

NOW AND THEN

by

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TEASER

EXT. COLLEGE GRADUATION CEREMONY -- DAY (2009)

It's springtime in Chicago, an outdoor graduation ceremony on a campus lawn. On stage is NICK ELLIOTT, 22, fresh-faced in a cap and gown, giving the student commencement address.

NICK

Although today we say goodbye to a great chapter in our lives, we say hello to the future. A future full of opportunities to follow our dreams and become--

KYLE

What a bunch of bullshit.

In the crowd we meet Nick's friends - KYLE, EMILY, MOOSE, JANE, EZ and SARAH. They whisper to each other, drinking from flasks, bored. Kyle holds a "WRAP IT UP" sign. EZ mimes hanging himself.

JANE

He looks like a penis in that cap and gown.

EMILY

You're supposed to be supportive friends.

MOOSE

How would you know what a penis looks like?

JANE

Lesbians have the Internet too. Plus I've seen your face.

The others laugh. Moose is unoffended, used to it. Emily is the only one focused on Nick, watching his speech closely.

INT. "L" MARIACHI'S -- LATER THAT NIGHT

They're out at a festive Mexican dive bar under the elevated train. Nick and Emily linger by the bar, pleasantly drunk.

NICK

Did I look nervous up there?

EMILY

No you looked good. I heard some girls talking after about maybe wanting to do intercourse with you.

NICK
 (fake scandalized)
Sexual intercourse? Right here in
 Chicago?

EMILY
 They were just your type too.
 Trashy plastic Barbie Doll trixies
 that smell like the mall--

NICK
 You had me at the early adjectives.

Emily laughs. Nick does too. They're longtime friends,
 comfortable together.

ACROSS THE BAR, Moose and Jane are checking out girls.
 They're a strange duo, him a lovable idiot who's earned the
 nickname Moose, and her a cool, confident black girl from DC.

JANE
 Every girl in college is a little
 bit gay. And I think of myself as
 a sherpa, leading them safely up
 the awe-inspiring mountain of first-
 time lesbianism.

MOOSE
 That's beautiful.

JANE
 Thanks, I'm a romantic. You want
 to go score some chicks?

MOOSE
 It's what we do.

They unzip their jackets, revealing homemade t-shirts that
 say "THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION." They bump fists and walk over
 to a group of girls. We stay with Sarah, EZ and Kyle,
 watching from afar, playfully dubbing their voices.

EZ (AS JANE)
 Hey, you look like you hate your
 parents enough to make out with me.

SARAH (AS MOOSE)
 Yo girl, you must be a homemade mac
 and cheese sauce, 'cuz I am
 thickening as I stand.

EZ smiles like he'd use that one. He's the wild man of the
 group, scruffy and adventurous. Sarah is more logical, a
 science major with a dark sense of humor. Next to her, Kyle
 is drawing on a stack of napkins.

SARAH

What are those?

KYLE

Graduation gifts. It's everyone in the future. Emily wins a Grammy, Nick's a billionaire CEO who adopts orphans because he's perfect. EZ cycles through jobs - clown, dairy farmer, National Security Adviser. You win a Nobel Prize and finally achieve your dream of having sex with the particle collider.

Sarah smiles as she flips through the absurd but charming drawings. This is Kyle - sweet, thoughtful, weird.

SARAH

You're my favorite psychopath.

BACK AT THE BAR, Nick and Emily share a quiet moment, looking out wistfully at their friends.

EMILY

I'm gonna miss this.

NICK

Me too. I wasn't gonna say it yet, but...I got that job. Global outreach for Google. Using technology to change the world.

EMILY

Dude. That's amazing!

NICK

Thanks, they just told me today. I didn't want to make a big deal out of it on our last night.

EMILY

Our last night...

She lets that linger in the air. A long beat. She sighs.

EMILY (CONT'D)

I like you, man.

NICK

I like you too, lady.

EMILY

No, I like you. I think. I mean, we're best friends, and I know that only happened because we never...

NICK
Intercoursed?

EMILY
Yeah.

NICK
I wanted to.

EMILY
So did I. I'm glad we didn't
though. It would have ruined
everything. I don't have this, our
thing, with anyone else.

Nick nods, agreeing. But Emily's not finished.

EMILY (CONT'D)
But college is over. We can't ruin
it anymore. And real life starts
tomorrow. Who knows what that is.

NICK
So...?

Emily takes a breath, gathers herself. She smiles.

EMILY
Nick Elliott, would you like to
come back to my filthy apartment
and have sex with me?

Nick freezes. A huge moment, his emotions swirling.
Finally, he gets a word out.

NICK
Yes.

INT. EMILY'S COLLEGE APARTMENT -- NIGHT

They enter Emily's messy studio apartment. Nick stares at
her empty, unmade bed, this whole thing becoming very real
very quickly. They stand still, looking around nervously,
not sure where to start.

EMILY
Should I...show you my boobs?

NICK
Okay.

Emily takes off her shirt. Nick has no idea what to say.

NICK
Nice.

All their fun banter, the joy and silliness of their friendship, is gone. This is awkward, painful, cold. They get into bed, taking off the rest of their clothes under the blanket. Nick gets on top of her, weirdly serious.

NICK
To the first day of real life.

EMILY
Did you just make a toast?

INT. EMILY'S COLLEGE APARTMENT -- MINUTES LATER

They lay in bed, a noticeable sliver of space between them. They seem distant, confused. Nick narrates.

