

How the Story Goes

By

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EXT. LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA - ESTABLISHING - DAY

The Hollywood sign stands tall against the Hollywood Hills.

EXT. BEACH FRONT BUNGALOW - VENICE BEACH, CALIFORNIA - DAY

In the bright sunshine, the beige house has the same hue of the sand on the beach behind it. In the background, waves crash against the shore and seagulls squawk as they fly by.

INT. VENICE BEACH BUNGALOW - LIVING ROOM - DAY

The upscale living room is empty until an attractive couple, GREG, 30, and JULIE, 20, move through together, kissing and pulling at each other's clothes.

They slip down the hall, into a bedroom and out of sight. Greg growls; Julie giggles. Clothes fly into the hallway.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - KENSINGTON, KANSAS - ESTABLISHING - DAY

A wooden, weather-beaten road sign welcomes drivers to Kensington, Kansas. In the background, a cloudy, gloomy sky hangs over a sea of autumn-browned cornfields whose plants bend and crackle in a heavy wind.

INT. LIMO - COUNTRY ROAD - KENSINGTON - DAY

MICHAEL HUDSON, 26, sits in the backseat of the limo and stares out the window. He is charmingly handsome in a black suit, but his features are pulled down into a sullen frown.

A MAN and WOMAN, both in their 50s, sit across from him wearing black. Next to him, SANDY, a pretty blonde, wears a plain black dress and set of small, white pearls. She reaches out and comfortingly rubs Michael's back.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - KENSINGTON - DAY

The black limo is one of the last cars in a long funeral procession that moves past the Kensington sign.

EXT. VENICE COFFEE COMPANY - VENICE BEACH - DAY

The logo on the door shows a coffee mug surfing on a large wave. Sun glints off the mug as a hand reaches for the door.

INT. VENICE COFFEE COMPANY - CONTINUOUS

KATE ALBRIGHT, 27, enters. She is put together, but lacks polish. Her look blends bohemian and hipster and serves to underscore, rather than detract from, her attractiveness.

Kate approaches the counter which is manned by SETH, a husky brunet with glasses in his early 20s. He prepares her order, two cups of coffee. She pays with a ten, no change.

EXT. FARM HOUSE - KENSINGTON - DAY

All around, the corn is green with the growth of spring.

INT. FARM HOUSE - KENSINGTON - DAY

Michael packs the last of several suitcases. The others are stacked neatly in the background.

EXT. SIDEWALK - VENICE BEACH - DAY

Kate sets down her two coffee cups on the sidewalk so that she can tie her shoe: a black Converse All Star. Another pedestrian walks by, his shoe bumping one of the cups. It wobbles, but Kate catches it before any spillage occurs.

EXT. KANSAS CITY AIRPORT - DAY

Sandy drives an old pickup truck with Michael as her passenger; several large suitcases are loaded in the back.

EXT. CROSSWALK - VENICE BEACH - DAY

Cars pass Kate as she keeps her eye on the "DO NOT WALK" sign. She taps her foot and turns her wrist to check her watch, nearly pouring coffee on herself. Another close call.

INT. KANSAS CITY AIRPORT - DAY

Michael checks in at the counter.

Michael goes through security.

Michael walks through the terminal and pauses to look at an arrival and departure screen. He looks at a flight with destination Los Angeles. The flight is listed as "ON TIME."

EXT. CROSSWALK - VENICE BEACH - DAY

Kate still waits for the light to change. When "WALK" appears, she grips her coffee and strolls across the street. She trips on the curb. The coffees slosh, but do not spill.

EXT. BEACH FRONT BUNGALOW - VENICE BEACH - DAY

Kate arrives and glides up the steps and through the front door with both coffees cradled in one arm.

EXT. LAX AIRPORT - LOS ANGELES - DAY

Michael exits the airport, carefully hauling his pile of luggage on an airport cart.

INT. BEACH BUNGALOW - VENICE BEACH - DAY

Kate walks through the house, carrying the coffees. Moans from the bedroom stop her in her tracks. She tentatively creeps toward the open bedroom door. Upon seeing the scene, she abruptly turns and marches down the hallway.

Greg bolts from the bedroom, covered with just a sheet.

GREG

Kate! Katie. Wait. Hang on.

She spins around.

KATE

My assistant? Really, Greg?

Julie exits the bedroom with a blanket around her.

JULIE

The boss bringing her assistant coffee? How thoughtful. How ironic.

Julie goes for a coffee cup. Kate gives her an icy glare then cocks one cup back as if to throw it. At the last second, she stops. Kate does an about face and exits.

EXT. SIDEWALK - VENICE BEACH - DAY

Kate moves hurriedly down the street. Far ahead of her, a cab is at the curb. The driver helps Michael get his suitcases out the trunk. Michael pays the driver.

As the cab pulls away, Michael leans on a tall suitcase and takes in the apartment building in front of him. He smiles.

Even in her blind rush, Kate notices Michael on the sidewalk. Her frown eases just slightly. She stops.

KATE
Half-caf vanilla latte?

MICHAEL
(amused)
What?

They look at each other. Suddenly, she is a little less angry. He raises his eyebrows and offers her an uncertain, but friendly smile. She holds out one of the coffee cups.

KATE
I bought two, but turns out I only
need one... or maybe three, but I'm
not really into that...

She eyes a bemused Michael. Still holding out the coffee, she shakes it. Offered no other option, he takes the cup. They gaze at each other until Kate abruptly walks away.

Michael watches her with a momentarily tilted head. He takes a sip of the coffee and gives it a nod of approval.

MICHAEL
(shouting)
Thank you.

Already down the street, Kate throws up her arm and waggles it as if to say "it was nothing." She continues on her way.

Michael sips the coffee. He turns the cup to examine the Venice Coffee Company logo, touching the surfing mug. He looks down the street, but Kate has already disappeared.

INT. SET - WRAP PARTY - L.A. - NIGHT

On a movie set, actors and crew members are scattered about, eating, drinking and talking. Broken down sets and half-packed equipment litter the background.

In the middle of it all, Kate and SALLY BURNS stand together. Frumpy, but commanding, Sally is in her 40s. Kate wears jeans, a fitted dress jacket and her All Stars.

KATE

Sally, thank you for letting me be a part of this process.

SALLY

It is your movie, after all.

KATE

Ha. Right. Remember film school? It's director as auteur.

SALLY

I didn't go to film school, but that doesn't stop me from realizing that you have a unique perspective, Kate Albright, and I do hope I was able to preserve it.

Sally turns away, about to head to another group.

KATE

Definitely. Thank you, Sally

Sally smiles and then is gone, engulfed by adoring crew. She is replaced by ALEX POOLE. Just a few years older than Kate, he is slick, but likable enough and dressed in an expensive, dark suit. He appears quickly, startling Kate.

ALEX

She likes you.

KATE

Maybe she'll direct my next script.

ALEX

About that. How's it coming?

KATE

It's not. I mean, why did I think you could mix existentialism with deconstructionism?

Alex has no freaking clue.

ALEX

Look, Kate, you're my most successful client.

She arches both eyebrows.

ALEX

Fine. You're my only successful client. Which is why I worry when you stall out.

Kate hangs her head.

ALEX

And, I would never tell you how to write because you're amazing, but have you thought about maybe, I don't know, switching genres?

KATE

I don't work within genres, Alex. I find themes that I like and--

ALEX

You stick with them. I know. And, they're great themes... for independent, intellectual flicks like this one. But if you're going to appeal to a wider audience--

KATE

Why would I want to do that?

ALEX

Because you're a hot commodity. Sally Burns told the execs at the parent company that you should be writing and directing.

KATE

Direct my own scripts?

Alex nods, looking at her pointedly.

KATE

And the catch is that I have to appeal to a wider audience?

ALEX

The catch is that Supreme Studios wants you to write and direct...

(mumbling)

A romantic comedy.

Kate laughs. Alex doesn't. She goes deadpan.

KATE
You must be joking.

Alex nods to a nearby craft services table. Kate gives him a dirty look, but walks with him to the table. As they talk, they take plates and wait in line to get food.

ALEX
You could transform the genre.

KATE
I just told you: I don't do genres.
So don't even tell me their offer.

ALEX
I could send my kids to college on
the commission, Kate.

KATE
You don't have kids, Alex.

ALEX
With the money from this deal, I
could buy some. From China maybe.

Kate rolls her eyes.

KATE
I don't write romance. I don't
write comedy. Yet I'm somehow
supposed to fuse the two into some
sort of mainstream masterpiece,
happy endings and all? No. Way.

ALEX
You'd get to direct. And the money
you'd make... you could use it to
fund your own theme-based flick
next time. This is just a paycheck.

KATE
I am not writing a romantic comedy.

She hands him her plate and turns to walk away.

ALEX
(to her back)
I'll call your assistant in the
morning with all the details.

KATE
(turning back)
I don't have an assistant.

ALEX
As of when?

KATE
As of last week. Right about when I
found her in my boyfriend's bed.

Alex stares at her.

ALEX
(sincere)
I'm sorry.

Kate shrugs.

KATE
(feigning apathy)
Whatever.

ALEX
Come by tomorrow. We'll talk.

She sighs, but nods.

KATE
I have to go. I have thirteen pages
of a screenplay waiting on me.

She leaves Alex with a disappointed look. Sally approaches.

SALLY
It would have been great.

ALEX
Yeah.

SALLY
Maybe she'll change her mind.

ALEX
Yeah... right. And maybe
Tarantino'll direct Everybody Loves
Raymond: The Movie.

Sally laughs heartily.

INT. KATE'S TOWNHOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Kate's place has a style that matches her clothing and personality. Chic Bohemian: minimally cluttered with unique items that are both expensive and artistic. A MacBook and printer rest on a small, neat desk. A French bulldog, PIERRE, sleeps on a cushy dog bed near the door.

Kate sits in front of her computer, staring at an open document. The only visible text is dialog from a character named "Crimson" which reads "We're no different from atoms. We're just small bits of nothing in a much larger world. We're meant to hook up and transform into something... bigger. If we don't then..." The cursor flashes.

Partially hidden by the laptop, Kate spots a framed photo of herself and Greg together at the beach. She snatches it up, giving it just a slight glance before tossing it into a nearby trashcan. She turns her eyes back to her screen. After staring at it for a second, she closes the laptop, gets up and stomps away.

EXT. ALEX'S OFFICE - VENICE BEACH - DAY

The sign outside the small stand-alone building reads "Drake and Poole." In smaller writing, the tag: "Representing Writers and Actors Since 2005."

INT. ALEX'S OFFICE - DAY

Alex sits at his desk with his feet up, rocking slightly and lost in thought. Kate barges in. Startled, Alex quickly drops his feet. Kate sits down in a chair opposite his desk.

KATE

I'm still on page thirteen. Tell me more about the romantic comedy.

INT. VENICE COFFEE COMPANY - CONTINUOUS

The trendy, yet cozy café has a steady stream of customers, but most take their caffeine to go. Kate and Alex, on the other hand, are at a table, sipping their coffee.

KATE

I just don't get it. Who looks at my work and says, "Kate Albright should write romantic comedies"?

ALEX

They just think the genre's getting stale. They were hoping you could breathe some new life into it. Do for romantic comedy what Kevin Williamson did for horror.

KATE

But, that makes no sense. What would make them think I would even be interested in romantic comedy?

ALEX

(hesitant)

They... look, they're sick. They have no method.

KATE

Alex...

ALEX

They asked me what I thought was the safest type of movie, okay? I mean, it's obvious, right? So that was it. That's your challenge.

KATE

Writing the "safest type of movie" is a challenge?

She scoffs.

ALEX

It's obviously a challenge for you.

KATE

Reverse psychology? That's the best you've got?

She rises.

ALEX

Wait, wait.

She reluctantly takes her seat again. Alex takes a deep breath then looks around, but says nothing more.

KATE

(exploding)

Couldn't you have anticipated where this would lead? Why didn't you come up with something else? Anything else. Psychological

(MORE)

KATE (cont'd)
thriller. Dark comedy. Animated
animal adventure. I mean, I could
have handled any of those, but I
just don't buy... romantic comedy.

ALEX
You don't buy romantic comedy, but
you'd gladly make Stuart Little
Part Twenty-Seven?

