
-- all plastic and rubber and crap, so nobody comes over here anymore.

He jumps on the monkey bars, swings up on top of them. He balances carefully and begins walking across.

AUDREY

What are you doing?

DAN

This scared the hell out of me when I was ten.

AUDREY

It's scaring me right now.

Dan reaches the other side and jumps down, self-satisfied.

DAN

Ta-da! Oh, forgot something.

He runs back and hits the Festiva's hatchback with the side of his fist. It springs open, he takes out a dark bundle.

AUDREY
What's that?

DAN
Tools.

Audrey cocks an eyebrow, not following.

INT. JAKE'S CONDO, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jake sits on his couch, his guitar case next to him. He wrings his hands, a bundle of nerves.

There's a KNOCK at the door. He takes a deep breath.

He hops up and throws open the door. It's Gwen.

GWEN
You ready?

JAKE
I think so.

She pulls a plastic shopping bag from behind her back.

GWEN
Here. I had to go to three vintage shops to find them.

Jake takes it and peeks inside at a handful of faded T-shirts. Merle Haggard, Wylon Jennings, and Woody Guthrie.

GWEN (CONT'D)
I didn't want you showing up in a polo shirt or anything.

Jake looks down at himself. Polo shirt, tucked in.

JAKE
Give me one second.

She comes inside as he goes to his room to change.

EXT. ABANDONED PLAYGROUND - NIGHT

Audrey and Dan look down at something.

AUDREY
You can't take it. It's vandalism.

DAN

It says everything. It's perfect.

AUDREY

It says "Somebody stole me from a playground."

They look down at an ancient spring-ride duck. A similar zebra and turtle stand next to it.

DAN

I'm rescuing this duck before a bulldozer gets it. He'll be art.

AUDREY

What does this have to do with the paintings you showed me? I fell in love with those, but this is --

DAN

A year ago I was shoplifting acrylics and cutting boxes apart to have something to paint on. Now I have a studio and a gallery show. That's what this is about. Holding onto whatever you loved as a kid and making it come true. You know?

Audrey smiles, finally getting it.

AUDREY

Yeah. I do.

DAN

Good. Then help me rip this bitch out of the ground.

EXT. REHEARSAL SPACE - NIGHT

Jake's Mercedes pulls into an overgrown parking lot full of cars that cost less new than one of Jake's monthly payments.

He and Gwen get out, Jake grabs his guitar from the trunk.

INT. REHEARSAL SPACE, HALLWAY - NIGHT

Jake, in his Merle Haggard shirt, follows Gwen down the long, intimidating hallway. MUFFLED, CHAOTIC MUSIC surrounds them, a different band behind every door.

Gwen BANGS ON one of the doors and it flies open, revealing

ROCKET, 55, a guy with grey hair pulled back in a ponytail, looking like a biker or a vagrant, or maybe both.

ROCKET
Come on in!

Gwen looks back at Jake, excited. He's still nervous, but Jake follows her inside...

INT. REHEARSAL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

...where it's quieter.

Rocket shakes Jake by the hand.

ROCKET
I'm Rocket. They're all named Mike.

He points at a DRUMMER, 25, white guy with a fro, a GUITARIST, 40, thick beard and long hair like a mountain man, and an UPRIGHT BASSIST, 19, wearing a Pizza Hut delivery cap.

THE MIKES
Hey.

JAKE
I'm Jake.

ROCKET
Gwen said you're looking for a band. You a lawyer, too?

JAKE
Investment banker.

ROCKET
Wow. I would rather die. You got a pickup in that thing? Let's get you plugged in.

Gwen squeezes Jake's shoulder. For the first time, he looks excited about this.

A can of beer flies at him. Jake catches it, looks at it.

ROCKET (CONT'D)
It's a beer. You drink it.

Rocket takes it from him, opens it, and hands it back.

EXT. ABANDONED PLAYGROUND - NIGHT

Audrey and Dan hurry back to his car, carrying the duck -- spring and all -- between them. Then Dan freezes.

DAN
Uh-oh. Trouble.

Audrey looks up to see a Jeep Cherokee with "PINKERTON SECURITY" emblazoned on it pull up behind Dan's Festiva.

A FAT SECURITY GUARD gets out to investigate. He shines a flashlight into Dan's open rear hatch.

AUDREY
What do we do?

DAN
Shhh...

The Security Guard looks around, unsatisfied, and scans the area with his flashlight. He spots Dan and Audrey.

SECURITY GUARD
Hey!! Stay right there!

DAN
We run.

They turn around and RUN/WADDLE back the way they came.

AUDREY
Leave the duck.

DAN
No! We need it. Follow me.

Dan leads them toward the trees, the Security Guard pursuing.

INT. REHEARSAL ROOM - NIGHT

The band plays "COCAINE BLUES," an up-tempo rockabilly song about running from the cops. Rocket plays the fiddle, and the three Mikes thrash around, all elbows and energy.

Jake stands perfectly still, playing guitar while reading his cues off of a music stand.

ROCKET
(scream-singing)
Early one morning I was makin' the
rounds / I took a shot of cocaine
and shot my woman down / Went right
home and I went to bed / I stuck
(MORE)

ROCKET (CONT'D)

that lovin' .44 beneath my head.

Jake misses a cue, and shakes his hand out. He sneaks a look at Gwen and smiles. She sits on a stool, nods to the beat.

EXT. ABANDONED PLAYGROUND - NIGHT

COCAINE BLUES continues over Dan and Audrey's escape. They stumble through the trees, lugging the duck.

Behind them, the Security Guard has a worse time of it.

SECURITY GUARD

Stop! You're only making it worse
on yourselves!

Dan and Audrey reach the edge of the trees and into a --

EXT. POSH COMMUNITY AREA - CONTINUOUS

They put the brakes on and get their bearings.

In front of them is the brand-new playground, entirely plastic and rubber, and beyond that is a fenced-off pool area. There's a LOUD PARTY going on at the pool.

DAN

This is that place I told you
about. Come on. I have a plan.

EXT. POSH COMMUNITY AREA - MOMENTS LATER

The Security Guard, totally winded, barrels out of the trees and whips his flashlight back and forth over everything.

SECURITY GUARD

All right, I got you kids cornered!

There's no sound but LAUGHTER and TALKING at the pool party. He plays his flashlight over the cars parked nearby, the locker rooms for the pool, and finally over the playground.