NICK (V.O.)
The sex lasted three minutes,
including apologies. It wasn't the
beginning of a great love story.
It was an ending.

EXT. CHICAGO STREET -- DAY

A few days later, Nick's friends load boxes into his car. They're having fun, joking around, but Nick and Emily aren't the same. He accidentally grazes her arm. She pulls back.

NICK/EMILY
Sorry.

They avoid eye contact. Nick starts to say goodbye to the other friends, but they yell in mock protest, cutting off his speech. Kyle holds his "WRAP IT UP" sign. Nick smiles.

NICK
Love you idiots.

They shout their love back at him. He glances at Emily, their eyes meeting for a split second before they both look away. Nick gets in the car and we stay with him as he drives off, his friends getting smaller in the distance behind him.

FADE TO:

INT. BEDROOM -- DAY (PRESENT DAY)

It's eight years later, Nick is now 30. He's asleep, his phone on the bed next to him. It VIBRATES, Emily's name on the screen. Nick puts on a cheerful voice and answers.

NICK
Emily! Hey, it's been a long--

EMILY (O.S.)
Where are you?

NICK
I'm in Tokyo. Work trip. What's going on, it's good to hear your--

EMILY (O.S.)
Kyle died.

Nick's face drops.

EMILY (O.S.)
He was in a car accident. A really bad one.

NICK
Are you...is this a joke? Is he on the phone?

EMILY (O.S.)
I'm sorry Nick. The funeral's in Chicago on Friday. I know you're busy with work--

NICK
I'll be there. I want to be there.

EMILY (O.S.)
Good. I have to call everyone else now, but...I'll see you soon?

NICK
See you soon.

He hangs up and rubs his eyes. We FLASH TO an image of Kyle in college, happy and carefree. Nick gets out of bed and walks across his CHILDHOOD BEDROOM. He's not in Tokyo, he's in suburban Michigan, a tree-lined street out the window.

NICK (V.O.)
I'd been lying to them for years.

We see FACEBOOK PHOTOS of Nick's dream job with Google. He builds solar roofs in India, brings water filters to villages in Africa. He looks happy, proud of the work he's doing.

NICK (V.O.)
The first year after college was everything I wanted my life to be. I was traveling the world, helping people, making a difference.

We HARD CUT to Nick one year later, unpacking boxes in his Michigan bedroom.

NICK (V.O.)

But one day it ended. They called it downsizing, but to me it felt like failure. I moved home to Michigan, applied for jobs I didn't get. I was embarrassed by how little the real world needed me.

Nick, still 23, scrolls through his photos from around the world. His friends LIKE and COMMENT on all of them, excited, happy for him. He looks at their comments closely and sighs.

NICK (V.O.)

They were proud of me. Even as life pulled us in different directions, as we talked less and less over the years, they still believed in me. It felt awful to be letting them down.

Nick closes Facebook and thinks for a long beat. He opens Photoshop.

NICK (V.O.)

So I did the worst thing I've ever done, to the best friends I've ever had. I lied. I pretended to still be living a perfect life.

We see more FACEBOOK and INSTAGRAM POSTS, a Photoshopped highlight reel of Nick's twenties. He travels to more exotic places, does more great things. He smiles happily, as if he is still working for Google, still living the dream.

INT. AIRPLANE -- DAY (PRESENT DAY)

We pull back from Nick as he stares straight ahead at the seat in front of him, like in the opening of The Graduate.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT (O.S.)

Ladies and gentlemen, we are about to begin our descent into Chicago.

Nick looks down at the city skyline, framed against the lake.

NICK (V.O.)

Now I was coming back to Chicago for the first time since college, for the saddest of reasons. And I was going to tell them the truth.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

INT/EXT. TAXI -- DAY

Nick rides in a cab, looking out at Chicago, lost in the memories of what this city once meant to him. The DRIVER, a gruff older man with a "Chi-cawgo" accent, looks back at him.

DRIVER

Where ya coming in from?

NICK

(hesitates)

Tokyo.

The driver looks at Nick in the mirror, feeling him out.

DRIVER

Yeah right.

INT. EMILY'S APARTMENT -- DAY

Emily opens her door, facing Nick in the hallway of a nice apartment building. She looks good but different somehow, tamer. They hug, holding onto each other for a long beat.

EMILY

Thanks for coming.

NICK

Of course.

Emily wipes a tear from her eye. They look at each other, taking in how they've changed. Nick takes a deep breath.

NICK (CONT'D)

I need to tell you something.

EMILY

Okay. Come in, everyone's here.

Nick walks into her clean, modern apartment, where the others stand to greet him. EZ is a suburban dad now, holding his baby daughter, AVA. Jane wears uptight work clothes. Moose is aggressively balding. Nick looks at their sad faces.

NICK

Holy shit, huh?

ALL

(agreeing)

Holy shit.

EMILY

Kyle's parents want one of us to give a eulogy tomorrow. We thought it should be you.

Nick looks nervous but he nods, trying to project the easy confidence they remember him for.

SARAH

I'll make a "wrap it up" sign.

Nick smiles. Sarah catches herself.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Is it okay to be funny yet?

She looks to Nick for guidance, like they always did.

NICK

Kyle would've been the first one making inappropriate jokes. Remember the postcards?

They all groan happily at the memory of him.