(beat)
Look. Romantic comedies don't have
to be... un-buyable. Just think of
them as exaggerations of real
romantic dilemmas.

KATE
I think of them as art imitating
life in a hyperbolic, unrealistic
fashion.

ALEX
Isn't that what I just said?

Kate scowls.

ALEX
How about this: they're modern day
fairy tales.

KATE
They're unrealistic fantasies.

ALEX
You really have a thing against
happy endings, don't you?

Kate glares at him.

ALEX
I'm begging you. Give it a shot.

KATE
I don't think I...

Across the room, Michael fills out a job application and
talks to Seth. Kate is momentarily infatuated and
distracted. Alex follows her gaze, noticing Michael.

ALEX
You don't think you what?

Kate forces herself back into her conversation with Alex.

KATE
I don't think I can do it.

ALEX
(insistent)
Why not?

KATE
Because in real life, there are no
happy endings.

ALEX
(careful)
I know how it is to be cheated on--

KATE
This is not about that.

Alex looks at her a moment. He sighs.

ALEX
Greg is a worthless made-for-TV
writer. You deserve better.

KATE
I know. I'm over it. And, I'm not
bitter. I know that's what you're
thinking. But I'm not. I'm just...

She can't help glance back at Michael. She sighs.

KATE
I'm realistic. And romantic
comedies are just the opposite.

ALEX
Suspension of--

KATE
Suspension of disbelief. The
audience is expected to trust and
believe the reality presented by
the film... and all the implausible
coincidences that go along with it.

ALEX
Exactly.

KATE
But, Alex, we're not talking about
suspension. We're talking about
hanging by a thread, and I refuse
to dangle like that.

She gets up to leave, her look apologetic. Alex is about to protest, but his cell phone rings. He takes the call; Kate takes it as her chance to escape.

Kate glances at Michael, but continues her march from the shop. Michael ties on a green employee apron, looking up just in time to see her walk out. He bites his lip, smiling.

ALEX
(on phone)
Hello?... Oh, hi, Harry. What's up?

Alex looks over his shoulder, making sure Kate's gone.

ALEX
She's a little hesitant, I must admit, but I'll bring her around.

He listens a moment, nodding along with the caller's words.

ALEX
Okay, Harry. I'll be in touch.

He hangs up, a look of bewilderment on his face.

EXT. VENICE BEACH - DAY

Michael walks on the beach and talks into a cell phone.

MICHAEL
Who? Hello?... You're breaking up.
Hello? Sandy? Sandy, is that you?
Oh, you're from Mr. Drake's
office... Nine a.m.? I'll be there.

He hangs up and immediately starts dialing. As he walks, he interacts with the various vendors on the beach.

INT. VET'S OFFICE - EXAM ROOM - KENSINGTON - DAY

Sandy, a veterinarian in a white lab coat is trying to hold a kitten still enough to give it a vaccination.

An old woman, the owner of the kitten, stands by, but offers no help. A cordless phone, tucked in the pocket of Sandy's jacket, rings. She abandons the kitten for a moment, tossing the owner an apologetic look.

SANDY
Hello? I mean, Hudson Animal
Clinic. This is Sandy. How may I
help you?

INTERCUT: INT./EXT. - VET'S OFFICE/BEACH - DAY/DAY

MICHAEL

You're answering the phone now?

SANDY

Mikey?

MICHAEL

Yeah. Are you busy?

SANDY

Um... just a sec.

She looks at the owner, biting her lip in hesitation.

SANDY

Excuse me?

The lady grabs her cat before it jumps off the exam table. Sandy steps out of the room into another larger area of the office. Cats and dogs roam about. Others are in cages.

SANDY

Okay. I got your message about the apartment. What else is going on?

MICHAEL

I may not fail miserably after all.

SANDY

Whoever thought you would?

MICHAEL

Mainly? Me.

SANDY

While your attempt at humility is honorable, you know you're going to do awesome out there.

Michael laughs humbly.

MICHAEL

I got a meeting with that agent I've been talking to.

SANDY

And if it takes awhile to get some auditions lined up?

MICHAEL

I just got a job at a coffee shop.
They hired and trained me today.

SANDY

You're good.

MICHAEL

We'll see.

A parrot, D.P., flies onto Sandy's shoulder.

D.P.

Hello. Hello. Hello.

SANDY

D.P. says hello.

MICHAEL

That's all he can say. Tell him I'm
not impressed.

From the exam room, the kitten hisses.

SANDY

Oh, God. Okay, Mikey, I've got to
go, but good luck tomorrow.

D.P.

Hello. Hello. Hello.

The kitten hisses again. The owner screams.

MICHAEL

(chuckling)

I'll talk to you later.

SANDY

Bye, Mikey.

Michael hangs up and looks around. He breathes in with a
content smile lighting his already joy-filled face.

EXT. ALEX'S OFFICE - PARKING LOT - DAY

Alex's BMW is parked in a spot boasting a sign with his
name. Michael pulls up on a bicycle. He is dressed in jeans
and a t-shirt with a fashionable dress shirt thrown on top.

INT. ALEX'S CAR - PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

The dashboard clock reads "7:00 am." Alex sits in a dark suit and sunglasses. He looks in his rear view mirror to check his hair. When Alex catches a glimpse of Michael, he slides his shades down to do a double take.

EXT. ALEX'S OFFICE - PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Alex jumps out of his car.

ALEX
Can I help you?

Startled, Michael takes a few steps back.

MICHAEL
I was just making sure I had the address right. I have an appointment with Mr. Drake at nine. Turns out I actually work right around the corner.

He gestures off toward the beach.

MICHAEL
You're not Mr. Drake, are you?

ALEX
Nope. I'm Poole. You're an actor?

MICHAEL
If this meeting goes well.

ALEX
Do you think it will?

MICHAEL
Yeah, I do, actually.

ALEX
So you're an optimist?

Michael smiles.

MICHAEL
Sometimes, I guess. Really just more of a realist. If I can be.

ALEX
Reflective and philosophical, too.

MICHAEL
Occasionally...

ALEX
And how do you feel about love?

Michael wrinkles his brow.

MICHAEL
What do you mean?

ALEX
Do you believe in it?

MICHAEL
Love?

ALEX
Yes.

MICHAEL
(hesitant)
Yes... I would say that I do.

ALEX
Like in that cheesy, romantic
comedy kind of way?

Michael scoffs.

MICHAEL
No.

ALEX
Why not?

MICHAEL
Reality just doesn't play out like
that. You don't meet your true
love, overcome a few obstacles then
live happily ever after--

ALEX
Okay, people really need to get
over the happy ending thing.

MICHAEL
In real life, it's not about the
happy ending. It's about dealing
with the difficulties that come
after the happy ending. It's hard.

Alex stares at him for a moment with a lingering smile.

ALEX

Can I buy you a cup of coffee?

MICHAEL

Sure, but... for the record, I'm straight.

ALEX

Oh. Ditto. My interest in you is strictly professional.

Michael raises his eyebrows curiously.

INT. VENICE COFFEE COMPANY - CONTINUOUS

Michael and Alex sit in lounge chairs, sipping coffee.

MICHAEL

Also, for the record, I don't have aspirations to write a screenplay.

ALEX

What?

MICHAEL

You said your interest was professional.

ALEX

Oh, right, of course. I'm actually doing a bit of casting right now for a personal side project.

MICHAEL

A film?

ALEX

No. Well, I mean, eventually.

Michael tilts his head.

ALEX

I represent a screenwriter. She has a slightly non-traditional approach when it comes to writing. She likes... interactive inspiration.

MICHAEL

What's she writing?

ALEX
A romantic comedy.

Michael throws his head back in laughter.

ALEX
And she needs to experience all the elements of the genre. She insists on it being authentic. You would need to meet her coincidentally, romance her and eventually--

MICHAEL
This isn't, like, some weird Hollywood escort service... is it?

ALEX
It's perfectly innocent. You don't have to sleep with her; you just can't let on that you're acting. The courtship has to appear real. You can never break character. It's a true, professional commitment to the craft. Beyond method.

MICHAEL
And you're ready to cast me? Just like that?

ALEX
Would you do it?

MICHAEL
Of course.

ALEX
Really?

MICHAEL
I mean, it doesn't sound suspicious at all. Weird, random guy with an ugly tie approaches me in a parking lot with this ludicrous story. Damn, where do I sign?

Alex examines his tie; Michael stands to leave.

ALEX
Wait.

Michael pauses.

ALEX

This wasn't Kate's idea. It was mine. I just thought you might be the kind of actor who'd want to motivate the evolution of a genre.

Michael stares at Alex contemplatively.

EXT. VENICE BEACH - DAY

Michael and Alex walk along together on a sidewalk that passes through a large grassy area adjacent to the beach.

MICHAEL

So, essentially, you want me to seduce this Kate person so that she will be... in the mood to write a romantic comedy that you can sell to Supreme Studios.

ALEX

(tentative)

Yes?

MICHAEL

Not only does it sound as preposterous as it did when you first pitched it, but now it also appears to be completely immoral... and I won't do it.

ALEX

I'll pay you.

MICHAEL

Is that what people do in L.A.? Negotiations have failed. Now it's time to bottom-line it and pull out the cash.

ALEX

Bottom line: five-thousand dollars.

Michael shakes his head in disgust.

MICHAEL

I'm going to be late.

Michael turns away. Alex smiles knowingly.

ALEX

I'll guarantee you representation.

Michael stops and turns back.

ALEX

I'll call John right now. You won't even need to meet with him... and if he doesn't get you work, I will.

Michael stands down, his arms relaxed at his sides.

MICHAEL

Why me? I mean, surely you know plenty of other actors and... actually, you haven't seen me act.

Alex's lips disappear into themselves.

MICHAEL

So... what was it? Why me?

ALEX

You're a nice guy. Your moral objections just further the point. I've offered you cash and a career, and you still won't cave.

Alex lowers his voice:

ALEX

This guy she was dating, Greg... he cheated on her with her assistant. She deserves better.

MICHAEL

I'm confused. Are you match-making or setting up a huge deception?

ALEX

Maybe both. You want to meet her?

Michael hesitates, but does not object.

EXT. PARK BY THE BEACH - WALKING PATH - DAY

Michael and Alex walk together briskly. Several joggers pass them on the path. Alex is wildly out of place in his suit.

ALEX

She brings Pierre here every morning.

MICHAEL
Pierre?

ALEX
French bulldog.

MICHAEL
Right. Cute.

They arrive at an open, grassy area.

ALEX
There they are.

Kate tosses a ball for Pierre, unaware of the audience.

Michael's jaw drops slightly. An intrigued smile forms on his lips. When Alex glances at him, he wipes away the smile.

MICHAEL
(feigned fascination)
Beautiful...

ALEX
Naturally. I'm not going to try to
set you up with--

MICHAEL
The dog.

ALEX
Huh?

MICHAEL
The dog is beautiful.

ALEX
Oh... what?

MICHAEL
Pierre is a really nice
representative of the breed.

ALEX
(baffled)
Uh... huh.

Michael laughs, watching Kate a moment more.

MICHAEL
I'm just pulling your leg. The
girl's pretty.

ALEX
But you're not particularly
attracted to her?

MICHAEL
How should I know. I've never met
her. Do you want to introduce me?

Michael takes a few steps in her direction, but Alex grabs his arm and pulls him behind a thick palm tree.

ALEX
Are you crazy? Your meeting has to
be coincidental. She can't know
that you know me. I just thought
maybe you'd feel drawn to her.
(beat)
Do you?

Michael laughs.

MICHAEL
Listen, Mr. Poole, romantic
comedies are written for a reason:
those situations can't be found in
the wild. They have to be
contrived. Even now, we have to
fake it to make it seem real.

ALEX
Yeah, yeah. Just go meet her.

Michael turns to go, but Alex grabs his arm.

ALEX
This is the part where you meet the
girl, pique her interest, then
leave her thinking she'll never see
you again. Got it?

Michael chuckles, shakes his head, and walks toward Kate.

ALEX
(loud whisper)
What are you going to say?

MICHAEL
I'm an actor; I'll improvise.

As he approaches Kate, she scoops up Pierre and marches away without giving Michael so much as a glance. Michael chases.

MICHAEL

I noticed your dog. He's beautiful.

Kate pauses to look directly at Michael for the first time. As she looks him over, her eyes widen. She swallows.