The beam passes over the swings, the slides, and the playscape -- the elevated structure with a walkway connecting little forts with bubble windows.

The flashlight hits the stolen spring duck, but the Security Guard doesn't register it. He can't see them anywhere.

A BOTTLE BREAKS by the pool, drawing his attention.

SECURITY GUARD (CONT'D)
No glass containers by the pool!!

He trundles off to bust the troublemakers at the pool.

INT. PLAYSCAPE FORT - CONTINUOUS

Dan and Audrey scrunch into a space designed for four-year-olds -- inside one of the bubble-domes at the top of a slide. They're right on top of each other.

AUDREY
Is he gone?

DAN
Sounds like. I haven't run from a Pinkerton since high school.

AUDREY
It's kinda fun. How do we get out of here?

DAN
Um...

He shifts a little, and Audrey tries to move the other way. They don't get anywhere, but after a moment they wind up with their faces inches from one another.

They're breathing hard from the escape, and there's clearly an attraction. Tentatively, Dan leans in to kiss her, but --

AUDREY
I...think I can get down the slide.

DAN
Oh. Yeah, ok.

EXT. POSH COMMUNITY AREA - CONTINUOUS

Audrey slides down the slide, then walks to the spring duck. Dan slides down a second later.

He helps her with the duck, and they head back in the direction of his car.

DAN
We can come back for the turtle tomorrow.

AUDREY
Sure.

INT. REHEARSAL ROOM - NIGHT

Jake and the band wrap up "COCAINE BLUES"

ROCKET

Come on you gotta listen unto me /
lay off that whiskey / And let that
cocaine be!

They sound the last notes and Jake smiles -- he got through it -- then looks at the rest of the guys to see how he did.

They're all looking at him. He doesn't know what that means.

ROCKET (CONT'D)

You're all right. Welcome aboard.
First show's tomorrow night.

JAKE

Excuse me?

ROCKET

I got a cousin who does sound at
the Orchid Lounge. Says somebody
canceled and we can fill in.

JAKE

Are you -- wait, really? Guys, I
can't play in front of people yet.
(to Gwen)
Did you know about this?

She shakes her head. Actually looks a little worried.

JAKE (CONT'D)

But...you'd never heard me play.
What were you going to do if I
wasn't any good?

ROCKET

I had a guy on standby plays this
xylophone he made out of rocks. But
I think you'll work better.

Rocket puts an arm around Jake, preempting any objections.

ROCKET (CONT'D)

What this calls for is drinking.
(to Gwen)
Wanna come?

GWEN

Not tonight.

JAKE
Guys, really --

ROCKET
Come on, banker. Let's go get
kicked out of someplace.

INT. POOL HALL - NIGHT

MONTAGE

- The band slams back a round of shots. All laughing except Jake. Tentatively, he downs his drink.
- At a pool table, Jake sinks a ball in a corner pocket.
- Rocket comes back from the bar with more shots.
- The guys down the next round. Jake drinks with them.
- At a pool table, Jake lines up a shot, but completely misses the cue ball. He laughs uncontrollably.
- Jake stands at the jukebox, wailing on an air guitar and headbanging ferociously.
- Rocket stands on a pool table, dancing a can-can and kicking balls off the table. PATRONS back away in fear.
- Two black-clad BOUNCERS step forward.

EXT. POOL HALL - NIGHT

The Bouncers toss Jake and Rocket out on the sidewalk, then the three Mikes.

Rocket sits up. Jake doesn't move.

DRUMMER
I have to pee.

He stands up and wobbles toward the side of the building, but doesn't make it, and falls.

Rocket looks at the four guys, all sprawled on the sidewalk.

ROCKET
Mission accomplished. Hey! Taxi!

Rocket waves his arms and a yellow minivan pulls up.

I/E. TAXI - NIGHT

The three Mikes slouch on each other in the back seat, Jake and Rocket ride in the middle.

JAKE

I have to be in work at four hours.

Mike the Drummer half-coughs, half-laughs at Jake.

DRUMMER

That's funny.

Rocket looks at the road ahead and gets an idea.

ROCKET

Hey, banker. Give me your pants.

JAKE

What?

ROCKET

At this intersection up here, you jump out naked and run as fast as you can across the street.

JAKE

Are you crazy?

BASSIST

Yeah, they made me do it, too.

ROCKET

Trust me. It'll do you good.

JAKE

How?

ROCKET

You going to give me those pants or am I going to take 'em?

Jake looks for help, but everybody wants to see him do it.

EXT. BUSY INTERSECTION - NIGHT

The taxi screeches to a stop at the red light. The door slides back, revealing the band members crowded around Jake, patting his bare shoulders.

BAND MEMBERS

GO!! NOW!! GO GO!!

Jake LEAPS OUT of the van.

His nether regions obscured by other cars, which all HONK WILDLY, Jake SPRINTS across the street.

JAKE
AHHHHHHRRRRGGGGHHHH!!!

The guys in the minivan CHEER.

ROCKET
(to the driver)
Pull around to that Taco Bell!

The driver does as he's told, whipping out into traffic.
Jake reaches the other side of the street and keeps running.

INT. TACO BELL - CONTINUOUS

YELLING draws the attention of the Taco Bell diners, who turn and look just in time to see Jake flail past.

EXT. TACO BELL - CONTINUOUS

The minivan pulls up beside Jake, still running full speed.

ROCKET
Get in!

JAKE
That was awesome!

ROCKET
Come on, come on, get in!

Jake keeps running, though, turns a corner. The van follows.

JAKE
I'm free!!!

Four pairs of hands reach from the van and yank him inside.

EXT. SMALL HOUSE - NIGHT

The taxi pulls up to the curb of a cute, older home, the door flies open, and Jake comes tumbling out, wearing pants again. Jake lies flat on his back, staring at the sky.

JAKE
Guys...?

ROCKET
Practice hard!

The taxi speeds away, the guys still HOWLING WITH LAUGHTER. Suddenly, there's a GIGANTIC ANIMAL on Jake.

JAKE
Ahhhh!!!! What the -- help!

It takes a second for him to realize it's Thor - Gwen's dog.

GWEN
Jake?!?

Jake rolls himself into a sitting position, and looks to see Gwen on the porch in her PJs. She looks cute.

JAKE
(pleasantly surprised)
Oh.

He looks around, confused.

GWEN
What are you doing? Get in here.

Jake nods slowly, and pulls his shirt on as he follows Thor to the front door.