MOOSE

He knew the mailman would read them. He sent me one from a penis enlargement center saying it was time for my follow-up appointment.

They laugh, their first real laugh since they heard the news.

JANE

I didn't know he sent ones that were true.

They laugh louder at this, Moose included. The mood lightens and they sit down, settling in together. EZ looks at Nick.

EZ

So what's it like being the most interesting man in the world?

MOOSE

Yeah, your Instagram's nuts. How many continents have you had sex on?

NICK

Actually...

He hesitates, all eyes on him. He wants to tell them the truth, but he can't find a way to say it. Moose jumps in.

MOOSE

Do you realize that starting next year, we can legally have sex with people born in the year 2000?

SARAH

That was a good year. Gladiator.

MOOSE

And a few years from now, some of the girls I wanted to sleep with in high school are gonna have kids I want to sleep with now.

They all playfully groan, grossed out.

EMILY

Kyle's somber memorial is off to a great start.

MOOSE

I'm just saying, cycle of life.

Nick watches them laugh at Moose and tease each other, a hint of their old dynamic coming back. He looks at them closely.

NICK (V.O.)

They'd all grown up. I'd been lost in Michigan, wasting time, treading water. They'd been living their lives and becoming adults.

We PUSH IN on each of them as they narrate a quick, stylized update of their lives since college. It feels like the opposite of a social media post - blunt, honest, vulnerable.

EMILY

I stopped playing music and got into real estate. I sell condos to rich families with ugly kids and cute dogs.

INT. UPSCALE CONDO -- DAY (FLASHBACK)

Emily wears lame professional realtor clothes, showing a GENERIC FAMILY and their LABRADOODLE around a fancy condo.

EMILY

The appliances are stainless steel and everything good about the neighborhood has been stripped away so casually-racist yuppies like you will pay millions of dollars for what used to be a cement factory.

The family nods agreeably like in a cereal commercial.

INT. RESEARCH LAB -- DAY (FLASHBACK)

Sarah wears Outbreak-style lab gear, her arms in a glove box.

SARAH (V.O.)

I got into science to cure diseases
and change the world. But for the
past three years, I've been
researching plant-based hamburgers.

We reveal the inside of the glove box, where Sarah delicately
handles a VEGGIE BURGER like it's plutonium.

SARAH (V.O.)

I'm also dating the saddest man in
the world.

INT. BOOK SIGNING -- NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Sarah's older German boyfriend, HEINRICH, signs copies of his
psychology textbook "Happiness is a Construct." He frowns in
real life the same way he does on the cover. Sarah whispers.

SARAH

Where do you want to eat after?

HEINRICH

It doesn't matter. Nothing
matters.

A heavy beat.

SARAH

Mexican?

INT. LAW OFFICE -- DAY (FLASHBACK)

Jane sits behind a conference table in a stuffy law office.

JANE (V.O.)

I wanted to be a civil rights
lawyer for the ACLU. Now I do
mergers and acquisitions for evil
corporations.

Across the table from Jane are six CONSERVATIVE OLD MEN in
dark suits, laughing in evil harmony like Bond villains.
Jane stares numbly ahead.

JANE (V.O.)
 I make half a million dollars a
 year, and I am deeply ashamed of
 myself.

INT. SUBURBAN LIVING ROOM -- DAY (FLASHBACK)

Ava watches from her highchair as EZ vacuums and dances at
 the same time, trying to make her laugh.

EZ (V.O.)
 I'm the world's greatest stay-at-
 home dad. I'm an expert in balloon
 animals, I'm certified in infant
 CPR, and I have no life or
 interests of my own, other than
 things my daughter points at.

Ava points at a bowl of oranges. EZ runs over and juggles
 them, wears one as a nose, anything to keep her entertained.

EXT. MOOSE'S WEDDING -- DAY (FLASHBACK)

Moose wears a tux, standing at the front of a small ceremony.

MOOSE (V.O.)
 Five years after school, I moved to
 Atlanta and married a monster.

His BRIDE walks down the aisle. She is a SEVEN FOOT TALL
 VERSION OF GODZILLA, a huge reptile in a wedding dress.

INT. MOOSE'S KITCHEN -- DAY (FLASHBACK)

Moose's Godzilla wife, now in yoga clothes, opens the
 dishwasher and SCREECHES like a monster. We SUBTITLE it.

GODZILLA WIFE
 (screeching, subtitled)
 You have to face the plates to the
 inside or they won't get clean.

Moose ignores her, watching TV. She screeches at him again.

GODZILLA WIFE (CONT'D)
 (subtitled)
 We need to talk about us.

INT. EMILY'S APARTMENT -- DAY (PRESENT DAY)

Back to the scene, as Moose finishes telling them his story.

MOOSE

That's how I ended up divorced and
living in a murder hotel by the
Atlanta airport.

We pan across their faces, horrified at Moose's bleak life.

JANE

Anyone want to try to top that?

EMILY

Sarah's manic depressive boyfriend
could be a contender.

SARAH

I wouldn't call him manic.

MOOSE

(getting competitive)

I saw a rat at the motel the size
of a basset hound, chewing on a
syringe--

ALL

Okay! You win. We get it.

EZ

Nick, can't you get him into a
Sheraton? You're a bazillionaire.

SARAH

No, he's a gajillionaire.

NICK

(sharply)

I'm not.

They look at him. Nick takes a breath, but Emily cuts in.