KATE

He'd probably love to hear that. If only he knew English.

MICHAEL

I guess he is a French bulldog.

(to Pierre)

Parlez-vous français ?

Pierre barks appreciatively. Kate puts him down, tossing a ball from her pocket. Pierre retrieves it and carries it to Michael's feet. Michael throws it; Pierre gives chase.

MICHAEL

Hi, by the way.

KATE

Hi.

A beat passes until Pierre returns with the ball. Michael pitches it away again.

MICHAEL

I've got a meeting at nine so I should probably go.

KATE

Oh no.

Michael smirks, but Kate looks toward Pierre. He has jettied past the trail, off the grass and toward the beach.

KATE

Pierre...

She hurriedly jogs away. Michael keeps pace alongside.

EXT. BEACH - CONTINUOUS

Pierre jumps around excitedly in the small waves.

KATE

He's too small for this. Last time, he almost got washed away.

Kate quickly removes her shoes and socks, and runs into the water after her dog. Pierre dodges her attempted captures.

For a moment, Michael watches, laughing. Finally, he kicks off his shoes and rolls up his pants' legs. He walks out tentatively into the ocean.

Both Kate and Michael fight the constantly moving water. Pierre frolics gleefully, his tongue hanging out. When he pauses to go after something under water, Michael lunges toward him. Pierre sidesteps the advance, causing Michael to belly flop into the shallow water.

Kate gasps, but seizes the chance to go for a distracted Pierre. At the same moment, a wave a little larger than the rest crashes and washes ashore. The current is just enough to cover Pierre and put Kate off balance.

Michael just manages to upright himself in the water when he finds Kate falling toward him. She lands nearly on top of him. He holds her up by her armpits.

MICHAEL
(laughing)
Are you okay?

KATE
(embarrassed)
Yeah.

She climbs off him, sitting next to him in the surf.

MICHAEL
I think he's good, too.

He nods toward Pierre who has made his way to a patch of dry sand. He watches them, breathing heavily from his adventure.

MICHAEL
Not exactly how I pictured my first
swim in the ocean...

He looks over at Kate with a easy smile.

LATER

Both dripping wet and carrying their dry shoes, Kate and Michael walk slowly on the beach. Pierre is now on a leash.

KATE
Thank you.

He smiles charmingly.

MICHAEL

You're quite welcome. And while we're doing thank yous, thanks for the coffee the other morning.

KATE

(embarrassed)

Yeah. Sorry if that seemed... odd. It was a bad morning.

Michael looks at her with tenderness.

MICHAEL

It was good coffee, though.

She smiles.

KATE

Didn't you say you had a meeting?

MICHAEL

Yes, but what I didn't say yet was it's been nice meeting you...?

KATE

Kate.

He nods, shaking wet hair out of his eyes.

MICHAEL

Bye, Kate.

He casually tucks his wet hands into the pockets of his wet pants then slips on his dry shoes.

KATE

Bye.

Michael walks away, his feet sloshing in his shoes. With Pierre hopping at her side, Kate is left otherwise alone.

EXT. SIDEWALK - VENICE BEACH - DAY

Alex and a still damp Michael stroll together. Alex sips a smoothie and carries his jacket over his shoulder.

ALEX

You're killing me here. Did she seem interested?

MICHAEL

I don't know. Maybe. Maybe not.

Alex looks at him out of the corner of his eye.

ALEX

What about you?

MICHAEL

What about me?

ALEX

Are you interested?

MICHAEL

In Kate?

ALEX

In the gig.

Michael sighs.

ALEX

Come on. Help me create a fairy tale that, by virtue of its very existence, could inspire one of the great creative minds of our time.

Michael rolls his eyes. They pass several vendors. Spread on a blanket, they find a vendor selling low quality medieval props. He has mop stick horses and wood-carved swords.

ALEX

Complete with...

Alex reaches down and swipes a horse and sword. The vendor, a middle-aged man with dreadlocks and a long beard, does not protest, but watches closely.

ALEX

A knight...

He knights Michael with a sword touch to each shoulder.

ALEX

In shining armor.

He hands the horse and sword to Michael who holds it, looking ridiculous as he does so.

MICHAEL

Man, you are seriously disturbed.

He gently replaces the items on the ground, nodding politely to the vendor. Michael and Alex walk on.

ALEX

Look, you wanted to know why you, right? It's because we saw you the other day at Venice Coffee Company, and she gave you the, you know, lingering, head-to-toe check out.

Alex demonstrates.

ALEX

She was practically drooling.

(escalating)

So, do the girl a favor. Make her realize that there is male beyond her idiot ex-boyfriend. That courting is fun and feel-good. That human relationships are worth experiencing and worth exploring...

Alex takes a deep breath and, looking like a politician in a debate, points a finger at nothing in particular.

ALEX

(slow)

Especially in screenplays.

Michael considers.

INT. VENICE COFFEE COMPANY - DAY

Michael stands behind the counter, serving a customer. His coworker Seth squeezes behind him to make an espresso.

SETH

(over his shoulder)

Let me get this straight. You said yes because it's an acting gig?

MICHAEL

No.

SETH

You said no?

MICHAEL

No. I mean, yes. I mean, no... I said yes, but not for the gig.

Seth arches his eyebrows as he hands off the espresso.

MICHAEL

Okay, so maybe partially for the gig. Even if for nothing more than some agent's ruse, it's acting.

SETH

But isn't it just acting... like yourself?

MICHAEL

No. It's acting confident and flirting a lot. Trust me, that's not my usual shtick.

Seth nods, wiping down the counter.

SETH

Plus this Alex guy set you up with his partner, right?

MICHAEL

Yeah. He introduced me to Mr. Drake, and I was accepted as a client on the spot--despite the fact that I was soaking wet. I've got an audition tonight.

SETH

Rock.

MICHAEL

But, that's not the only reason I agreed.

SETH

What else is there?

MICHAEL

The girl...

He looks up and, as if on cue, Kate walks through the door. She is alone and avoids even a glance in his direction.

SETH

Oh, her?

Kate take a seat at a corner table and pulls out a book. She buries her nose in it. Michael and Seth watch discreetly.

MICHAEL

Yeah. Maybe it really is like Mr. Poole says: she's this brilliant writer who lacks inspiration.

SETH

And you want to be her muse?

MICHAEL

It would be a true acting feat.

SETH

It might be tougher than you think. She's a nice lady, but she used to come in with this guy. He was a complete ass. Her relationship skills are clearly deficient.

Michael shrugs away the advice.

SETH

Plus, dude, I thought you said you have a girlfriend.

MICHAEL

I said I had a fiancée, actually. Had. Besides, I won't actually be pursuing her. Just acting like it.

A customer comes up and orders a coffee. Michael gets it quickly, and trades the drink for cash.

MICHAEL

And, she makes a decent co-star. She's pretty. Beautiful, really. Don't you think?

SETH

My fiancée doesn't really like for me to answer questions like that. One time, my buddy asked me what I thought about J. Lo's ass and I told him it mesmerized me, you know, like the moon or something. You just stare. Can't look away--

MICHAEL

Yeah, I get the picture.

SETH

So my fiancée overheard and... let's just say we don't watch Maid in Manhattan anymore. Bummer.

Michael laughs.

SETH
Oh, hey, here she comes.

Kate walks toward the counter.

MICHAEL
She's my customer today, okay?

SETH
But she always pays for her coffee
with a five. No change.

Kate nears the counter.

MICHAEL
(whispered)
You can have the two bucks.

SETH
Score!

He smirks and slinks away so that Michael is the only one
available when Kate reaches the counter.

MICHAEL
Bonjour, Mademoiselle, où est votre
chien?

KATE
Sorry. Je ne parle pas français.

MICHAEL
Liar.

KATE
Oui. Anyway, Pierre is at home.

Michael nods, feigning aloofness.

KATE
I didn't know you worked here.

MICHAEL
I just started yesterday. I didn't
know you drank coffee here.

KATE
I do. I sometimes even give it to
strangers on the street.

He laughs.

MICHAEL
Oh, was that from here?
(he holds up a cup)
Does that mean you'd like a
half-caf vanilla latte?

She gives him a surprised nod. He prepares her coffee.

MICHAEL
Do you work around here?

KATE
Sort of.

MICHAEL
How vague.

He presents her with a teasing smile.

KATE
My agent is a few blocks away. I
have a meeting with him later.

MICHAEL
Actress?

Kate laughs loudly.

KATE
Hardly. No. No, I write.

MICHAEL
Books?

KATE
Screenplays.

MICHAEL
Oh. Neat.

Kate fidgets. Michael exchanges the coffee for her five.

KATE
Keep the change.

MICHAEL
Thanks.

KATE
Thanks for the coffee,
(she looks at his name tag)
Michael.

She lingers a moment before slipping back to her table. Seth approaches Michael, palm out for the money. Michael hands it over without taking his eyes off Kate.

SETH

All about the acting, right?

MICHAEL

(distracted)

Yeah. Can I take my break now?

Before Seth can answer, Michael walks away and over to Kate's table. He is seated before he asks:

MICHAEL

May I?

Kate can only laugh.

MICHAEL

Okay, so let's just get this out of the way: do you believe in fate?

Kate, sipping her coffee, nearly chokes.

KATE

No.

MICHAEL

Thank God.

Kate wrinkles her brow.

MICHAEL

It's just that we've been running into each other a lot lately and I'd hate to think you were one of those "Meg Ryan" types, reading into it as if it were fate.

KATE

Meg Ryan? Why Meg Ryan?

MICHAEL

Sleepless in Seattle, You've Got Mail, French Kiss. Need I go on?

KATE

I wouldn't have pegged you as a romantic comedy connoisseur.

MICHAEL

What better genre to teach you how
life isn't?

KATE

I completely agree.

Kate sips her coffee.

MICHAEL

I mean, who meets someone and falls
for them

(he snaps his fingers)

like that? I--and excuse me if this
is presumptuous; I'm sure you have
a boyfriend--I think you're
extremely attractive, very smart.

(beat)

My type in every way.

Kate leans back in her chair.

MICHAEL

But there's no tingling sensation.
No heart palpitations. No
electricity between us.

(he wiggles his fingers)

No magic.

They gaze at each other: Magic.

MICHAEL

Of course, I did walk over here
because I felt... drawn to you.

He laughs and offers her a conspiratorial smile.

MICHAEL

I have to get back to work.

KATE

And I have a meeting with my agent.

MICHAEL

See ya around, Kate.

He gets up, smiles at her then strides back to the counter.

KATE

See ya.

INT. ALEX'S OFFICE - DAY

Alex sits at his desk with his chin propped up in his hand. Kate walks around, picking up and putting down knickknacks.

KATE

So, yeah, maybe I will take a crack at the romantic comedy thing.

Alex smiles curiously.

ALEX

What changed your mind?

Kate takes a deep breath.

KATE

This guy...

ALEX

Guy?

KATE

A new employee at Venice Coffee.

ALEX

Oh, I thought you meant that you, you know, met a guy.

KATE

He sat down at my table--

ALEX

You should tell the manager--

KATE

And started talking about Meg Ryan and romantic comedies. He said the way characters meet and instantly fall in love is a total sham.

Kate forces herself into a chair, gripping the arms.

ALEX

Sounds like you.

KATE

Yeah, and I had all these concurring thoughts that I wanted to offer, but it was impossible for me to form them into the eloquent sentences that would normally flow effortlessly from my lips.

ALEX

Is he hot?

Kate scrunches up her face.

KATE

I don't know.

Alex raises his eyebrows.

KATE

Okay, yes. He's hot. And smart.
When he was talking, it was like my
brain was moving in slow motion.

(beat)

Do you think he drugged me?

EXT. ALEX'S OFFICE - PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Kate and Alex walk together toward her vintage blue Chevy.

KATE

Maybe he just gave me full-caf. I
do feel a little jittery.

ALEX

Whatever he gave you, keep ordering
it because if it makes you want to
write a romantic comedy, it must be
something special.

KATE

It was something, anyway.

ALEX

The whole thing sounds like fate.

Kate stares at him for a long beat.

KATE

I don't believe in fate.

ALEX

(playfully)

You don't believe in anything
except your own particularly
negative brand of cynicism.

KATE

Me? Negative? You're the one
berating me after I told you I'd
try to write this thing.