INT. GWEN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Jake sprawls on Gwen's couch. She brings him water.

JAKE
What is this?

GWEN
Just water.

Jake looks disappointed, but takes it.

JAKE
This is the best night of my life.
I can't believe I'm finally doing
this.

GWEN
Better late than never?

JAKE
I know. And we're playing a
concert. I'm in an outlaw band, and
we're playing a concert.

GWEN

You're going to be great.

She sits down next to him.

JAKE

That might not be true, but I ran through an intersection naked.

(noticing)

Oh man, I have this same couch.

GWEN

I think it's amazing you're really going after what you dreamed of.

JAKE

I just needed a push in the right direction. A big, big push.

GWEN

A little push, maybe.

JAKE

No, it was big. I was so contained all the time and in my head and I needed to get out. And be free.

He looks at her, head still swimming, but excited.

JAKE (CONT'D)

I needed...you. I think.

Gwen smiles, genuinely moved. Jake leans in and kisses her. She closes her eyes -- this is what she's been waiting for.

He leans her back on the couch, winding up on top of her.

GWEN

Jake...? Jake, you're kinda heavy.

He doesn't stir.

GWEN (CONT'D)

Jake?

She grabs his hand and holds it out from her, then lets go. It falls limply. Jake passed out.

Gwen manages to push him to the other side of the couch. Thor jumps up on and insinuates himself between them.

GWEN (CONT'D)

I can't get a break.

INT. JAKE'S OFFICE - DAY

Jake sits at his desk, head down and hung over. Painfully, he straightens up and rolls his head back.

JAKE
(agonized)
I don't know what to do.

He drops his head to the desk again with a THUNK.

Trevor stands across from him, examining a file folder.

TREVOR
Look on the bright side -- most guys out there would kill for one really great girlfriend, and you've got two. That's not the worst problem to have. That's bad advice, isn't it? Don't listen to me.

JAKE
I can't keep doing this. I have to make a decision, right?

TREVOR
Yeah, probably. How, do you think?

Jake looks around at his desk, like the answer's there. He grabs a pen and paper, draws a line down the center.

JAKE
I should make a list. Put Gwen on one side, Audrey on the other, and try to see all the ways I match up with each of them.

TREVOR
You mean like the internet test you took that got you into all this?

Oh, yeah. Jake just crumples up the paper.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING, ELEVATOR - DAY

Audrey steps off the elevator, looks around nervously. In casual clothes, she sticks out from Jake's coworkers.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING, CUBICLE BULLPEN - CONTINUOUS

Audrey crosses the cubicle area, draws curious glances, and heads toward...

INT. JAKE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Audrey appears at the door and KNOCKS. Trevor turns and sees her, Jake's got his head back down on his desk.

AUDREY

Jake?

He looks up and startles when he sees her.

JAKE

Hey! What are you doing here?
What's going on?

AUDREY

Are you ok?

JAKE

Yeah. I went out with...Trevor
...last night.

She looks at Trevor, disappointed.

TREVOR

Hey, I told him to take it easy.

Trevor slips away as Audrey looks at a bleary-eyed Jake.

AUDREY

You look like you could use break.

EXT. AUDREY'S GALLERY - DAY

Audrey leads Jake up the sidewalk toward the front door. Jake looks up at the building, and stops in his tracks.

Audrey follows his gaze.

AUDREY

Yeah, I did that this morning. I
wanted you to see.

Above the door, painted on the facade, it reads "Jacob's Ladder -- Contemporary Art Gallery."

JAKE

Did you...you named it after me?

Jake looks floored. Audrey shrugs.

AUDREY

Surprise.

INT. AUDREY'S GALLERY - DAY

Audrey lets them both in, flips a light switch.

The dump Jake first visited has vanished, replaced by colorful walls, hardwood flooring, and modern lighting.

Several free-standing walls provide more surfaces to hang artwork from. The place floors Jake. And well it should.

JAKE

You did this?

AUDREY

Wait until it has art on the walls.
And I finish painting them.

She points at the back wall, only a few roller tracks on it. A paint can, roller, and drop cloth sit on the floor.

JAKE

Why didn't the contractor paint it?

AUDREY

I wanted to do a little myself.

JAKE

This place looked like it should've been condemned.

AUDREY

I thought it had potential.

JAKE

And you believed in yourself.

AUDREY

Well, somebody had to.

She says it more sad than angry, but it hits home with Jake.

JAKE

Audrey --

AUDREY

It's ok, though.

The PHONE RINGS in her office.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

Sorry. One minute.

She hurries off into the back.

Jake stands alone, ashamed of himself. His gaze falls on the last unpainted wall, and the paint supplies there.

INT. AUDREY'S GALLERY, OFFICE - DAY

Audrey holds the phone to her ear. The spring-ride duck she and Dan stole sits in the corner, next to the turtle that had been with it at the playground.

AUDREY

If you want to move everything in tonight, I'll be here.

INT. AUDREY'S GALLERY - MOMENTS LATER

She steps back out into the gallery space.

AUDREY

Dan's bringing the art --

She freezes when she looks up.

Standing on an overturned bucket, Jake paints the wall.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

JAKE

Apologizing.

Deeply touched, Audrey wraps her arms around his waist. Jake gets off the bucket and hugs her back.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Listen...what are you...this might be stupid, but what are you doing tonight?

AUDREY

That's what I was going to say. Dan's bringing the art tonight.

JAKE

Oh.

AUDREY

Did you want to do something?

JAKE

No. I'm just...I was going to hit the Orchid Lounge. See if you wanted to come. Never mind.

Audrey knows something's wrong, but not exactly what.

AUDREY

Next time.

JAKE

Yeah.

Jake shakes his head, waving it off.

INT. THE ORCHID LOUNGE, BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Jake paces the dressing room, strumming his guitar. He's clearly agitated, and from more than just nerves.

Mike the Bassist tunes up, Mike the Drummer bangs out some warm-ups on a ratty couch, and Mike the Guitarist stands in front of a mirror, practicing playing behind his head.

Rocket bursts in, a case of beer in one hand, open can in the other. He sets the case down, puts an arm around Jake.

ROCKET

Tell you what you do if you screw up. Act like you meant it, and then jump into the frickin' crowd.

JAKE

Ok.

Rocket digs a scrap of paper out of his pocket.

ROCKET

And I know we haven't known each other that long, but after the other night I feel a real bond. So I drew you a tattoo.