EMILY

He does non-profit stuff for
Google, he's not a tech guy.

MOOSE

Yeah, Jane's richer. It's
corporate blood money, but it still
counts.

Ava cries softly, waking up from a nap. EZ pulls toys out of
her bag like Carrot Top, shaking them, trying to soothe her.

EZ

I should take her home. Are we...
(covers Ava's ears)
...getting drunk later?

MOOSE
I'm drunk now.

Nick looks at the group, slumped on couches. They're not the energized, carefree people they used to be. He thinks.

NICK
You know what we need? Kyle's old tradition. An eight-to-eight.

They all smile, quoting Kyle in unison.

ALL
Eight at night 'til eight in the morning.

JANE
The funeral's at eleven.

NICK
So we go hungover. Remember your LSAT's? Kyle got you wasted the night before.

EMILY
He hated anything important.

They look at Nick. Despite the years that have passed, they still look up to him. He's their leader. And he likes it.

NICK
Let's have a night out like we used to. The Bush Administration, Jagerbombs, karaoke. Big, stupid fun like we always had.

Emily and Moose are into it, but Jane and Sarah look unsure.

SARAH
I haven't gone out like that in a long time.

NICK
Exactly. None of us have. But it used to be who we were. We need to feel that again, for us and for Kyle. He invented the eight-to-eight. Let's do the best one ever.

No one can argue with that. Jane and Sarah come around, agreeing. The eight-to-eight is on. Nick smiles, but he hides a nervous look. He is still lying.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. MCCALLISTER'S PUB -- NIGHT

An Irish pub, an old college hangout. Jane's changed out of her work clothes, EZ's taken Ava home. Moose's balding hair is locked in a tragic comb-over. Nick passes out Jagerbombs.

NICK

Let's toast.

Emily looks at him quickly, remembering their night together and his awkward sex toast. Nick notices, tries to ignore it.

NICK (CONT'D)

To Kyle. A ridiculous weirdo and a true original. And to one more crazy night in Chicago.

They clink glasses and down the drinks, and a college-era pop song takes us into a DRINKING MONTAGE--

--The drinks keep coming. Shots dropped into beers, cocktails on fire, quarters bounced into empty glasses. Drunken laughs, big smiles, like a great hazy college night.

EXT. STREET -- NIGHT

They stumble outside, drunk, exhausted, blinded by the streetlights. Nick checks his phone. It's 8:45pm.

NICK

(dry voice)

Eleven hours to go.

They all GROAN as Nick leads them down the street to another bar. A young family pushes a baby stroller past.

INT. FAIR AND FOWL -- NIGHT

They all crowd into a booth at a tacky sports bar/wing place. Moose shows off his old BUSH ADMINISTRATION t-shirt, much too small on him now. He puts his arm around Jane.

MOOSE

You ready for the Second Bush Administration? I'll wingman for you, you wing-lady for me.

JANE

I haven't done the Bush Administration thing in a while...

MOOSE

Me neither. I've been talking to this one girl at the motel, but I get a real undercover cop vibe.

JANE

No, I mean I...

(sighs)

I haven't had sex in a year.

Moose takes a sip of beer so he can intentionally spit it out in shock. Sarah wipes some off her shirt.

SARAH

This is my only going-out shirt...

MOOSE

A year? But you're Wilt Janeberlain. Jane the Hurricane.

JANE

I know, I've just been focusing on work. It's a conservative firm, they don't even know that I'm...

She gestures to herself. EZ takes a guess.

EZ

Black?

JANE

Gay.

MOOSE

Well tonight's the night for both of us then. Pick a girl, any girl. We'll dust off the old classics.

SARAH

You can't use those lines anymore. College girls are politically active now. They're feminists.

MOOSE

So? I'm not anti-women. I love women. I just want to tell them how good they look using bad pick-up lines from the '80s.

INT. FAIR AND FOWL -- MOMENTS LATER

Moose approaches a CUTE COLLEGE GIRL at the bar. He taps her on the shoulder. She turns.

MOOSE

Hi there. I just want to say that
shirt looks very becoming on you.

(big smile)

Of course, if I was on your chest--

She PUNCHES HIM IN THE FACE. Not a slap, a real punch.
Moose goes down hard. The girl high-fives her friends at the
bar. Jane walks over and helps him up.

JANE

See? Sarah's right. You're also
not allowed to explain things
anymore. It's called mansplaining.

MOOSE

(frustrated)

But I love explaining!

MORE DRINKING AS THE NIGHT GOES ON--

--Sarah, drunk and loosening up, dances wildly by herself.
She's a surprisingly cool hip hop dancer for a science nerd.

--EZ dominates a Golden Tee arcade game in the corner, an old
college favorite. He is intensely competitive with himself.

--Jane opens the Wikipedia page for feminist icon Betty
Friedan on her phone. Moose reads it, intrigued.

--Nick types on his phone. Emily comes over, a little drunk.

EMILY

Texting some supermodel in
Bulgaria?

NICK

Writing Kyle's eulogy.

EMILY

Oh. So I'm a giant asshole.

NICK

(smiles a little)

Medium-size.

The bar gets a notch quieter all the sudden, like bars do
sometimes. Emily and Nick look out at their friends, the way
they did on graduation night. A sincere moment.

EMILY

I'm glad you're doing so well. Not
sure I ever really said that.

Nick sighs.