ALEX

Not that I'm complaining, but you haven't really explained why.

Kate shrugs.

KATE

That's because I don't really know why. I just know that... I want to.

She gets in her car, rolling down the window.

ALEX

Keep drinking that coffee.

She rolls her eyes and pulls out of the parking lot.

INT. MICHAEL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

The one-bedroom apartment is plain with white walls and light wood floors. The bedroom door is visible, but shut. The living room contains only a couch and TV. A small balcony reveals a second-floor view of the nearby beach.

INT. MICHAEL'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

This room contains a full-size bed with an IKEA frame, a MacBook on a very small desk, suitcases stacked neatly by the closet, and a dresser with a mirror that holds up a series of photographs: Michael in various stage costumes, old Polaroids of a teenage Michael with a blonde girl, a photobooth strip of Michael and Sandy.

Michael stands at the mirror wearing jeans and a nice dress shirt. He glances around at the pictures then looks at himself. One last check. He takes a deep breath.

INT. CITY BUS - LOS ANGELES - NIGHT

Michael sits on the bus, dialing his cell phone.

INT. HUDSON VETERINARY CLINIC - KENSINGTON - NIGHT

Sandy sits on a stool in front of a large Great Dane. They stare at each other as if it were a contest. From her pocket, the phone rings. Scooby ignores it. Sandy answers, but never looks away from Scooby.

SANDY
Hudson Veterinary Clinic. This is
Sandy. How may I help you?

INTERCUT: INT./INT - BUS/VET'S OFFICE - NIGHT/NIGHT

MICHAEL
Hey, it's me. What are you doing?

SANDY
Having a staring contest with
Scooby.

MICHAEL
Scooby as in Scooby Dooby Doo where
are you?

Scooby blinks and looks away.

SANDY
Ha! I win!

Scooby looks at her again and lets out a small bark.

SANDY
The Gravenhorsts think he's
depressed.

MICHAEL
He's a dog. What's he got to be
depressed about? Give him some
Scooby snacks and a squeaky ball
and I'm sure he'll snap out of it.

Sandy pulls a treat from her pocket and holds it out to
Scooby. He takes it in his mouth, then drops it in her lap.

SANDY
The Gravenhorsts had a cat named
Velma, and when she died last week,
Scooby stopped eating.

She rubs the top of Scooby's head.

MICHAEL
Tell the Gravenhorsts to get a new
cat. They can name it Daphne.

SANDY
That's excellent advice, Mikey.
Scooby needs to move on. A new cat
would be perfect for him.

She clears her throat. Michael half-smiles and sighs.

MICHAEL

But what would Velma think?

SANDY

I think Velma would want him to be happy in his new life without her.

Michael sighs.

MICHAEL

But, boy, he loved her.

Sandy smiles sadly, scratching Scooby's head.

SANDY

I bet there are plenty of awesome cats in Los Angeles.

MICHAEL

There is this one.

Sandy grins.

SANDY

Oh, really?

MICHAEL

Yeah. More to come on that. I'm on a bus headed to an audition and I think my stop is coming up.

SANDY

What's the part?

MICHAEL

Just a soap. Three episode run with a potential regular slot.

SANDY

Ooh. Impressive. I'll call you tomorrow to see how it turns out.

MICHAEL

Okay. Bye, Sandy.

SANDY

Bye.

She hangs up, looking at Scooby with a curious smile.

INT. CASTING ROOM - LOS ANGELES - NIGHT

A female casting director, JANICE JONES, and her assistant AARON sit at a table. A lone chair is waiting for Michael.

MICHAEL

Hi.

Janice looks him over.

JANICE

I like your look. Have a seat.

Michael sits, nervously wiping sweaty palms on his pants.

JANICE

This is my assistant Aaron. He's going to read with you. Ready?

Michael takes a deep breath and closes his eyes.

MICHAEL

Yes.

Janice nods to Aaron.

AARON

(without emotion)

Oh my God. Lucas? Is it really you?

Michael looks at Aaron.

MICHAEL

It's me. I'm so glad to be home.

He leans forward in his seat. Janice smiles at his delivery.

AARON

(bored)

What are you doing here? How are you even alive?

MICHAEL

I don't remember. I woke up in a hospital and all I knew was that I had to get back here. To you

(beat)

and to Isabel.

Aaron sighs.

AARON
Lucas. Isabel and I are together.

MICHAEL
(emotional and sincere)
Steven, how could you?
(he stands)
You're my brother and Isabel is
(he looks down then back up)
the love of my life.

Janice tilts her head, a small, but genuine smile forming.

JANICE
Scene. Good. Thank you.

Michael, still emotional from being in character and offering a good performance, looks up at her.

MICHAEL
Thank you.

JANICE
A suggestion?

MICHAEL
Please.

JANICE
Don't audition for soaps anymore.

MICHAEL
Was it that bad?

JANICE
Tell your agent you're interested
in features. I've been around
awhile, and you're definitely more
of a leading man than a day player.

Her assistant nods in quiet agreement.

JANICE
That, and you're about ten years
too young for this particular part.

Michael nods solemnly.

JANICE
But we've got you on file now, so
if anything comes up, we'll call.

She reaches out for a handshake. Michael complies.

INT. LIVING ROOM - KATE'S TOWNHOUSE - NIGHT

Kate sits at her desk with a sharpened pencil in her hand, tapping it on the desk. She is in deep thought.

Pierre sits lazily on the couch, but growls when a knock sounds at the front door.

GREG(O.S)

It's me. I want to talk to you.

Kate approaches the door despite Pierre's objecting barks

KATE

(to Pierre)

Shh.

Kate opens the door to reveal Greg. He looks handsome.

GREG

Katie, I'm so sorry.

He takes a step forward; she blocks his way.

GREG

May I?

KATE

No. You shouldn't be here, Greg.

She partially closes the door; he holds it halfway open.

GREG

That girl--that "assistant" of yours--she lied to me, babe. She told me you were cheating on me.

KATE

You didn't think to confirm the story before you slept with her?

GREG

I'm an idiot. When she told me the truth, I came straight here.

Greg sticks his head through the door.

GREG

(poorly acted)

I love you, Kate. I love you and I want to be with you so badly.

Kate narrows her eyes. Pierre's growl grows fierce.

KATE
You are such a liar.

He acts as if he is confused by the accusation.

KATE
Just stop. You're acting skills are
on par with your writing ability.

His mouth agape, he stares at her. Finally, he smirks.

GREG
You're good.

Pierre runs to Kate's side, still growling.

GREG
I can't believe you insulted my
writing. You're getting sassy. I
really think I kinda like it.

She puts a hand on her hip. Pierre barks.

GREG
Alex dropped me as a client.

KATE
I'm so sorry to hear that.

GREG
Now who's a bad actor?

KATE
That wasn't acting; it was sarcasm.

Greg thinks about it then shrugs.

GREG
Anyway, he also told me how he's
working that deal with Supreme.
Need a co-writer?

Kate's face twists.

KATE
You're unbelievable. Go away. Now.

He smirks at Pierre who growls more ferociously than ever.

GREG
(to Pierre)
I never liked you either.

Greg leers at Kate for a moment more.

GREG

You I liked.
(closer and quieter)
But could never ever love.

Kate glares at him until he walks away, chuckling to himself. She closes and locks the door, blinking back tears.

Kate stands, lost for a moment, then slides down to the floor. She picks up Pierre and holds him close.

KATE

The bad writer man is gone now.

Pierre licks her face. She closes her eyes and sobs softly.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MICHAEL'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Michael walks from the kitchen with a bowl of cereal. When he hears a knock, he looks quizzically at the door. He opens it to reveal Alex. In contrast to Michael's pajama bottoms and t-shirt, Alex looks sharp in his suit and neatly combed hair. Michael takes a bite of his cereal.

MICHAEL

(mouth full)
What are you doing here?

ALEX

I came to discuss yesterday.

MICHAEL

So... that wasn't a bad dream?

ALEX

Not for her, anyway. Can I come in?

MICHAEL

No, man. I gave you my cell number.
How'd you even find my apartment?

ALEX

(matter-of-fact)
John has your address on file.

Michael gives him a look of disbelief.

MICHAEL

Look, I appreciate the intro to Mr. Drake, and I plan on keeping up my end of the bargain, but it's going to have to be on my own terms.

ALEX

Your terms don't matter.

Michael glares at him across his cereal bowl.

ALEX

All that matters are the
constraints dictated by a very
specific film genre.

Michael rolls his eyes, but steps aside to let Alex in.

ALEX

(looking around)

This is worse than I anticipated.

Michael seemingly ignores him. He sits on the couch, digging into his cereal. Alex watches him in disgust.

ALEX

Shockingly, you fared pretty well
in the raw charm department.

Michael raises his eyebrows; Alex takes a seat.

ALEX

After nothing more than a simple
"meet cute," she was ready to go
off and write the next When Harry
Met Sally.

MICHAEL

Then, we're done. She's agreed to
write the rom-com.

Alex tilts his head at the jargon.

MICHAEL

I Wikipedia-ed it yesterday. Did
you know that Roger Ebert's
actually the one who popularized
the phrase "meet cute."

He's comically smug. Alex is silently impressed.

MICHAEL

Anyway, I guess you won't be
needing me anymore.

He gets up as if to show Alex out.

ALEX

Oh, no, no, no. This will be played out to its conclusion.

MICHAEL

Which happens when?

Michael takes a bite of cereal.

ALEX

When you get the girl.

Michael nods, chewing and mulling everything over.

MICHAEL

So, she said she found me charming?

ALEX

Actually, she said she wondered if you drugged her or, even worse, gave her full-caf coffee.

MICHAEL

(disappointed)

Oh.

ALEX

And that you were hot and smart.

Michael grins then continues to chew his cereal.

ALEX

Romantic tension established. Now we enter phase two: witty banter.

Michael cocks his head to the side.

ALEX

Dialog is like foreplay. You have to keep her constantly wanting more. Begging for more.

Michael yawns and takes another bite of cereal.

INT. VENICE COFFEE COMPANY - DAY

Michael and Seth work behind the counter.

SETH

So, essentially, he wants you to talk your way into her pants.

MICHAEL

I'm pretty sure he was speaking figuratively.

SETH

Still. You should go for it. I know some pretty good lines if--

MICHAEL

I think I'll wing it.

SETH

Well, grab a Red Bull and drink up because here she is.

Michael looks up at the door in time to see Kate enter the coffee shop. She smiles when Michael waves to her, but takes a seat in her corner and digs out her laptop from her bag.

Michael prepares a latte. He delivers it to her table and sits down across from her. She looks at the coffee curiously. Michael nods. Kate sips it then nods approvingly.

MICHAEL

I have a confession.

KATE

What's that?

MICHAEL

I'm an actor. I just moved here from Kensington, Kansas.

Kate smiles.

KATE

That explains the suitcases on the sidewalk. Welcome to L.A.

MICHAEL

I have another confession.

KATE

You accidentally gave me full-caf coffee yesterday?

MICHAEL

(feigning confusion)

No...

KATE

Oh, well, it was just a theory.

He snaps and points at her.

MICHAEL
Oh, you know what? That might have
been the rufies.

He is serious for a moment, but then smiles.

MICHAEL
But seriously...

KATE
Your other confession.

MICHAEL
Yeah.
(he swallows)
Despite what I said yesterday, I
actually enjoy romantic comedies.

He bites his lip as if he's delivered embarrassing news.

KATE
That's really weird because,
despite what I said yesterday, I'm
actually writing one.

Genuine embarrassment shows on her face.

MICHAEL
That's hard to believe considering
your clear distaste for the genre.

KATE
Actually, my bitterness directly
relates. My agent has thrust this
upon me in an attempt to get a
studio deal.

MICHAEL
Studio deal? That's impressive. You
must be a real pro.

Kate smiles with gratitude.

KATE
Yet you're the one with all the
fresh perspective.

MICHAEL
That's me: farm fresh.

KATE
(escalating)

(MORE)

KATE (cont'd)

And, you have a firm grasp of the romantic comedy genre. Want to see what I have so far?

(she flips her laptop to reveal a blank document)

Nothing. That's what.

MICHAEL

You know, I'm actually off, like, (he checks his watch) now. Maybe we could take a walk?

She hesitates.