He hands Jake a crude drawing of a skull and crossbones, a banner flying over it that reads "Outlaw Banker."

ROCKET (CONT'D)

I'll take you to get it put on after the show.

JAKE

Thanks for thinking of me.

Rocket slaps the meaty part of his shoulder.

ROCKET

Right here. Wear it proud.

Gwen appears in the doorway, just as excited as the band. She runs over to Jake and kisses him. He tenses up.

GWEN
Break a leg. You'll do great.

JAKE
Thanks.

GWEN
And...I think you're amazing.

JAKE
Listen --

O.S., a STAGE MANAGER KNOCKS on the door.

STAGE MANAGER (O.S.)
Guys, you're up!

JAKE
I'm on.

Gwen lays a hand on his shoulder.

GWEN
I have something planned for after.
It's going to be great.

JAKE
Uh --

ROCKET
Man, I was gonna get him tattooed.
Anyway, give me a kiss for luck.

JAKE
Aw, come on. You're old enough to
be her dad.

ROCKET
I am her dad.

Jake starts to say something, but he's at a loss.

INT. THE ORCHID LOUNGE - NIGHT

Jake runs out onstage with the other guys, plugs in, and turns around to face the crowd. He stops cold.

There's maybe FIFTEEN PEOPLE in the audience, none looking particularly interested in the band.

JAKE
 (to Rocket)
 There's nobody here.

ROCKET
 An audience is an audience. Let's
 give 'em a show!

Mike the Drummer CLICKS HIS STICKS IN A FOUR-COUNT.

DRUMMER
 One, two, three, four!

The band launches into "COCAINE BLUES," playing at a frenzied pace. Running around, jumping, etc.

But Jake plays with his feet rooted to the spot. He looks like a guitar-playing statue.

Rocket catches his eye, and motions for Jake to get into it.

Jake begins nodding his head in time.

Rocket howls into the mic.

ROCKET
 Early one morning I was makin' the
 rounds / I took a shot of cocaine
 and I shot my woman down...

Gwen comes out from backstage and looks up at him.

Jake widens his feet, takes a more relaxed stance, and looks around the stage. The Bassist and Guitarist are running all over, giving it all like this was a packed house.

ROCKET (CONT'D)
 I went right home and I went to bed
 / I stuck that lovin' .44 beneath
 my head.

Jake walks in a circle, heads over to the drum riser. With the Drummer banging away, Jake steps up on the riser, too.

ROCKET (CONT'D)
 Got up next mornin' and I grabbed
 that gun / took a shot of cocaine
 and away I run...

Jake looks around and the Drummer gives him a thumbs up.

ROCKET (CONT'D)
 I made a good run but I run too
 (MORE)

ROCKET (CONT'D)

slow / They overtook me down in
Juarez, Mexico

The music stops on the beat, and when it comes back in, Jake LEAPS off the drum riser.

IN THE AUDIENCE

Gwen laughs out loud, absolutely loving this.

ON THE STAGE, MOMENTS LATER

Rocket attacks his fiddle, nailing a solo.

Jake comes to the front of the stage, throws a foot up on a monitor speaker, and headbangs.

On the other side of the Guitarist, Mike the Bassist does the same. He and Jake move in unison.

The solo ends, and Rocket comes back in.

ROCKET (CONT'D)

(singing)

The judge he smiled as he picked up
his pen / 99 years in the Folsom
pen / 99 years underneath that
ground / I can't forget the day I
shot that bad bitch down / Come on
you've gotta listen unto me / lay
off that whiskey / And let that
cocaine be!

They end the song on "be" hitting the last note in unison. Jake and the Guitarist both jump up in the air, hitting the LAST CHORD of the song.

And then the Guitarist BREATHES FIRE.

Jake crouches down, scared and caught completely off-guard. The Bassist holds a lighter up in front of the Guitarist, and the Guitarist holds a bottle of Jack Daniel's.

He takes another swig, spews it out at the lighter, and it erupts in another FIRE BLAST.

And then it's silent.

Jake turns and looks out over the "crowd." Nobody gives a damn about them. He sees TWO PEOPLE get up to leave.

His face falls. And then, very quiet, he hears Gwen CLAP.

INT. ORCHID LOUNGE - LATER

The guys march down the steps from the stage, heading to the back again. Gwen waits at the foot of the steps for Jake.

GWEN

You were awesome. How was it?

Jake doesn't look thrilled.

JAKE

It was ok.

GWEN

That's it? Just ok?

JAKE

...Yeah.

He shrugs to say he doesn't get it either.

GWEN

Ok, well come on. This, you're gonna love.

I/E. JAKE'S CAR - NIGHT

Jake drives, Gwen riding shotgun and giving directions.

GWEN

Were you upset there weren't more people there?

JAKE

A little.

GWEN

You were the first band on a Thursday night. Going out there and giving your all for nobody but the sound guy is part of paying your dues. It's a badge of honor.

JAKE

It wasn't just the crowd.

GWEN

And that's the life, it's part of what makes it a challenge and makes it rewarding when you're finally established.

JAKE

Gwen, listen, I'm so confused right now. I feel like I'm faking everything.

GWEN

You were nervous. It gets better. Take a right at the light.

JAKE

I'm just starting to think I could take it or leave it. This stuff.

GWEN

But it's your dream.

JAKE

Maybe it isn't anymore.

GWEN

What does that mean?

JAKE

I don't know. Maybe a lot.

He looks at her for a long moment. The silence is awkward.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Do I turn, or -- ?

GWEN

There...

A film crew set up around a brightly lit public fountain comes into view. Jake's confused, but Gwen just beams.

EXT. ROMANTIC FOUNTAIN - NIGHT

Gwen leads Jake toward the fountain. It's a commercial shoot -- GRIPS and PAs scurry every which way amid the general CLAMOR of setting up.

JAKE

What is this?

GWEN

You are going to flip. I called in a favor with a commercial producer I work with, and I got us on a SouthernMates TV spot.

Jake tries to get his head around what he just heard.

JAKE

What?

GWEN

We get to give our testimonial. How the site brought us together.

JAKE

But we're not married.

GWEN

We don't have to be.

JAKE

(to himself)

Wait, testimonials...like a commercial?

(remembering something)

I have to leave right now.

GWEN

No, I talked to the producer and she loves our story. I promise you'll thank me.

Jake's eyes dart around nervously.