NICK
I wish I'd been around more. Seen
Kyle...
(beat)
Seen you.

Emily registers this, but moves past it.

EMILY
Kyle loved that you were doing big
things. He was proud of you.

This hits Nick hard. His eyes water, he turns away. Emily mistakes it for sadness about Kyle, not his own lying.

EMILY (CONT'D)
I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make
you cry like a girl.

NICK
Can I tell you something?

She nods. He struggles with it.

NICK (CONT'D)
I'm...not who you think I am.

EMILY
(lights up)
I knew it. I knew you were in the
CIA. All that foreign travel, and
you'd disappear for months--

NICK
What? No, I'm not in--

Emily yells to the others.

EMILY
Nick's in the CIA! He's a spy!

Jane pays Sarah five bucks.

SARAH
Told you.

NICK
No, god, I'm not a spy.

EMILY
You just have a very particular set
of skills?

NICK
I was trying to be serious...

EMILY

The funeral's tomorrow. That's serious. Tonight's for being idiots again.

INT. KARAOKE BAR -- LATER

The group stands on stage at a small karaoke bar, singing a ridiculous but memorable song they used to love in college ("Wonderboy" by Tenacious D?). They share a mic, drunkenly misreading the lyrics, laughing and pushing each other.

Emily takes the mic for a solo, and for the first time, we hear her sing. It's not a perfect movie moment, it's a silly song and a beat up microphone in a tiny karaoke place. But there's something about her presence, the look in her eyes when she sings. She loves it. This is where she belongs.

Nick watches her from the edge of the stage, getting lost in her performance. He looks at the other friends, dancing, letting loose, having fun again. It feels good, all of them getting back a piece of what they used to have together.

LATER IN THE NIGHT--

They crowd into a booth, sharing greasy bar food. Nick works on the eulogy on his phone. Moose trudges over, rejected by another girl.

MOOSE

This one didn't punch me, she just said she felt sorry for my mother.

SARAH

It's weird to get hit on. When I met my boyfriend, he was like--
(bad German accent)
"Your eyes remind me of the stones I would skip on the lake as a boy."

EZ

Are you dating Werner Herzog?

MOOSE

I get it, the war on women is real. The wage gap, the pink tax. We're living in a patriarchy, and we have to make the world better for the next generation.

(beat)

But can't I also get laid?

Jane considers this. Nick tries to help Moose's cause.

NICK
He married a monster...

MOOSE
That was a metaphor. But yeah.

JANE
Okay, fine. We need to make some changes. First of all, that shirt is four sizes too small on you.

Moose tugs at his super-tight BUSH ADMINISTRATION shirt.

MOOSE
I think it shrunk in the wash.

JANE
For sure. And the next thing might not be easy to hear. Moose... you're bald. You're a bald man. Your hair's not coming back.

MOOSE
(nods sadly)
I tried to take pills for it. Made me look like a shag carpet neck to ankles, but I got nothing up top.

JANE
So go with it. Don't do this comb-over thing. You look like a Divorced Man Halloween costume.

MOOSE
You want me to shave my head?

She nods. Moose thinks for a moment. He trusts her.

MOOSE (CONT'D)
Let's go shopping.

INT. WALGREENS -- NIGHT

They all squint under the bright lights of a 24-hour drug store, as Sarah holds up two TACKY CHICAGO TOURIST T-SHIRTS.

SARAH
Wrigley Field or Navy Pier?

EZ returns with an armful of ELECTRIC SHAVER OPTIONS.

EZ
Some of these do nose hair too.
It's never too early--

NICK

You guys...

Nick points off screen. They all turn and their eyes light up at the sight of a DRUG STORE BLOOD PRESSURE MACHINE, glistening beautifully under a halo of light in the corner.

SARAH

Kyle's favorite game.

EMILY

The Blood Pressure Olympics. High score wins.

NICK

How could we not?

Sufjan Stevens' bouncy "Come On Feel the Illinoise!" takes us through JUMP CUTS of the BLOOD PRESSURE OLYMPICS. We mix in flashes of them playing the same game in 2007, Kyle included.

--Sarah goes first, putting her arm through the cuff, scoring a measly 117/76. They boo.

--Nick does jumping jacks, trying to get his heart rate up, but he only gets a 124/74. He hangs his head in defeat.

--EZ jams a key into a can of Red Bull and shotguns it, scoring an impressive 142/89 to take a commanding lead.

--Emily stuffs her face with chips and candy, hoping the salt and sugar will help. She gets 139/88, good for second place.

--Moose rubs kosher salt on his gums like cocaine, smacking himself in the chest like a boxer before a fight. He scores 151/91, pumps his fist in celebration.

--Jane quietly reads Politico on her phone. No food, no exercise, just good old fashioned political rage. She gets 170/95, a Blood Pressure Olympic record.

As Nick crowns her champion, a SECURITY GUARD kicks them out for causing a scene. They laugh uncontrollably, banned from a Walgreens in the middle of the night for being too ridiculous. Kyle would be proud.

INT. "L" MARIACHI'S -- LATER THAT NIGHT

They're back at the Mexican dive bar from graduation night. It's late, the night winding down. Sarah is very drunk.

SARAH

I can feel my liver trying to talk my other organs into an uprising.

NICK

I think the Bush Administration's got some unfinished business.