MICHAEL

Strictly business. I have an idea about that screenplay of yours.

She bites her lip adorably.

KATE

Okay.

He smiles then stands.

MICHAEL

Okay...

His gaze lingers on her for a moment.

MICHAEL

I've got to go clock out. I'll meet you outside.

She nods, packing up her stuff. Michael returns to the counter, tossing down his apron. Seth appears.

SETH

Whoa, what are you doing? That little tête-à-tête was your break, and you're not off until four.

MICHAEL

Cover me.

SETH

Oh, no way, dude. This is a coffee shop, not a hospital. I get minimum wage. There is no "covering."

MICHAEL
I'll give you all my tips tomorrow.

Seth considers.

SETH
Done.

MICHAEL
Thank you. Seriously.

Seth nods. Michael jogs out of the shop.

EXT. VENICE BEACH - DAY

Kate and Michael walk on the sidewalk, just at the edge of the sandy beach. The day is beautiful.

KATE
So. Kansas to L.A?

MICHAEL
Kansas to Chicago to Kansas to L.A.

KATE
What's in Chicago?

MICHAEL
(slow and sly)
Let's see. There's the Sears Tower,
Navy Pier, Grant Park, the Art
Institute, Second City, da Bears.
Oh, and most impressively, Oprah.

Kate groans playfully.

MICHAEL
There's also Northwestern.

KATE
Ah. Good school for journalism.

MICHAEL
It was my major--for a semester.

KATE
Mine, too. At UCLA. Then film.

MICHAEL
(points at himself)
Then theatre.

She looks at him pointedly and thoughtfully.

KATE
You're good at this.

MICHAEL
What?

KATE
Dialoggng.

He glances at her out of the corner of his eye.

MICHAEL
You mean talking?

KATE
I guess, but it's better than
talking, isn't it?

Michael folds his arms and raises his eyebrows insistently.

KATE
Well, there's talking: everyday,
run of the mill words strung
together and flung around, filled
with meaning yet lacking flair.

She walks so he follows, keeping pace as best he can.

KATE
(faster)
Then there's dialoggng: on the
surface, very similar, but
underneath: so much more.

She walks faster; Michael jogs to keep up.

KATE
At times, verbose and superfluous,
dialoggng conveys meaning with
style. It flows with a cadence that
keeps you on the edge of your seat,
your ears ever-eager for more.

They stop at the shore. Michael catches his breath.

MICHAEL
But who actually talks like that?

KATE
People in movies. And since I've
met you, you've been doing it.
(beat)
You should try screenwriting. I bet
your dialog is pretty good.

Michael shrugs then thinks of something:

MICHAEL
Speaking of screenplays...

KATE
You had an idea about mine.

MICHAEL
More of an offer.
(beat)
Maybe I can help you.

She turns away.

KATE
Sorry. I don't co-write.

MICHAEL
Co-write? No, I was thinking more
along the lines of... assistant.

Kate looks at him, curiously suspicious.

MICHAEL
Unless you already have an
assistant.

KATE
No, I did, but
(beat)
I just fired her.

MICHAEL
Oh.

KATE
Because she slept with my
boyfriend. Ex-boyfriend.

MICHAEL
Oh. Ouch.

Kate, still facing the water, shrugs.

MICHAEL
Want to talk--or dialog--about it?

She looks down, but shakes her head. Michael takes a slight
step toward her and lightly bumps his shoulder into hers.

MICHAEL

Hey, maybe this time, if you play your cards right, you'll be the one who sleeps with your assistant.

She holds back a laugh.

MICHAEL

I'm just kidding. I never mix business with pleasure.

Kate looks at him slyly.

KATE

Hmm, maybe I won't hire you.

He offers a polite scoff.

MICHAEL

Oh, now that was genius. Pure rom-com dialoging.

He abruptly sits down on the sand.

MICHAEL

The audience would just be wondering, "Does Kate like Michael as much as he seems to like her?" Then you'd hit them with that line.

She sits down next to him, listening.

MICHAEL

But then we'd take away their hope.

KATE

By agreeing to keep things professional.

Michael looks sideways at Kate.

MICHAEL

So does this mean I'm hired?

She smiles mysteriously.

INT. ALEX'S OFFICE - DAY

Kate paces around. Alex sits comfortably in his chair, not at all perturbed by her anxiety.

ALEX
Have you started on that--

KATE
Not yet.

ALEX
But... you will?

KATE
(ignoring him)
I hired a new assistant.

ALEX
Oh? What's her name?

KATE
His name is Michael.

Alex sits back, giving nothing away.

ALEX
Michael?

Kate sits down covering her face.

KATE
The coffee guy.

ALEX
The coffee guy you have a crush on?
You hired him to be your assistant?

KATE
He's an aspiring actor, but he's
got a knack for dialog.

Alex smiles briefly, but then plasters on a serious look.

ALEX
But he doesn't act. Or write
dialog. He serves coffee. Why?

KATE
Because he just moved here from
Kansas. He's also got an extensive
knowledge of the "rom-com" genre.

ALEX
(smug)
You must have had quite the
"interview."

KATE

This relationship is purely professional. And what I felt was best for the direction of my new project so maybe you should get happy about my new hire.

ALEX

And you're sure he's not some crazy stalker? You trust him completely?

KATE

Absolutely.

Alex smiles to himself.

INT. MICHAEL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Michael sits on his couch, sprawled out and watching You've Got Mail. Atop a DVD player on top of his TV, a stack of DVDS have their famous titles visible on their spines.

The door to the apartment opens, startling Michael who jumps to his feet. He sighs with relief when Alex walks in.

ALEX

This is L.A.; learn to lock your door.

MICHAEL

Learn to knock.

Alex glances at the T.V.; Michael sits down again.

ALEX

Research?

MICHAEL

Did you know You've Got Mail is a remake of a Jimmy Stewart picture?

ALEX

No.

MICHAEL

The Shop Around the Corner. I watched it. Margaret Sullavan was the female lead. Almost as charming as Meg Ryan... or Kate Albright.

Michael winks at Alex whose face does not change.

ALEX

Shop Around the Corner, huh? Kind of like the coffee shop around the corner where you no longer work now that you have a new job.

MICHAEL

(sheepishly)

Oh, is that why you're here?

ALEX

We're way off track now. I told you to engage her in banter not--

MICHAEL

Will you back off on the banter?

On the screen, Meg Ryan and Tom Hanks engage in banter. A knock at the door startles Alex.

MICHAEL

See, she knows how to knock.

ALEX

(whispering)

She? She Who?

Michael stands, walking toward the door.

KATE(O.S.)

It's me.

Alex's eyes widen.

MICHAEL

(whispering to Alex)

You can take the fire escape.

He thumbs over his shoulder in the direction of the bedroom.

ALEX

(whispering)

Why is she here? Is this a date?

KATE(O.S.)

Hello? Michael?

MICHAEL

I'll be right there.

(whispering)

She's here for business. She asked me to compile some research.

(he nods to the DVDs)

(MORE)

MICHAEL (cont'd)
Now get lost.

He points toward his bedroom.

ALEX
(whispering)
Is she just picking that stuff up
or is she staying to...

Michael shrugs, folds his arms and waits. Alex glares at him, but skulks down the hallway toward the bedroom. When he is out of sight, Michael opens the door.

Kate awaits, framed by the door. Her hair is pulled back in a sloppy ponytail held together by a pencil. She is wearing pajama pants and an obscure band t-shirt.

Kate holds a tin of Jiffy Pop in one hand and a leash attached to Pierre in the other. Pierre barks a hello.

MICHAEL
(stepping aside)
Keep in mind I just moved in.

She steps into his apartment without looking around too carefully. Pierre strides in confidently, sniffing the air.

She glances around then back at him, only to find him smiling at her. She shifts self-consciously. Pierre barks and pulls toward the bedroom.

MICHAEL
Uh... hey, popcorn?

KATE
Yeah. Pierre. Quit.

He whines, but sits down sulkily.

INT. BEDROOM - MICHAEL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Alex pushes up on the window, but it won't move. He glares at it before gritting his teeth and pushing with all his might. Nothing. He wipes a few beads of sweat from his brow.

INT. MICHAEL'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Michael places the Jiffy Pop on the stove; Kate stands by. Pierre walks behind, now unleashed. He sits at the door.

MICHAEL

I think the last time I saw this stuff was in *Scream*. Remember that? Drew Barrymore cooking up some popcorn during a very brief cameo.

KATE

I love that movie. Kevin Williamson is one of my screenwriting idols.

The popcorn begins to pop, startling them both.

MICHAEL

(creepy voice)

What's your favorite scary movie?

KATE

Ha ha.

MICHAEL

Actually, I hope you're in the mood for love.

She raises her eyebrows. He smiles playfully, using the Jiffy Pop handle to shake the popcorn.

MICHAEL

Or, love stories anyway.

(beat)

The video store clerk made a snide comment about how I cleared out the "chick flick" section.

Michael hands off the popcorn handle to Kate then searches through the mostly empty cabinets.

KATE

Did you tell him that using the term "chick flick" is both ignorant and narrow-minded? That it simultaneously implies that all men don't enjoy love stories and that all women do?

MICHAEL

Nah. I told him I was trying to get laid. I think he bought it.

His friendly smile soothes her. She lets the arms she planned to fold across her chest hang loosely at her sides. Michael holds the bowl out; Kate dumps the popcorn in.

MICHAEL

Shall we?

Her look is innocent but coy as she exits into the living room. Michael stands there a moment, holding his bowl of popcorn and falling ever so slightly in love.

INT. BEDROOM - MICHAEL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Alex sits on Michael's bed, staring out the window. He taps his hands on his thighs.

The muted movie sounds and murmur of conversation float through periodically. A buzz from the dresser catches Alex's attention. He spots a cell phone and goes to it.

Picking up the phone, Alex reads the caller I.D. to see that "Sandy- work2" is calling. He tilts his head.

When the buzz stops, Alex puts the phone down. He glances up at the series of photos on the mirror. He looks them over quickly, the photo booth strip of Michael and Sandy catching his eye. He pulls it down then flips it over where he finds the inscription: "Mikey-- Just a little reminder of the good times. Have fun in L.A. With love, Sandy."

ALEX

(quietly)

Sandy.

He looks at the picture again, thoughtful and soft. An interrupting buzz sounds once more. Alex grabs the phone.

ALEX

(whispered)

Michael's phone.

EXT. FARM HOUSE PORCH - KENSINGTON - NIGHT

Sandy sits sideways on a front porch swing with a very old cordless phone held up to her ear. She has on shorts and a short-sleeved plaid shirt, but looks all the more pretty for it: very farm girl meets cover girl.

SANDY

Who's this?

ALEX
 (on phone)
 Alex Poole.

INTERCUT: INT./INT BEDROOM/FRONT PORCH - NIGHT/NIGHT

SANDY
 Okay, Alex Poole, is Michael there?

Alex looks again at the picture in his hand.

ALEX
 No. I mean, he can't come to the
 phone. I'm his agent and--

SANDY
 Is he at another audition?

ALEX
 Another... oh, yeah. Yes.

SANDY
 Okay. Just tell him Sandy called
 and good luck with the audition.

ALEX
 Okay.

SANDY
 Thanks.

ALEX
 Not a problem.

He pauses to look at her picture again, not speaking.

SANDY
 Okay, well, bye, Alex the agent.

ALEX
 Bye, Sandy.

She hangs up; Alex turns off the cell phone. He sets it down
 on the dresser, but holds onto the picture.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MICHAEL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Michael and Kate sit on the couch.

ROMANTIC COMEDY WATCHING BRIEF MONTAGE

1. TAMMY AND THE BACHELOR: Opening Credits.

Michael laughs; Kate rolls her eyes.

KATE

Next.

Michael chuckles and gets up to change the movie.

2. SLEEPLESS IN SEATTLE: Sam talks on the phone with Dr. Marcia about how he makes it through each day.

KATE

Overcoming personal tragedy. Should I be writing this down?

3. PILLOW TALK: Jan first meets Brad.

Michael glances over at Kate; she glances back. He smiles and turns back to the movie. She does the same.

INT. BEDROOM - MICHAEL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Alex sits on the floor now, looking up and out the window. He picks up the phone again, hits a few buttons and waits.