JAKE

Ok, Gwen? I promise that I will explain why I'd rather not be in a national commercial explaining how we met online, but I have to do it far, far away from here. Please.

GWEN

Just come see the set.

She takes his hand, tries to pull him along.

JAKE

No. Gwen, come on.

He looks past her, and the color drains from his face.

Aria and Larry. They're on camera, giving their story.

ARIA

He didn't have a computer, so he had to check his profile in the stock room at work, and he said he fell in love with my picture.

LARRY

Well, yeah, 'cause she's hot. And
three months later we got married.

Jake doesn't take his eyes off of them.

JAKE

(sharp stage whisper)
Gwen!

GWEN

What's the matter with you?

By the fountain, Aria smiles and looks away from Larry. She spots Jake. She watches Gwen slip her arm around Jake's waist, trying to steer him. Her jaw drops.

ARIA

Jake?!

Jake sees that Aria's seen him. Knows he's caught.

EXT. CREW PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Aria storms across the parking lot, between grip trucks, with Jake, Larry, and Gwen right on her heels.

JAKE

Aria, wait! You can't tell her.

ARIA

You son of a bitch. She loves you.

JAKE

That's why you can't tell her.

GWEN

Jake, what is she talking about?

He turns to Gwen.

JAKE

It's a misunderstanding.

GWEN

Are you dating her?

JAKE

No. She's married to this hippie.

LARRY

We're soulmates.

Larry hurries past, trying to catch Aria, who's climbing into their Jeep Wrangler. Gwen stops walking.

GWEN
What the hell is going on?!

Aria starts the Jeep and Larry jumps in as it starts moving. Jake watches them pull out of the parking lot.

JAKE
I can explain, but right now I have to catch them. I'll come by later.

He turns and runs for his Mercedes, leaving Gwen.

GWEN
Jake!? Jake!

I/E. JAKE'S MERCEDES - NIGHT

Jake speeds along surface streets, trying to get to Audrey first. He slips his Bluetooth earpiece in.

JAKE
(into earpiece)
Audrey mobile.

His phone DIALS, and starts RINGING. No answer.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Dammit.

He steps on the gas.

EXT. AUDREY'S GALLERY - NIGHT

A moving van sits out front and TWO MOVERS walk a giant, canvas-shaped parcel out of the truck. Dan oversees.

INT. AUDREY'S GALLERY - CONTINUOUS

Inside, Audrey cuts the protective paper off of several canvases and leans them against the wall.

Suddenly she hears TIRES SQUEALING close by. She turns to see Aria skid to a stop at the curb. Aria leaps out and runs across the street, Larry stays in the passenger seat.

Dan and the Movers stop what they're doing, Dan looking worried. Audrey throws the door open to meet Aria.

AUDREY
What's wrong?

Aria stops on the sidewalk, just stares at Audrey, looking like she might cry before she can say anything.

I/E. JAKE'S MERCEDES - DAY

Jake pulls to the curb behind the Jeep. He take in the whole scene -- Aria with Audrey already -- and looks defeated.

Audrey sees his car and marches toward him, furious.

Jake gets out, holds his hands up.

JAKE
I can --

AUDREY
If you wanted out, you didn't have to do it like this.

JAKE
Audrey, I'm sorry. I didn't --

AUDREY
Did you sleep with her?

JAKE
What? No.

Looking on, Dan turns to Aria.

DAN
What is this? What happened?

ARIA
What's it look like?

Audrey takes a deep breath and collects herself.

AUDREY
I don't know if you noticed, but I am in the middle making something happen for the first time in my life around here. So I'm not dealing with this right now. Go.

She storms back to the gallery. Jake starts after her, but Aria blocks his way.

ARIA
Let her be alone if she wants.

JAKE
 (talking around Aria)
 Can we try to figure this out?

Audrey spins on him.

AUDREY
 What's to figure out? I'll put your
 stuff that's at my apartment in a
 box, and --

JAKE
 I don't want my stuff. I want --

AUDREY
 Why don't you go tell "Gwen" what
 you want?

Jake thinks about fighting, but finally his shoulders slump
 and he turns to go. Audrey watches him, refusing to cry.

Dan looks at Audrey, hurting for her. He looks to Jake, who
 can only shrug helplessly, his body saying "I blew it."

I/E. JAKE'S MERCEDES - MOMENTS LATER

Jake sits in his car, bangs his fists on his steering wheel.

JAKE
 God -- dangit --

He accidentally punches the horn, startling himself.

JAKE (CONT'D)
 Oww.

He shakes out his hand.

There's a KNOCK at the window. Dan stands there, motions for
 Jake to roll the window down.

JAKE (CONT'D)
 What do you want?

DAN
 I think you need to go.

JAKE
 What do you know about it? She
 might not remember right now, but
 she loves me.

DAN
 Let her forget. It'll be better.
 That's all.

Dan starts back toward the gallery.

JAKE
 What, so you can swoop in? No. What
 if she's not supposed to forget?
 What -- what if Romeo and Juliet
 had forgotten each other?

Dan turns, walking backward away from Jake.

DAN
 They wouldn't have died.

He turns his back on Jake and heads inside the gallery.

Jake stewes for a minute, and opens the car door just to SLAM
 IT SHUT again. Hard.

INT. AUDREY'S GALLERY, OFFICE - NIGHT

Audrey sits at her desk, digging the heels of her hands into
 her eyes, keeping herself together.

Aria leans against the door frame, waiting until Audrey
 looks up at her.

ARIA
 I can stay, if you want.

AUDREY
 I'm ok. I'm a big girl.

ARIA
 You sure?

Audrey takes a deep breath, gathering herself, and nods.

AUDREY
 Thank you.

INT. AUDREY'S GALLERY - NIGHT

Aria walks out past Dan, who waits just inside the door.

A moment later, Audrey comes out from the back.

AUDREY
 So. Where you think we should put
 (MORE)

AUDREY (CONT'D)
the spring animals?

DAN
By the north-south walls.

That makes Audrey laugh a little.

DAN (CONT'D)
I could never see you with a
banker, anyway.

AUDREY
Dan, please.

DAN
You've got so much spark. You don't
need the guy who does your taxes
holding you back.

AUDREY
He isn't -- he wasn't.

He takes her by the shoulders and kisses her. She's
surprised, but doesn't pull away.

After a moment, she lets it happen and kisses him back.

EXT. AUDREY'S APARTMENT - DAWN

Jake sits in his car, exhausted, watching Audrey's building.