Everyone looks at Moose. He nods bravely, as Nick plugs an electric shaver into an outlet by the bathroom. He flips it on, the whirring noise startling Moose. Jane comforts him.

JANE

This will set you free.

Nick RUNS THE SHAVER ACROSS MOOSE'S HEAD. He winces. They all cheer, hair falling on their shoes. Nick keeps going back and forth like a lawnmower, until Moose is COMPLETELY BALD. He looks at himself in a dirty bar mirror and SMILES.

MOOSE

I look good! Like Bruce Willis, or the paper towel guy. Should I go talk to a woman?

JANE

I'll wing-lady for you.

They walk across the bar. Nick examines the electric shaver.

NICK

I think we could still return this.

Over by the bar, Moose and Jane spot a GORGEOUS COLLEGE GIRL.

MOOSE

Just be myself, right?

JANE

Definitely not.

Jane stays back as Moose approaches the girl, using a sensible, modern-day pick-up line.

MOOSE

Excuse me, hi. I don't want to be presumptuous and assume that you drink alcohol, but if that clear liquid with olives in it is what I think it is, I'd love to have one with you. I'm happy to pay, or if that's offensive and old fashioned, we could split it.

GORGEOUS COLLEGE GIRL

That's very forward-thinking of you, but I'm gay. Sorry.

MOOSE

Oh. Interesting.
(thinks)
Stand by.

He turns to Jane and does a complex series of HAND SIGNALS like a third base coach in baseball. Jane swoops over and introduces herself to the girl. They walk off to find a quiet spot together. Moose watches them go and sighs.

VOICE (O.S.)

All the good ones are gay, huh?
Just like men.

Moose turns to see the flirtatious gaze of CAROLINE, a friendly, attractive, 60-YEAR-OLD WOMAN.

MOOSE

I'm not.

CAROLINE

Prove it.

She smiles. Moose is taken aback by her directness. He looks at his friends in the corner. EZ and Sarah look unsure, but Nick gives him a thumbs up. That's all Moose needs. He turns back and introduces himself.

MOOSE

Jason. My friends call me Moose.

CAROLINE

Caroline. I lost all my friends in a bitter divorce and I'm starting over.

Moose smiles widely.

MOOSE

Caroline, I think we might have a lot in common...

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET -- NIGHT

It's late, the streets are quiet. The six of them walk together, the only ones out this late. They talk and laugh. It feels like the end of a drunken college night.

MOOSE

I'm done with Atlanta. One night back in Chicago and I shaved my head, I met a girl, I got punched in the face. I love this city!

NICK

You didn't want to go home with her?

MOOSE

Of course I did, but I'm not ditching you guys for a girl. She gave me her number, I'll call her tomorrow.

EZ

Is it a landline?

EMILY

Rotary phone?

JANE

I guess if you can't find somebody born the year Gladiator came out, why not Singin' in the Rain?

NICK

I'm putting that in the eulogy. That's wisdom.

MOOSE

Alright, I get it, she's a thousand years old. She's cool though, she gets me. And she's taking adult education classes, so technically she's still a college girl.

SARAH

Kyle would've loved her. He used to volunteer at a nursing home.

NICK

(to Jane)

What about you? What happened with your girl?

JANE

(shrugs)

Nothing really--

EMILY

Ah! Sex shrug! That's your sex shrug! I remember your sex shrug.

FLASH TO college-age Jane, always playing down her sexual achievements with the same half-smile shrug. It's her tell.

NICK

You already hooked up with her? Where, the bathroom?

JANE

Please. I'm not a kid anymore. We broke into the manager's office and did it on the Xerox machine.

EZ

"L" Mariachi's has a Xerox machine?

SARAH

Can we get hot dogs? I should eat something slippery before I throw up so it comes out easier.

They all look at each other. Why not?

NICK

Science has spoken. Let's go to Parse's.

EXT. STREET -- LATER

They turn a corner onto a side street, looking for the hot dog place. Emily checks her phone, confused.

EMILY

It should be right here. Parse's Hot Dogs, 7049 Higgins.

They look across the street at a BRAND NEW BANK OF AMERICA, a NOW OPEN banner hanging outside. Their old hot dog place has been gentrified. A terrible end to a great night.

EZ

That was Kyle's favorite place.

SARAH

(drunk, emotional)

I needed those hot dogs to throw up with. With which to throw up?

Nick looks around, not willing to give up yet.

NICK

Stay here. I have an idea.

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE -- NIGHT

Nick microwaves a pack of hot dogs, holding buns and a bottle of mustard. A CASHIER looks over like he sees this a lot.

CASHIER

Bank of America?

Nick nods.

CASHIER (CONT'D)
Been good for business.

INT. BANK OF AMERICA ATM LOBBY -- NIGHT

The six of them eat microwaved hot dogs together in the ATM lobby, passing around the bottle of mustard like a joint.

NICK
Kyle would have loved this. Us,
together, drunken idiots in the
middle of the night.

MOOSE
It feels like he should be here.

A sad beat, all of them getting quiet. Nick narrates.

NICK (V.O.)
I wanted to tell them everything.
But we were drunk, emotional,
remembering who we used to be.

We FLASH TO a happy image of them at the old hot dog place, crammed into a booth. They throw fries, fight over the jukebox, laughing at each other, at themselves.

Back in the present, they're framed similarly in the window of the ATM lobby. Emily sits on the floor where the booth would have been, finishing her hot dog. The others join her.