INT. BARN - FARM - KENSINGTON - NIGHT

Sandy is grooming a horse in the barn, an electric lantern lights the stall. Her phone rings from the ledge of the stall door. The horse nays softly. Sandy pats him calmly then puts down the grooming brush to answer the phone.

SANDY

Hudson Vet Hotline. This is Sandy.
Do you have an emergency tonight?

INTERCUT: INT./INT. BEDROOM/BARN - L.A./KENSINGTON

Alex smiles, curious.

ALEX

Does extreme boredom count?

She laughs.

SANDY

Alex the agent, is that you?

Sandy grooms the horse, balancing the phone on her shoulder.

ALEX

I'm sitting here waiting for Michael and... I've never really met a girl from Kansas before so...

SANDY

(laughing)

This isn't that kind of hotline. I'm a vet, not a call girl.

Alex listens, his smile widening with each word she speaks. He picks up the photo strip again and draws one knee up, resting his elbow on it.

ALEX

I didn't know vets answered their own late night emergency hotlines.

SANDY

I'm trying to adjust to running everything without Michael. I'd like to hire another tech, or at least a receptionist, but until then, it's all me all the time.

ALEX

(flatteringly)

Sounds nice.

SANDY

You've never tried to administer medical care to pets while trying to answer the phone.

ALEX

Not to mention running the emergency hotline every night.

SANDY

Oh, God, but don't tell Mikey I said any of that. I don't want him to start feeling guilty. He deserves to be in L.A. right now.

She pauses to move over to the other side of the horse.

SANDY

You're easy to talk to, Alex.

ALEX

You're easy to listen to, Sandy

INT. LIVING ROOM - MICHAEL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Michael and Kate continue to watch PILLOW TALK. Pierre has replaced the popcorn between them. Michael has his hand resting on the dog's back so when Kate reaches over to pet him, she actually pets Michael's hand. She draws back.

KATE

Sorry.

He smiles, biting his lip.

MICHAEL

You see it in movies all the time.

KATE

What?

MICHAEL

"Accidental" contact. Like reaching for the popcorn at the same time.

She continues to watch the movie, but blushes.

ROMANTIC COMEDY WATCHING MONTAGE CONTINUED

1. PILLOW TALK: over the phone, Brad teases Jan about "Rex," hinting that Rex is probably gay.

KATE

Okay, that's evil.

MICHAEL

That's what you said about Tom Hanks in You've Got Mail.

KATE

Well, why does the guy always get to be in on the charade?

Michael tosses her a knowing smile.

2. HOW TO LOSE A GUY IN 10 DAYS: Andie brings her stuff to Ben's apartment, purposefully freaking him out.

KATE

At least in this one, the deception is mutual.

Michael looks over at her suspiciously.

KATE

Why do people have to be lying to each other for romantic tension to be created?

MICHAEL

It does seem to be a common theme, doesn't it?

He looks at her out of the corner of his eye.

KATE

Are there any other options?

3. SERENDIPITY: Sara spends the five dollar bill with Jonathan's number on it, explaining that if they're meant to be together then the bill will find its way back to her.

KATE

So if it's not a lie, it's "fate"... which is a lie...

MICHAEL

Maybe it's not.

KATE

Oh, so now you believe in fate?

MICHAEL

I believe in "fortunate accidents."

Kate rolls her eyes.

MICHAEL

Hey, I believe in unfortunate accidents, too.

KATE

Luck.

MICHAEL

(with a light laugh)
Life.

INT. BEDROOM - MICHAEL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Alex is still on the floor behind Michael's bed, talking on Michael's cell phone.

ALEX

Okay, listen, I'm from L.A. so anything I know about farming probably came from Green Acres.

EXT. FARM HOUSE PORCH - KENSINGTON - NIGHT

Sandy, on the phone, is curled up on a porch swing with a blanket wrapped around her and a cup of tea in her hand.

SANDY

How ironic. I learned about L.A.
from the Beverly Hillbillies.

INTERCUT: INT./EXT. BEDROOM/FRONT PORCH - NIGHT/NIGHT

ALEX

Thank God for Nick at Night, huh?

SANDY

I watched that the other night.
They play the Fresh Prince of
BelAir now.

ALEX

(imitating Will Smith)
In... West Philadelphia born and
raised...

Sandy cracks up.

SANDY

Don't get me started. I know the
whole thing.

Alex grins.

ALEX

Prove it.

She rolls her eyes up, smiling widely.

SANDY

Are you challenging me?

ALEX

I am so challenging you...

She smiles, about to give her performance.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MICHAEL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

WHILE YOU WERE SLEEPING: Jack explains to Lucy the intricacies of "leaning."

Closer to Kate, Michael yawns and puts his arm on the back of the couch behind her. She looks at him.

KATE
 (light)
 What are you doing?

MICHAEL
 Making a joke.

She smiles smugly.

KATE
 Uh-huh.

His arm still on the back of the couch behind her, he leans in to talk to her.

MICHAEL
 What? You think this is, like, a legitimate move I use on women? I'm a little more sophisticated than the "yawn-stretch," thank you.

KATE
 (smiling)
 I'm just saying: you made fun of me earlier over the "accidental contact" thing, which really was an accident, by the way.

MICHAEL
 I know.

He smiles, leaning a little closer to her.

MICHAEL
 Try not to let it happen again, though, because when something so pleasurable happens to me at a business meeting like this one, I tend to get a little... confused.

Kate swallows. Michael looks at her carefully, his playfulness replaced with the hint of desire.

MICHAEL
 I should tell you...

A beat.

KATE
 You should tell me?

He nods, licking his lips.

They move closer. Closer. Closer. Until finally. THEY KISS.

It is brief, but intense, and when they part, both are flushed and neither move away.

INT. BEDROOM - MICHAEL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Alex sits on the floor, the cell phone still to his ear.

ALEX
(on the phone)
I swear, when you first called, I
thought you were his girlfriend.

Whispers, giggles and feet shuffling make Alex look up.

ALEX
(on the phone)
Hey, Michael's coming. Gotta go.

In a panic, he stands and looks around the room, tossing the phone and Sandy's picture back onto the dresser.

As the shuffling feet move closer, Alex frantically throws open the closet only to find Michael's suitcases stuffed inside. He pushes once more on the window, but it is still stuck. As the door knob turns, Alex dives under the bed.

Kate and Michael enter together, kissing fervently. Kate pulls him onto the bed where he hovers above her, kissing her. She wraps both arms around him, pulling him closer.

From the dresser, Michael's phone rings. He ignores it.

KATE
Should you get that?

The phone stops ringing. Michael grins and kisses Kate. The phone rings again; both ignore it. He slides a hand up her body; she trails kisses down his neck.

MICHAEL
This is so much better than dialog.

KATE
I agree.

Their kisses become more intense until... the phone beeps.

KATE
(pulling back)
Voice mail?

MICHAEL
(moving closer)
Text message.

She puts a hand on his chest, holding him off.

KATE
Maybe it's an emergency.

He nods reluctantly, but gets up to retrieve the phone.

MICHAEL'S P.O.V. - CELL PHONE SCREEN

A text message reads "Under the bed. Alex."

BACK TO SCENE

Michael takes a deep breath, but sets the phone down.

KATE
Everything okay?

MICHAEL
Yeah. Just my sister from back
home. She gets worried.

Michael hits a few buttons on his phone then hits send.

Under the bed, Alex reads a message on his cell phone:
"Going to kill you." He rolls eyes.

MICHAEL
You know, Kate, I've had such a
good time with you tonight, but...

KATE
Uh oh.

She stands up, straightening her clothes and hair.

MICHAEL
You're my boss. We should probably
tread carefully.

Kate smiles and folds her arms.

KATE
I'd be glad to fire you.

MICHAEL

Except I don't want to be fired. I want to help you.

Kate looks down then back up. A beat.

KATE

Okay. So help me.

He nods, biting his lip and looking at her.

KATE

Walk me home?

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE MICHAEL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Kate and Michael walk outside. Kate holds Pierre on a leash.

MICHAEL

So you live nearby.

She points down the street.

KATE

Three blocks that way.

MICHAEL

You didn't tell me.

KATE

Just in case you turned out to be a psycho...

MICHAEL

"We all go a little mad sometimes."

KATE

Billy Loomis from Scream quoting Norman Bates from Psycho. Double quote. Bonus points.

They smile at each other, drawn a step closer.

INT. BEDROOM - MICHAEL'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Michael glances up at the bedroom of his apartment. Alex is watching from the window. He waves.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE MICHAEL'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Michael stares for a moment, catching Kate's attention. She turns to follow his gaze.

MICHAEL
Oh! Oh my God!

She looks back at him in confusion.

KATE
What?

MICHAEL
I forgot to lock my door.

KATE
Okay. Let's go back up.

She starts for the apartment.

MICHAEL
No!!

She turns to him, eyebrows raised.

MICHAEL
I mean, I can go. Wait right here.

He runs back inside. She watches him, slightly confused.

INT. MICHAEL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Michael enters the apartment and heads for the bedroom.

ALEX
She's still out there.

MICHAEL
And you're still in here. Why?

ALEX
I couldn't get the window open.

MICHAEL
So you hung out here for six hours?

ALEX
Seven. Sounded like you two had a good time. Maybe this idea of yours wasn't so bad after all.

MICHAEL
I'm sorry, I'm still stuck on you
spying on me for six hours.

ALEX
Seven.

Michael walks up to Alex, his hands clenched tight.

MICHAEL
Six. Seven. Whatever! You were
spying on me. From under the bed!

ALEX
That was more hiding than spying.

MICHAEL
You are unbelievable. I swear to
God, if I can open this window, I'm
throwing you out of it.

Michael strides over and pushes on the window. It's stuck.

ALEX
(smug)
You should tell the super.

Michael pushes up with all his might. It opens.

ALEX
(gulping nervously)
Wasn't Superman from Kansas, too?

MICHAEL
Notice, the window is now open.

Alex takes a frightened step back. Michael shakes his head.

MICHAEL
Just be out by the time I get back.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE KATE'S TOWNHOUSE - NIGHT

Kate and Michael walk along. Michael holds Pierre's leash loosely at his side. Kate stops in front of her townhouse.

KATE
Thanks again for the movies. They
were nice... in their own way.

MICHAEL

You gonna be able to do this now?

KATE

I don't know. It's like... I'd rather write about something that actually exists in the real world.

MICHAEL

I don't get you. You're upbeat and laid back. Why write about something lamenting and uptight?

KATE

Because writing about it draws attention to it. It lets people connect intellectually. I just can't see why someone would go out of their way to watch a romantic comedy. What do they get out of it?

MICHAEL

Interesting question. Do you have any other hangups holding you back?

She thinks then points at him.

KATE

The happy ending. I mean, who are they kidding? In reality, no one actually lives happily ever after.

Michael nods.

MICHAEL

Okay, I have a few ideas on helping you resolve these issues. Can I stop by tomorrow afternoon?

She nods.

MICHAEL

Great. I'll see you tomorrow.
(to Pierre)
Au revoir.

Pierre barks. Michael lingers a moment.

MICHAEL

About earlier...

KATE

Forget it; we're back on track now.

MICHAEL

Just what I was going to say.

He offers her a little wave before he walks away. She watches, a disappointed smile smeared on her face.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE MICHAEL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Michael strolls up, hands in his pockets, lost in thought. Alex waits on the stoop. Michael stops, annoyed.

MICHAEL

Why are you still here?

ALEX

To find out how it went. I mean, you guys almost--

MICHAEL

Forget that. I think I can actually do this in a legitimate manner.

ALEX

Do what?

MICHAEL

Help her write the screenplay.

ALEX

Did you work in any banter tonight?

MICHAEL

Alex! Listen to me for three seconds instead of trying to manage this scheme of yours.

Alex leans against his car, listening.

MICHAEL

Do you have a flip cam?

Alex raises his eyebrows.

INT. VENICE COFFEE COMPANY - DAY

Behind the counter, Seth is preparing a drink. He hands it to a woman. Michael appears next in line. Seth glares.

SETH

We don't serve traitors here.

MICHAEL

Oh, come on, I worked here for three days.

SETH

I know, and I really thought we'd bonded in those three days. Plus, you owe me a day's worth of tips.

Michael rolls his eyes. He opens his wallet and forks over a twenty dollar bill. Seth grins and snatches the money.