It looks like he's been waiting for her to come home all
night. He checks his watch.

JAKE
She's not coming home. And I'm
talking to myself. Awesome.

He rubs his eyes, and when he blinks, he notices one of the
SouthernMates.com billboards, with Dr. Garret's face smiling
down at him.

JAKE (CONT'D)
You did this to me.

Jake glares at the billboard, then gets an idea. He
scrambles for his keys and cranks the engine.

I/E. JAKE'S MERCEDES - DAY

Jake speeds down the freeway.

EXT. SOUTHERNMATES.COM OFFICES - DAY

Jake pulls into the parking lot of an ultramodern office building and gets out. He studies the building.

INT. SOUTHERNMATES.COM OFFICES, LOBBY - DAY

Jake approaches the RECEPTIONIST. She's the kind of person who might be killed one day for being too perky, but even she takes in Jake's terrible appearance and cringes.

Giant letters on the wall behind her say "SouthernMates," and underneath, "For Hearts in the Heart of Dixie!"

JAKE

I need to see Dr. Garrett.

RECEPTIONIST

I'm sorry, if you don't have an appointment --

JAKE

Uh-huh. I manage four million dollars of this company's investment capital. You get him on the phone and tell him I'm going to invest this company's entire portfolio in sub-prime mortgages unless he sees me right now.

The Receptionist picks up the phone.

INT. DR. GARRETT'S OFFICE - DAY

Two doors part all by themselves, and Jake walks in, a little confused. The doors close behind him, startling him.

A high-backed chair facing the window slowly spins around as Jake approaches Dr. Garrett.

DR. GARRETT

What do you think of the new door?
Just had it installed.

He offers his famous, avuncular smile.

DR. GARRETT (CONT'D)

Good to see you again. What can I do you for?

JAKE

Your dating site ruined my life,
(MORE)

JAKE (CONT'D)

and I need you to fix it.

DR. GARRETT

When you say "ruined your life," do you mean that in a litigious sense?

JAKE

I...hadn't.

DR. GARRETT

Great! How can I help?

Jake sits down across from Garrett. It's an intimidating office. Solid wood everything, rows of leather-bound books, and on the desk, an onyx hand holds a solved Rubik's cube.

JAKE

I wanted to ask my girlfriend to marry me, but instead we created dating profiles, and when we didn't get matched, I start thinking about probability and how numbers are infallible -- I mean, I've believed that my whole life -- so I started secretly dating one of the girls I did get matched with. To make sure I wasn't making a mistake with the marriage thing. Which may have been a mistake.

DR. GARRETT

I can see how your girlfriend might take that the wrong way.

JAKE

Right. So I figure your site got me into this, you can get me out.

Dr. Garrett looks stumped, but he's listening.

JAKE (CONT'D)

I'm willing to wait, if you want to take a minute to think it over.

DR. GARRETT

You'd like me to tell you which of them you should be with?

JAKE

If that's possible. And if you have numbers to back that up, I'd probably feel way less confused.

DR. GARRETT
You're serious?

Jake doesn't have to say anything. He looks serious. Kind of drunk on lack of sleep, but serious.

DR. GARRETT (CONT'D)
Our service, it's an algorithm.
It's like Netflix recommendations.
You don't worship those, do you?

JAKE
...No.

DR. GARRETT
Do you love your girlfriend?

JAKE
Very much.

DR. GARRETT
And the other woman?

Now Jake has to think about how to respond.

JAKE
She found something in me I thought
had been gone for a long time.

Dr. Garrett nods.

DR. GARRETT
Do you know why we made our online
survey as comprehensive as it is?

JAKE
Sure. When you increase the number
of variables, you increase --

DR. GARRETT
Because most of us never honestly
assess who we are. And if we don't
know who we are, how can we know
what we want?

He leans forward.

DR. GARRETT (CONT'D)
Without being presumptuous, I think
that's your real problem. But it's
tricky. Sometimes it's knowing what
we want that tells us who we are.

JAKE

Where does that leave me?

DR. GARRETT

My favorite question on our survey
is "If your home were on fire, what
one thing would you save?"

He gives Jake a look that asks if Jake remembers his answer.

JAKE

I put my music collection.

DR. GARRETT

You'd save something that's easily
replaceable if everything you loved
in the world were threatened?

JAKE

That wasn't the question. The
question was about my house.

DR. GARRETT

But that's its spirit. Think about
it. What would you save?

Jake looks overwhelmed by the prospect, but thinks about it.

JAKE

...Not my music collection?

Garret shakes his head, losing patience.

DR. GARRETT

Both women are in a burning
building, you can only save one.
Who do you save?

JAKE

Oh my God. What kind of terrible
question is that?

DR. GARRETT

I think it's one you need to
answer, don't you?

JAKE

I don't...

Then, suddenly, it occurs to him. He looks up at the doctor.

JAKE (CONT'D)

(simply)

(MORE)

JAKE (CONT'D)

Audrey.

He almost laughs. It's a powerful realization.

EXT. SOUTHERNMATES.COM OFFICES - NIGHT

Jake runs across the parking lot to his Mercedes.

He jumps in, cranks the engine, and his rear tires kick up pebbles as it drops it into gear and he speeds off.

I/E. JAKE'S MERCEDES - DAY

Jake speeds back down the freeway, into town.

JAKE

Gwen, you're not going to believe this, but I met somebody else...two years ago.

He shakes his head.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Gwen, you're a great girl and I know you'll make some other guy very happy...That's lame.

He thinks for a minute.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Where's a waitress when I need one?

EXT. GWEN'S HOUSE - DAY

Jake POUNDS on Gwen's front door.

Gwen, dressed like she just finished working out, opens the door. Before he can speak --

GWEN

What the hell happened last night?

He falters.

JAKE

I'm glad you got home safe.

INT. GWEN'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Jake sits on the couch, Gwen paces in front of him.

GWEN
You have a girlfriend?

JAKE
Had a girlfriend. I'd actually
planned on proposing, and then...

GWEN
I don't know if I should be furious
or...happy.

JAKE
...Happy?

GWEN
Things make a lot more sense now.
Like why you kept pulling away
every time I got close to you. And,
really, this means there's nothing
to keep us apart now.

Jake looks confused.

JAKE
Except for the obvious thing.

GWEN
We can put it behind us. Yes, you
technically cheated on me, but --

JAKE
No. The obvious thing that...we're
not right for each other.