NICK (V.O.)
It was the perfect night. For a
few hours, we'd been our best
selves again, completely free and
in love with life. But we knew
that in the morning, we would have
to say goodbye to our best friend.

We PULL BACK down the quiet street. The six of them sit under the bright lights, remembering the great times they used to have together, in this exact place. In the distance, the sun is just beginning to rise.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. FUNERAL HOME LOBBY -- MORNING

A drab lobby, our characters lean against the gray wallpaper, sweaty and hungover. They sip coffee, Gatorade, ginger ale. Sarah cools the back of her neck with a water bottle.

JANE

How'd we used to do this four times a week?

SARAH

Science answer? Metabolism.

EMILY

Non-science answer?

SARAH

We didn't give a shit.

The look at a large photo of Kyle by the door. Nick reads his eulogy on his phone. A FUNERAL DIRECTOR approaches him.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR

I'll begin the service, then you'll deliver the first eulogy.

Nick nods, nervous. He straightens his too-tight suit.

INT. FUNERAL HOME -- LATER

The six of them sit in the back row. It looks a little like graduation day. The funeral director starts the service.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR

We are here today to celebrate the life of Kyle David Zimbler. A life taken too soon, but undoubtedly, a life well lived.

Nick looks down at his eulogy notes and deletes the phrase "life well lived." He mouths "shit" to himself.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR (CONT'D)

Kyle's brother put together a video tribute of some of his happiest times. He'd like to play it for you now.

He steps aside and a VIDEO is projected onto a screen at the front of the room. The Decemberists' "January Hymn" plays over a SLIDESHOW OF KYLE. We see him as a baby, school photos, Little League teams, an American childhood.

We see him in high school, then college. Many of the PHOTOS and VIDEOS include the rest of our group, back when they were young and excited and happy to be together.

In the back of the room, they sit up and take notice. It's like they're watching a memorial to their own past selves:

NICK AND EMILY look totally free, full of that infectious joy they used to share. She looks like a bright-eyed musician, him a confident leader, on his way to greatness.

MOOSE AND JANE are inseparable, always having fun. EZ and KYLE hump Chicago's famous Harry Caray statue. SARAH laughs so hard in one video she can barely breathe.

We see the landmark moments from their time in Chicago. Cubs games, Lollapalooza, Grant Park on the night Obama won. They look down on the city from the top of the Sears Tower.

Through it all, Kyle looks happy and full of life. The video is nostalgic, beautiful, heartbreaking. It's all of us in college, with the purest friends we've ever had.

It ends and the lights come on. The crowd claps softly, but our group is speechless, shattered. The funeral director motions to Nick, who walks forward in a daze. He glances nervously at his phone, then leans into the mic.

NICK

I loved Kyle very much. He was the funniest person I've ever met, but he didn't try to be. He was just...himself. And he was so happy being himself that it made the rest of us happy too. He was generous, and he was real.

Nick looks down, taking a moment. Kyle's words from graduation day echo in his head.

KYLE (O.S.)

What a bunch of bullshit.

Nick smiles. He looks at his friends in the back and puts his phone down, finally pushing himself into this.

NICK

I'm not real. I'm not important, I'm not helping people or changing the world. I'm a liar.

Some MURMURS from the crowd, not sure where this is going. The friends look confused. Moose mouths "CIA?"

NICK (CONT'D)

I've never been to Tokyo. I don't work for Google. I lost that job years ago, and I've been lying ever since.

He looks at his friends, getting emotional.

NICK (CONT'D)

You guys were...are...the best thing I ever had. And I ruined it. I was afraid. Of failure, of letting you down. Of not knowing who I am or what my life will be.

FLASH TO Nick's glamorous photos from around the world, but with his body removed from the backgrounds. All the editing fades away, so Nick is a jagged, empty cutout of a person.

NICK (CONT'D)

I've been home in Michigan, working bad, boring jobs, hoping something good would happen. After a while I stopped hoping, and I just drifted.

Now we see REAL IMAGES of Nick's twenties, not through social media. These are flat, mundane pictures of day-to-day life in Michigan. A dreary low-level office job, dinners at home with his parents. Quiet nights alone, lit by his laptop.

NICK (CONT'D)

I always thought I was destined for big things. For a long time, it was all that mattered to me. But I'm thirty now, and I'm nobody, and I don't think I care anymore.

He looks at his friends, his eyes watering.

NICK (CONT'D)

I'm sick of lying. I wish I could tell Kyle everything. Give him one more hug, hang out again, like we used to, when life was kind of perfect. When he made it perfect.

He turns to the confused crowd.

NICK (CONT'D)

I had a really nice eulogy, but he would have hated it. He would have wanted this instead. The truth.

(choking up)

I'm sorry. Kyle was...he was one of us. I'll miss him forever.

Nick hurries away from the podium, wiping his eyes. He walks towards his seat in the back, but he **KEEPS GOING**, out the door. The friends look at each other, not sure what to do. Emily **STANDS** and follows him.

EXT. FUNERAL HOME -- DAY

Nick is walking away from the funeral home, emotional, everything swirling in his head. A bad day made worse.

EMILY (O.S.)

You kinda made that about you, huh?

Nick turns to see Emily standing by the door. It's just the two of them alone on the street, a quiet Chicago morning.

NICK

I'm sorry. I wanted to say it last night, but I couldn't. I'm not the guy that you thought I was. I'm... nothing.