MICHAEL

Okay, so I'm going to need a vanilla latte, half-caf, and a...

SETH

Dammit, man. You're taking super-tip lady from me, too?

MICHAEL

I'll tip you five if you quit being a freak.

SETH

Show me the money.

Seth holds out his palm. Michael rolls his eyes. Seth reasserts his hand. Michael groans, but hands him a five.

SETH

So how's it going, man? You wooing the woman?

MICHAEL

No, but I am working on encouraging her to write the screenplay.

SETH

How?

MICHAEL

Funny you should ask...

Michael whips out a flip cam and turns it on Seth.

SETH

What the...

MICHAEL

I'm compiling research. Do you like romantic comedies?

SETH

Am I, like, part of a focus group?

MICHAEL

Sure.

FLIP CAM P.O.V

SETH

(smiling at the camera)

In that case, I love romantic comedies.

MICHAEL(O.S.)

What's your favorite?

SETH

(without hesitation)

Maid in Manhattan.

Michael laughs.

MICHAEL(O.S.)

Isn't that the one with Jennifer Lopez and Ralph Feinnes?

Michael mispronounces Mr. Feinnes name as "Ralf."

SETH

It's pronounced "Rafe." And, yes.

MICHAEL

Why do you like it?

SETH

Because Jennifer Lopez is a beautiful, beautiful woman.

Michael laughs.

MICHAEL

And, that's all?

Seth looks into the camera seriously.

SETH
 (thoughtful)
 Watching that movie gives me the
 sensation of falling in love. I
 like that feeling.

He looks down, rubbing at a nonexistent spot on the counter.

EXT. STREET - GRAUMAN'S CHINESE THEATER - DAY

STREET INTERVIEW MONTAGE - FLIP CAM P.O.V.

1. CONNIE AND JOHN: couple in their late 40s.

CONNIE
 Romantic comedies are
 super-wonderful.

JOHN
 I don't know why she thinks so.

CONNIE
 The sex.

2. KAREN AND ROGER: couple in their 50s.

KAREN
 I love them. They're so cute.

ROGER
 They're silly.

KAREN
 But they make me feel happy.

3. MARY AND TARA: women in their 20s.

MARY
 They make you feel like even if you
 are alone, maybe Prince Charming
 will be arriving at any moment.

TARA
 Please. Those movies make you feel
 bad for being alone.

4. ANDREW and TEGE: two men.

TEGE
 My wife likes 'em okay.

ANDREW

Come on, those movies are stupid.

5. JOSH: man in his mid-20s.

JOSH

I hate when guys act like they hate romantic comedies. I don't know any guy who wouldn't quote Matthew McConaughey to get a girl.

6. MISSY AND JASON: couple in their late 20s.

MISSY

What kind of people don't like romantic comedies?

JASON

Yeah. Whether you like the comedy--

MISSY

Or you like the romance.

JASON

Either way, you feel good.

MISSY

Either way... you feel.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MICHAEL'S APARTMENT - DAY

On the TV, the last scene of the montage, Seth's response, plays. Kate sits on the couch, watching. Michael stands by the TV, scrutinizing her reaction.

MICHAEL

Well?

KATE

Well...

She thinks a moment before looking up at him.

KATE

I've always tried to write movies that would make people think, but it appears that a lot of people would rather...

MICHAEL

Feel?

She nods, still looking at the now blank television.

EXT. VENICE BEACH - STORE FRONT SIDEWALK - DAY

Kate and Michael walk together along the sidewalk, the ocean is choppy in the background. The day is windy and cloudy.

KATE

This is hard. How do I make someone
feel like they're falling in love
when I've never been in love?

MICHAEL

Really? Never?

Kate shrugs.

MICHAEL

You should try it sometime.

KATE

I have tried... and failed.

Michael looks at her carefully.

MICHAEL

And now you've put up a wall?

KATE

Maybe.

Suddenly, rain pours from the sky, instantly soaking them both. Kate is perturbed, but Michael grins at her.

KATE

What?

MICHAEL

A wall can't stop something that
falls from the sky.

She pushes wet hair out of her face.

KATE

Come on. Let's get out of this. We
can go to my place. It's closer.

They walk then jog then run down the street together.

INT. KATE'S TOWNHOUSE - DAY

Kate and Michael enter, both soaking wet. Pierre lays in his bed near the door. He looks up, but goes back to sleep.

Kate wrings out her shirt and kicks off her shoes. She walks off down a hallway. Michael also takes off his shoes.

KATE

Heads up.

She tosses him a towel from down the hall then disappears again. He pulls off his shirt and uses the towel to dry his hair, head and chest. He looks down at his pants.

MICHAEL

Hey, Kate? Should I just go?

KATE

What? You can't leave now.

She pokes her head out from a hallway door. She is not wearing a shirt. Michael swallows, blushing slightly.

KATE

I need you to tell me more about being in love.

She now notices his own lack of shirt. She checks him out before looking away in embarrassment.

MICHAEL

You know I want to help, but...

KATE

You keep saying that.

He shrugs and gestures down to his wet body.

KATE

Hang tight. I've got a solution.

Michael hesitates, but stays where he is.

LATER

Michael and Kate sit on the couch. He is wearing a white terrycloth bathrobe embroidered with purple flowers. It's small on him. He shifts awkwardly, keeping himself covered.

KATE
So... love...

MICHAEL
Yeah...

He brings his gaze up to meet hers.

KATE
You've been in love?

Michael nods.

KATE
Will you tell me about it?

MICHAEL
What it's like to be in love?

KATE
Your story.

Michael, seeing the gaping robe, covers himself again.

MICHAEL
It won't help you. It's not the
kind of thing you see in movies
like the one you need to write.

KATE
Obviously, because it didn't last.
Love doesn't last.

Pensive and suddenly sad, Michael sighs.

MICHAEL
I think it's just that sometimes
circumstances get in the way of the
happily ever after.

He looks at her with a soft, endearing smile.

MICHAEL
I've never really compiled this as
a "story," per se...

KATE
Well, think cinematically.

MICHAEL
Cinematically?

INT. MOVIE THEATER - ANYWHERE - ANYTIME

Kate and Michael sit in the front row, two seats apart. Light flickers and a movie plays. We are stuck in the audience, behind Kate and Michael as they watch the screen.

MICHAEL

Since before we were born, our dads
had been in this feud.

ON SCREEN: EXT. MAIN STREET - KENSINGTON - DAY

On one side of the street, HAROLD HUDSON stands in front of Hudson Animal Clinic wearing a white lab coat. Across the street, SAMUEL STINSON, dressed the same way, stands in front of Stinson Animal Hospital. Each has his arms folded.

KATE

(chuckling)
Rival veterinarians?

ON SCREEN: INT. KENSINGTON HIGH SCHOOL - BIOLOGY CLASS - DAY

A class full of fifteen-year-old students sit at lab desks, listening to THE TEACHER as he draws and labels a cell.

One boy, YOUNG MICHAEL, doodles on his paper. Over his shoulder, we see his drawing: the Hollywood sign.

MICHAEL

In ninth grade, I had A pluses in
Acting I and Public Speaking, but I
was failing Biology miserably, much
to the dismay of my father.

ON SCREEN: INT. KITCHEN - FARMHOUSE - DAY

Young Michael sits at the table with Harold looming over and shaking a finger at him.

MICHAEL

The teacher set me up with a tutor,
the smartest girl in the freshman
class: Sarah Stinson.

ON SCREEN: INT. KENSINGTON HIGH SCHOOL - BIOLOGY CLASS - DAY

In an empty classroom, the teacher introduces Young Michael to YOUNG SARAH, a beautiful girl with long, blond hair.

MICHAEL

Who also happened to be the most beautiful girl in entire school.

Young Michael and Young Sarah sit at a lab bench, studying.

Another day: Young Sarah waits for Young Michael. He enters the room and shows her a test with a big red A on top. Young Sarah squeals in delight and beams at Michael.

MICHAEL

Man, that smile...

ON SCREEN: INT. KENSINGTON HIGH SCHOOL - BIOLOGY CLASS - DAY

Young Michael and Young Sarah sit at a lab bench. The classroom stays the same, but the kids grow older and the books become more advanced: from biology to chemistry to AP Chemistry to AP Physics. Young Michael answers questions with greater ease as the years go on.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - ANYWHERE - ANYTIME

Kate leans closer, listening and blocking our view of the screen. We get just little glimpses of what he describes:

MICHAEL

Senior year, she won first prize at the state science fair. Two weeks later, she was crowned prom queen.

KATE

But you guys were just friends?

MICHAEL

We were barely acquaintances if you asked anyone, but then...

INT. GYM - KENSINGTON HIGH SCHOOL - PROM - NIGHT

Though the picture still flickers as if being projected, we are no longer in the movie theater. We are there.

"A Red Carpet Affair" is written on a giant clapboard standee. Silver stars and cardboard film reels decorate the walls. Some students dance, others stand around talking. The place is packed and the music is loud.

On one wall, young Michael leans against a cutout of the Hollywood sign. He wears a tuxedo and a pair of sunglasses.

Young Sarah stands with a group of friends. She looks beautiful in a white dress. Young Michael walks over.

YOUNG MICHAEL
(extending a hand)
Want to dance?

Young Sarah glances at her friends, but then smiles only at Michael. That smile. "I'll Be" by Edwin McCain plays. She takes his hand, letting him lead her to the dance floor.

EDWIN MCCAIN
"And I'll be better when I'm older.
I'll be the biggest fan of your
life..."

On the dance floor, young Sarah and young Michael dance closely, intimately. Everyone and everything else fades.

YOUNG MICHAEL
(whispering in Sarah's ear)
I'm in love with you.

Sarah smiles, coy, but kind.

YOUNG SARAH
Tell me again in five years if you
still feel that way, Mikey.

She leans in and kisses him just to the side of his mouth.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - ANYWHERE - ANYTIME

Kate is now just one seat away from Michael. His face is flushed. He touches the spot where Sarah kissed him.

MICHAEL
Can we just end it here?

On the screen, young Michael and young Sarah keep dancing.

KATE
No. What happened in five years?

He closes his eyes, sighing. We again catch glimpses of his story flashing on the screen. This time, everything is extremely blurry, the faces indistinguishable.

MICHAEL

I had already graduated and moved back home. I was working at my father's office, and hating every minute of it. She was in vet school, but came back to work at her dad's office for the summer.

KATE

Ah. The rivalry torch passed on to the next generation.

MICHAEL

Except I secretly consorted with the enemy on a regular basis.

INT. MAIN STREET PIZZA - DAY

The picture is clear. Michael, grown up, sits at a table with a partially eaten pizza in front of him. Across the room, Sarah, still a beautiful blonde, drops quarters into a jukebox and makes her selection: "I'll Be" by Edwin McCain.

KATE(V.O.)

She wanted you to say it again.

Sarah makes her way back to Michael and holds out her hand.

SARAH

Want to dance?

Several curious patrons and waitresses watch Michael take Sarah's hand to dance with her by their table.

MICHAEL

(whispering in Sarah's ear)
I'm in love with you. Five years hasn't it changed it, and neither will fifty. I want to kiss you...

Sarah pulls back so that she is looking at him now.

MICHAEL

(soft and passionate)
I want to kiss you and be this close to you all the time.
(he moves closer)
Sarah, I want to marry you.

KATE(V.O.)
 You proposed to her before you even
 kissed her?

MICHAEL(V.O.)
 Shh...

Sarah smiles with shy desire and moves closer to him.

SARAH
 One thing at a time.

She kisses him fervently. He cups her cheek, kissing her
 back passionately.

They are stopped only by the cheers of the other people in
 the restaurant. Sarah wraps her arms around his neck and
 buries her head in his shoulder. The song continues.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - ANYWHERE - ANYTIME

The picture on the screen fades to black. Kate is now in the
 seat right next to Michael. She turns to him, but he just
 stares up at the black screen.

MICHAEL
 The end.

KATE
 But--

MICHAEL
 The end.

The lights come up in the theater. Kate blinks repeatedly.

INT. KATE'S TOWNHOUSE - DAY

They still sit together on the couch. Michael stands.

MICHAEL
 Are my clothes ready yet?

INT. KATE'S TOWNHOUSE - LAUNDRY CLOSET - DAY

In silence, Kate pulls Michael's clothes out of the dryer
 and hands them to him one article at a time.