GWEN
But you came out of your shell, and
I broke a cycle of relationships
with people so different from me we
could never have anything real.

JAKE
You did, you helped me, but --

GWEN
Then what's the problem?

JAKE
Look at me. I'm Frankenstein's
monster. You gave me a guitar,
dressed me in new clothes, found me
a band...Gwen, you swore off
musicians, then turned me into one.

She hadn't realized that. She stammers.

GWEN

No, I helped you live your dream.

JAKE

I like playing guitar again, and it's ok if you want to date musicians. Who cares what your girlfriends think?

Gwen shakes her head.

GWEN

We can get past this.

JAKE

When I leave here, I'm going to try to get Audrey back. You deserve better than somebody who's going to do that to you.

Gwen doesn't know how to respond, but she knows she's lost. Anger, sadness, and who knows what else mingle on her face.

JAKE (CONT'D)

And...I know this is awkward, but do you mind if I keep the guitar?

Gwen PUNCHES Jake in the jaw, knocking him off the couch.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Owww!

GWEN

Damn musicians.

She stomps back into her bedroom and SLAMS THE DOOR.

Jake tests out his jaw, then slowly realizes he HEARS SOMETHING. Something like GROWLING.

He looks up to see Thor standing in the doorway, teeth bared. He is mad at Jake.

JAKE

Wait a second...

EXT. GWEN'S HOUSE - DAY

Jake SPRINTS out the front door, Thor bounding out behind him, BARKING furiously.

Jake DIVES ACROSS the hood of his car, and scrambles in through the passenger's door as Thor SMASHES into the driver's side window -- which sprouts spiderweb cracks.

JAKE

I thought you liked me!

Not anymore. Thor tries to bite him despite the window. Jake throws the car into gear and speeds off down the street.

Thor circles in the road, a little sad his kill got away.

INT. ARIA AND LARRY'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - DAY

Larry sits on the couch, strumming a guitar.

LARRY

(shouting)

Hey Aria? What's something that rhymes with "proletariat?"

INT. ARIA AND LARRY'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Audrey stands in front of a full-length mirror in a close-fitting black dress, Aria helps her straighten it.

ARIA

I don't even know why I bought this. It's very black.

AUDREY

Is it too black? I don't want to look like I'm in mourning.

ARIA

No, it's good. You look better in it than I do.

Aria peeks at Audrey's backside.

ARIA (CONT'D)

Makes your butt look great.

Audrey holds her own gaze in the mirror, serious.

AUDREY

I kissed Dan last night.

ARIA

Really? Like, a real kiss?

AUDREY
He kissed me first but, yeah.

ARIA
What does that mean?

AUDREY
I don't know.

INT. JAKE'S CONDO, BATHROOM - DAY

After a shower, Jake wipes the fog off the bathroom mirror. He lathers shaving cream all over his face.

Even puts a dab between his eyebrows. Just in case.

INT. AUDREY'S GALLERY - DAY

Audrey and Dan stand in front of a mostly green and purple canvas hanging on the wall.

AUDREY
Is that the one I helped you with?

DAN
Yep.

Audrey smiles, then turns and takes a step back to take the whole scene in. They're done.

The gallery's ready, everything is hung, it's perfect.

AUDREY
Just add people.

DAN
Two hours, they'll be here. I hope you're proud of yourself.

Audrey smiles, deeply satisfied. Dan looks at her.

DAN (CONT'D)
I'm not sorry about kissing you last night.

AUDREY
Let's get through tonight, then figure out where we go from there. Deal?

Dan nods.

EXT. AUDREY'S APARTMENT - DUSK

In a suit and tie, Jake walks toward Audrey's building with a big bouquet of flowers and a stuffed teddy bear.

He heads up the stairs to Audrey's door and KNOCKS. No answer. He KNOCKS again.

JAKE
Audrey!? Audrey?

He listens at the door. Doesn't hear anything. He looks at his watch.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Crap. Still? Really?

He turns and hurries back down the stairs.

INT. AUDREY'S GALLERY - NIGHT

VISITORS mill about. A good crowd. Audrey weaves through it.

AUDREY
Thank you for coming...Hi, good to see you...

Aria and Larry man the refreshment table, snacks, wine, and a fishbowl full of cash donations in front of them.

A banner behind the table reads "Beauchamp!"

Dan stands before one of his paintings, glad-handing some of the visitors and making speeches.

DAN
The work's about life. It's about finding the boundary. And then peeing on that boundary.

The sixty-year-old RICH WOMAN he's talking to looks up at his painting and nods like she knows exactly what he means.

DAN (CONT'D)
Although I don't actually pee on my canvases, unlike Warhol.

Audrey reaches behind him, sticks a red dot that says "SOLD" to the info card by the painting. The card reads "\$21,000."

Dan lays an arm on Audrey's and leads her to the Rich Woman.

DAN (CONT'D)

Mrs. Darke, this is Audrey Blake.
The owner.

AUDREY

Wonderful to meet you.

MRS. DARKE

This is powerful work. Vital.

AUDREY

That's what I thought, too.

Mrs. Darke smiles warmly.

Looking guilty for being there, Trevor stands next to his wife DEVON, 35, a Real Housewife of Music City in waiting. Trevor pokes the spring-ride turtle.

TREVOR

I don't think we should've come.

DEVON

Don't pick at the artwork.

TREVOR

It's just a decoration.

DEVON

It's got a price tag.

She holds up the tag tied around the turtle's neck.

TREVOR

(reading the card)

Holy jeez.

EXT. AUDREY'S GALLERY - NIGHT

Jake's Mercedes screeches to a stop across the street, not bothering about a parking spot.

Jake stumbles out, flowers and teddy bear in hand.

Through the window, he watches Audrey float among the crowd, chatting people up, shaking hands, playing the good host.

She's a vision. Jake swallows hard. He starts for the door.

INT. AUDREY'S GALLERY - NIGHT

Dan steps up beside Audrey.

DAN
How're we doing?

AUDREY
They're selling. But listen --

THE CHIME ON THE FRONT DOOR DINGS, Audrey and Dan turn.
Jake stands just inside the doorway, looking awkward.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
Jake -- ?

Jake remembers the flowers and holds them out to her.

JAKE
Audrey, I'm sorry.

AUDREY
Whatever you're doing --

He drops down on one knee. Everyone turns to look.
Conversations dry up. Ice stops tinkling in glasses.