Emily moves closer to him. A long, tense beat.

EMILY

You're also bad at sex.

She smiles. Nick is confused, too pained to laugh.

EMILY (CONT'D)

We liked you when you were nothing. A homesick kid in the dorms. Then you became a big deal, the cool guy with the perfect life. Now you're nothing again. So what?

(shrugs)

I still like you, man.

Nick smiles at that, relieved. A beat.

NICK

We really messed things up back then, huh?

Emily nods, no longer avoiding this.

EMILY

You can say it.

NICK

Say what?

EMILY

I know what you want to say.

NICK
Which is...?

EMILY
We should have sex again.

NICK
Oh god.

Emily's confidence crumbles.

EMILY
That wasn't it? Oh shit.

NICK
That's what you were thinking?

EMILY
Maybe it's like a double negative.
It would undo the last time.

NICK
Or it'd be twice as bad.

EMILY
Nothing could be twice as bad.

He laughs. She does too. A glimmer of their old connection.

EMILY (CONT'D)
I didn't really want to have sex
again. I was kidding.

NICK
No you weren't.

EMILY
You don't remember how hilarious I
am.

NICK
Yes I do.

They smile. A comfortable silence.

EMILY
Maybe we should just...be friends
again? We were good at that.

Nick happily agrees. The other friends walk out of the funeral home with plates of food.

EZ
Did you know if you leave a funeral
early you get all the food first?

MOOSE

You should see the spread in there.
Egg salad, shrimp salad, potato
salad. All the salads.

NICK

I'm really sorry, guys.

They all look at each other for a beat. No one seems upset.

SARAH

I thought it was kind of cool.

JANE

Yeah, you hijacked a funeral.
What's more Kyle than that?

EZ

So all those pictures over the
years? Backpacking in Thailand,
the Hamilton tickets?

MOOSE

That Scandinavian girl?

NICK

Fake. All fake. The closest I've
come to sleeping with a
Scandinavian girl was masturbating
in a chair I bought at Ikea.

They smile, happy to have him back.

EZ

What are you gonna do now?

NICK

I have no idea. I've been making
things up for so long that I don't
know who I actually am. So I
guess...I need to figure that out.

EMILY

Figure it out here.

He looks at her, surprised.

EMILY (CONT'D)

Not here, next to the funeral
dumpster. But Chicago. Last night
was amazing. We haven't had a
night like that since college. It
felt...right.

They all agree. Despite being exhausted and hungover and sweating through their clothes, they feel good. They saw who they used to be, the happiest versions of themselves.

EMILY (CONT'D)

Let's keep doing it. Not all the drinking, but just...being in each other's lives again.

EZ

I could use some friends that are older than one.

SARAH

I need a social life away from Heinrich. I keep having nightmares about the bad guy from Die Hard.

JANE

I need to get out of the office and be a badass power lesbian again.

MOOSE

I need to stand next to you when that happens.

EMILY

I need to play music. I haven't been on a real stage in a long time. It used to be all I cared about.

They all look at Nick, his turn. A beat.

NICK

I have no idea what I need. But I know it's not in Michigan. And I know my life is better with all of you in it.

FLASH TO a happy memory from freshman year. Nick and Kyle are dressed up as Napoleon Dynamite and Pedro for Halloween. Moose and EZ are Borat and Ali G. The girls are in dark suits and sunglasses, the Blues Brothers.

They sit around Nick's dorm room, digging through a mountain of chocolate. They laugh, throw candy, quote their Halloween characters. It's innocent, genuine, a perfect college night.

Back in the present, they walk down the street in their funeral clothes, talking and sharing plates of food. They don't look at where they're going, they just walk slowly, together, framed against the buildings of downtown Chicago.

END OF ACT THREE

TAG

INT. SMALL MUSIC VENUE -- NIGHT (WEEKS LATER)

Emily plays guitar and sings in a small coffee house. The group is there to support her, sitting in the back row like they always do. She looks out at the crowd.

EMILY

I have one more song, I just
learned it. It's kind of silly,
but...it feels right.

She begins a folky acoustic cover of John Sebastian's theme from Welcome Back, Kotter. It's quirky and fun, something only Emily would end a set with.

EMILY

(singing)

*Welcome back. Your dreams were
your ticket out. Welcome back, to
that same old place that you
laughed about.*

We FLASH TO Nick's friends helping him move into a tiny Chicago apartment. They carry boxes and joke around. Nick frames a Kyle NAPKIN DRAWING and hangs it on his wall.

EMILY (O.S.)

*Well the names have all changed
since you hung around. But those
dreams have remained and they've
turned around.*

They stage a RE-GRADUATION for Nick to start over, all of them in caps and gowns made from blankets. Heinrich plays the college dean, glumly handing Nick a DIPLOMA. He turns it over to find a note: **"TO THE FIRST DAY OF REAL LIFE."**

He looks at Emily and smiles.

EMILY (O.S.)

*Who'd have thought they'd lead you,
back here where we need you? Yeah,
we tease him a lot, 'cause we've
got him on the spot, welcome back.
Welcome back, welcome back, welcome
back...*

Back in the coffee house, they clap for Emily. She shrugs, a little shy, but they give an exaggerated STANDING OVATION. She takes a bow and SMILES WIDELY, happy to be there, feeling inspired, performing again in front of her friends.

END OF SHOW