JAKE
I made a mistake, I know. But
please take me back. I wanted to do
this before, but I'm...I'm sorry.

He reaches in his pocket and produces the engagement ring he
had all ready to go at Aria's wedding.

Audrey sizes him up. He looks so hopeful and earnest. But --

AUDREY
No.

That hits Jake hard. He visibly deflates.

Audrey turns and walks away. Dan steps up in her place.

DAN
Maybe next time you'll think about
your mistakes before you make them.

Jake gives him a "you're an idiot" look.

JAKE
Audrey, I love you, and I will do
anything.

She stops, fifteen or so feet from him, and turns back.

AUDREY

Then leave.

EXT. AUDREY'S GALLERY - NIGHT

Jake stomps out of the gallery, tosses the flowers to the ground. He starts to chuck the teddy bear, but doesn't.

He yanks open his car door, tosses the bear in, and pauses. He looks at his trunk, then back at the gallery. He thinks.

INT. MERCEDES' TRUNK - NIGHT

The trunk lid flies up, revealing Jake against the night sky. Inside is his guitar case.

He unlatches it and raises the lid.

INT. AUDREY'S GALLERY - NIGHT

Dan and Audrey stand off by themselves in a corner.

DAN

Are you ok?

AUDREY

No.

The CHIME ON THE FRONT DOOR DINGS again. Jake stands in the doorway wearing his guitar.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

What is he doing?

Jake looks around the room at the fifty or so pairs of eyes all trained on him.

He clears his throat, strums a PRACTICE CHORD, and --

TREVOR

Jake? What are you doing, buddy?

A path through the crowd opens for Audrey.

AUDREY

You are ruining this.

Without a word, Jake starts strumming A SONG.

Dan comes forward to stand next to Audrey.

DAN
 (to Jake)
 Would you get out of here?

At the refreshment table, Larry recognizes the song.

LARRY
 Hey, I like this song.

ARIA
 What is it?

Jake begins SINGING. Audrey and Dan both gape at him.

JAKE
 (singing)
 Lay, lady, lay / lay across my big
 brass bed / lay, lady, lay / lay
 across my big brass bed...

In the crowd, a few people GROAN. But Audrey looks touched. She steps around Dan, toward Jake.

JAKE (CONT'D)
 (singing)
 Whatever colors you have in your
 mind / I'll show them to you and
 you'll see them shine...

At the refreshment table --

ARIA
 Aw, I like this song, too.

JAKE
 (singing)
 Stay, lady, stay / stay with your
 man awhile / His clothes are dirty
 but his hands are clean / and
 you're the best thing that he's
 ever seen / Stay, lady, stay / stay
 with your man awhile...

Audrey lays a hand across Jake's guitar strings.

AUDREY
 You hate Bob Dylan.

JAKE
 I kinda like this song. It's on his
 Nashville record.

AUDREY
I didn't know you played guitar.

JAKE
Yeah. I was in a band.

Dan takes two steps toward him.

DAN
You know what your problem is?

JAKE
One more step and I will hit you in
the face with this guitar.

Dan stays put.

Jake pulls out Audrey's engagement ring again.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Audrey, will you marry me?

The people in the gallery begin to whisper to each other.

JAKE (CONT'D)
I'll understand if you say no
again. But please don't.

Jake holds out the ring, and Audrey bites her lower lip.

DAN
Audrey, don't listen to him. Look
what you and I did here. He can't
help you with your dreams.

JAKE
I painted the back wall, butthole.

Dan takes Audrey's hand, pulls her away from Jake.

DAN
Be with me. He'll never go out on a
limb, never do anything wild or --

AUDREY
What do you call this?

She takes her hand back from Dan and takes a couple of steps
away from him, splitting the distance between the guys.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
Just wait...one second.

She thinks hard, and finally looks at Jake.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
 Nothing will ever be perfect. We
 won't always make sense or add up.

JAKE
 Well, numbers aren't everything.

She smiles a little.

AUDREY
 Ok.

She takes the ring, and Jake gives her a kiss.

Throughout the gallery, people resume their CONVERSATIONS.

Fuming, Dan watches Audrey and Jake. Then a Patron comes forward and taps him on the shoulder.

GALLERY PATRON
 Hey, buddy. How much for the duck?

DAN
 (snapping at him)
 A million dollars.

GALLERY PATRON
 I'll take it.

Dan suddenly looks much happier.

FREEZE ON DAN

JAKE (V.O.)
 Dan was a good sport, since Audrey
 made him rich. Gave him a career.

EXT. AUDREY'S GALLERY - NIGHT

Another opening. A LINE OF PEOPLE stretches out the door. A banner across the windows reads "BEAUCHAMP RETURNS!"

INT. REHEARSAL ROOM - NIGHT

Rocket gives Gwen a hug, and walks off to wrap up some cables. Mike the Guitarist walks up, a glint in his eye.

GUITARIST
 Don't feel too bad about that guy.
 He told me he's secretly gay.

GWEN

I wouldn't be a bit surprised.

He offers her a beer, and she looks up at him. He smiles.

JAKE (V.O.)

Gwen was ok. She didn't stay on the market very long.

EXT. BEACH - MYRTLE BEACH, SC - DAY

The same Hippie Woman who presided over Aria and Larry's wedding now stands beside a TRADITIONAL MINISTER.

Jake and Audrey wear casual clothes and leis.

JAKE (V.O.)

And Audrey and I finally got to do this.

TRADITIONAL MINISTER

You may kiss the bride.

Jake and Audrey do so. The Officiants CLAP, and behind the happy couple, all the guests join in.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

Another wedding, another bonfire on the beach. Audrey's parents walk up to her, and offer her a handmade book.

NANCY

I know you met when you were a temp at his work, but we thought it was better at a hot air balloon race.

AUDREY

Guys, stop. You will send me positive energy on my wedding day.

LYNDON

Honey, we're afraid you won't have any fun with him. You have to be able to cut loose sometimes.

JAKE (O.S.)

Everybody follow me!

Jake SPRINTS PAST THE FIRE, making for the ocean.

And he's butt naked.

JAKE (CONT'D)

It's only cold for a second!

He runs out into the waves. Audrey grins, surprised. Her parents look stunned. Audrey hands them their book back.

AUDREY

If you wouldn't mind holding this.

She joins the handful of people running after Jake to the water, pulling off her shirt as she goes.

FADE OUT.