KATE
We forgot your socks.

He shrugs as if they are unimportant to him.

KATE
(concerned)
Are you okay?

His gives her a grin that doesn't quite pass as genuine.

MICHAEL
Turn around. I want to get dressed.
(he lifts a flirtatious
eyebrow)
Unless you want to watch.

She rolls her eyes, but turns around.

KATE
I'd really like to know how it
ended with you and Sarah.

As Kate's words hang in the air, over her shoulder, Michael drops his robe. Everything below his waist is covered by the still-open dryer door.

For a moment, Michael stares at Kate's back. He glances up at the ceiling then pulls on his boxers.

MICHAEL
Okay, you can turn back around.

KATE
That was
(she glances at his boxers)
quick.

He hangs his head a moment before looking up at her.

MICHAEL
She died of cancer last fall.

Her face drops in shock.

MICHAEL
Not quite the cliché you were
looking for, huh?

KATE
Michael, I...

MICHAEL

She made me promise I'd move to
L.A. and give my dreams a chance.

He smiles then sighs. He pulls on his shirt. It takes several seconds before he continues.

MICHAEL

The happy ending slipped away.

INT. LIVING ROOM - KATE'S TOWNHOUSE - DAY

Michael, now dressed, looks out the glass doors. The rain has stopped and there is the hint of sunshine. Kate walks up and stands next to him, close but not invasive.

KATE

If I had known... I wouldn't have
pushed you like that, Michael. I
should have left it at "the end."

He looks over and smiles at her.

MICHAEL

If only we could make our stories
end where we want.
(beat)
Then again, if it had ended there,
I wouldn't be here. And that would
be... incredibly unfortunate.

He looks out the door, squinting in the now bright sunlight. She smiles and tentatively reaches down to take his hand. He squeezes back appreciatively.

After a moment, she pulls his hand up to her mouth, softly kissing it. He closes his eyes at the contact then turns to face her, keeping her hand in his. He takes her other hand.

They look at each other for several seconds. He slides his hands up her arms and to her neck, his lips near hers.

MICHAEL

Don't do this because you feel
sorry for me.

KATE

Don't do this because you want me
to be her.

He looks down, licking his lips. He looks up with a smile.

MICHAEL

I hope you can see that right now
what I want--all I want--is you.

They come together in a lustful kiss.

DISSOLVE TO:

SCREENPLAY WRITING MONTAGE

1. Kate lies in bed asleep. Michael, fully dressed, kneels beside her with a cup of coffee. She wakes up, smiling.

2 In her living room, Kate sits on the couch with her laptop on her lap. Michael sits at her desk, organizing DVDs into two stacks.

3. Michael sits next to Kate on the couch. He tries to peek at the laptop, but she turns it away.

4. THE HOLIDAY plays on the television, but on the couch Michael and Kate make out.

5. On the beach, Kate and Michael sit on a blanket enjoying a picnic. Kate is scribbling in a notebook. Michael watches with a smile.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - KATE'S TOWNHOUSE - DAY

Kate stands at the door. Michael is halfway out.

KATE

You know what I want? Right?

He grins.

MICHAEL

This is a complicated question.

She smiles, tucking her hair behind her ear.

MICHAEL

But if you meant the coffee...
yeah, I think I've got it.

She kisses him on the cheek. He smiles at her.

KATE

Thanks.

He nods then exits. She closes the door and rushes to her computer. She sits down and starts typing.

EXT. VENICE COFFEE COMPANY - DAY

Alex sits at an outdoor table, sipping coffee. He wears khaki pants and a polo shirt. He talks on a cell phone.

ALEX

You know, I think I like Saturday.

EXT. FARM HOUSE YARD - KENSINGTON - DAY

Sandy lays out on a lawn chair wearing a modest bathing suit and sunglasses. She holds her cordless phone up to her ear.

INTERCUT: EXT./EXT. - COFFEE SHOP/YARD - DAY/DAY

SANDY

Recent revelation?

ALEX

Usually I'm a Monday kind of guy.

SANDY

Are you really that much of a workaholic?

ALEX

Are you really laying out?

Sandy smiles, adjusting her sunglasses.

SANDY

You know, I love my job too. And if I'm closing up shop to come to L.A. for a few days, you better believe I'm working on my tan in advance.

(a beat)

Think Mikey will be surprised?

ALEX

He will definitely be surprised.

SANDY

Hopefully that writer will be done with him by the time I get there.

ALEX
He told you about Kate?

SANDY
Yeah. In thirty second intervals
when he wasn't running errands.

ALEX
What did he say? Is she writing?

SANDY
Yeah. He said she's almost done.

Alex cocks his head, but then looks up as Michael approaches the shop. Alex grabs a newspaper from the next table and covers his face with it.

SANDY
Still there?

ALEX
Yeah. Can I call you back?

Sandy looks momentarily confused, but she smiles.

INT. LIVING ROOM - KATE'S TOWNHOUSE - DAY

Kate sits at her laptop, furiously typing, writing a screenplay. She types "THE END." She clicks the print icon, prompting her printer to spit out pages into a neat stack.

She immediately exits the room, begins to shed clothes and walks down the hallway then into the bathroom. The shower turns on. The heavy thud of water hitting the porcelain tub nearly drowns out the frantic zips of the printer.

LATER

A knock sounds over the still running shower. Pierre, in his bed by the door, looks up to watch Alex enter the apartment.

ALEX
People in L.A. really need to learn
to lock their doors.

He looks down at Pierre who yawns.

ALEX
Or at least upgrade guard dogs.

Alex looks around, noticing the trail of clothing on the floor in the hallway. Near the door, he sees Michael's socks, unmoved from a week ago. He nearly jumps up and down.

He looks down the hall toward the sound of the shower. He sneaks over to the printer just as it spits out the last page. His jaw drops slightly when he picks up the stack. The title page reads: "Again in 5 Years by Kate Albright."

ALEX

It's about time.

Alex looks back toward the sound of the still-flowing shower then reaches out to the computer to click print. He quickly shuffles out of the apartment with his own copy of the screenplay safely rolled and tucked in his pants' pocket.

EXT. KATE'S TOWNHOUSE - STOOP - DAY

Alex exits the house just when Michael walks up, carrying two cups of coffee and a full courier bag.

ALEX

(to himself)

Oh, that's cute.

The two meet at the bottom of the steps.

ALEX

Mikey, you're amazing.

MICHAEL

Thanks?

ALEX

When were you going to tell me that she's writing?

MICHAEL

She won't even let me look at it until she's done.

ALEX

What else haven't you told me?

Michael groans.

MICHAEL

Go away, Alex. It's been so nice this week without you hovering.

(beat)

Where've you been anyway?

Alex shrugs.

ALEX

Funny you should ask. I kind of met
this girl, actually. She's amazing.

Michael lifts his eyebrows in pleasant surprise.

MICHAEL

Good for you.

(beat)

I'm going to go in now, but keep me
posted on the girl thing.

Michael walks past Alex and up the stairs of the townhouse.
Alex watches, his eyes narrowed with curiosity.

INT. LIVING ROOM - KATE'S TOWNHOUSE - DAY

Kate walks in wearing her robe, her hair wrapped in a towel.

Michael enters through the front door. As he takes in her
appearance, a captivated smile plays on his lips.

KATE

I just got out the shower.

MICHAEL

I see that.

He hands her a coffee, his eyes still adoring her.

MICHAEL

I stopped by my place to get all
that stuff you wanted.

He pulls out a stack of screenplays and DVDs and hands them
over to Kate. He discards his bag on the couch.

KATE

I have something for you, too. It's
printing now. Take a look.

Michael glances at the printer. When he looks back at Kate,
she has already walked back down the hall. He approaches the
printer. The last page, the title page, spits out.

MICHAEL

(shouting)

Kate... is this what I think--

KATE
It's not for the studio.

MICHAEL
Oh...

Deadpan, Michael stares down at the pages as they print.

INT. ALEX'S OFFICE - DAY

Alex sits comfortably at his desk, reading the screenplay. A small, satisfied smile creeps onto his lips. He picks up the phone and dials.

ALEX
Harry? Alex Poole. I think we're going to get that script out of Kate after all... Yes, sir. I'll keep you posted...

Alex tosses the script on his desk. He is elated.

INT. BEDROOM - MICHAEL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Michael lies in bed, reading the screenplay. He gets to the last page and smiles. He stares at the screenplay a moment with a look of pleasant nostalgia. He closes the screenplay and sets it down next to him on the bed. He closes his eyes.

INT. LAX - BAGGAGE CLAIM AREA - DAY

Alex stands around, looking at passengers that approach. Among them, Sandy emerges. Alex smiles when he sees her, struggling to carry a large suitcase with no wheels. He almost lets her walk right by him before he speaks:

ALEX
In L.A., the girls usually carry their own bags, but...

She stops and turns to him, smiling.

SANDY
You'll make an exception for a poor Kansas farm girl?

ALEX
Just this once.

He reaches out to take her suitcase, their hands touching innocently in the turnover. Accidental contact.

ALEX
(enchanted)
Hi.

SANDY
Hi. Alex the agent, I presume?

ALEX
Only if you're Sandy the vet.

They stand, beaming at one another.

INT. LIVING ROOM - KATE'S TOWNHOUSE - DAY

Kate sits at her desk, looking through the stack of DVDs and screenplays. She wears a skirt, tank top and cardigan--very Meg Ryan from You've Got Mail.

Michael walks in with the screenplay. Kate looks up, startled until she sees it's him. He holds up the script.

MICHAEL
So, this? Wow.

KATE
(standing)
Yeah?

MICHAEL
You're a great writer. I mean, I knew that, but... wow.

He looks down at the screenplay.

MICHAEL
This is almost better than the real thing.

KATE
I figured after I badgered the story out of you, it'd be nice to give it back to you in a way that would mean something just to you.

He looks at her with a warm smile of appreciation.

MICHAEL
I thought this happy ending was lost forever, but... here it is.

He reopens the screenplay to the last page.

MICHAEL

Right there on page one-eighteen.
You gave me back my happy ending.
Literally. Thank you.

He smiles genuinely.

KATE

And you gave me the ability to see
the purpose of romantic comedy.

He sits down on the couch.

MICHAEL

Do tell.

Kate stands and paces as they talk.

KATE

Romantic comedies are special
because they don't represent life.

MICHAEL

I thought you already knew--

KATE

They showcase the best of life like
a snapshot of a happy memory that
you can go back to over and over.
And, you know, I'm okay with that.

Michael smiles at her admission.

MICHAEL

So now what?

KATE

So now I'm ready to write something
for Supreme. With your help.

MICHAEL

I can try, but you're pretty
amazing all on your own.

A beat.

KATE

Are you busy right now?

MICHAEL

Busy showering you with praise.

They both laugh.

KATE
Good, then you won't mind helping
me brainstorm. What should this
screenplay be about?

MICHAEL
Seriously?

KATE
Seriously.

She grabs her laptop and joins him on the couch.

MICHAEL
(contemplative)
Hmm...

He looks around the apartment with his hand on his chin.
Kate stares at her screen. She looks at him suddenly.

KATE
Random thought: are you afraid to
fall in love? You know, again.

He considers the question.

MICHAEL
A week ago, I would have been
terrified of even thinking about
answering that question.

KATE
But now?

MICHAEL
Now I'm just a little
afraid... to say... that I could
easily see myself falling in love
again.

She stares down at her laptop, but he looks only at her.

MICHAEL
Very, very easily.

KATE
(looking up)
I'm afraid. To fall in love.

Michael looks at her carefully.

MICHAEL
Was your ex-boyfriend on drugs?

KATE
(confused)
No...

MICHAEL
Then he must just be insane because
you're the most interesting person
I've met in L.A. The smartest. The
most beautiful. The best writer.
(he grins)
The absolute sexiest.

She blushes, embarrassed by the compliments.

KATE
That is a list of superlatives that
describes someone else entirely.

MICHAEL
No, Kate. It describes you.

She glances at him, vulnerable and unsure.

MICHAEL
You're the girl in all those
movies: the super-talented at
whatever she does self-doubter.
(beat)
I have an idea. For the screenplay.

KATE
Indie screenwriter Kate gets
cheated on by her loser boyfriend--

MICHAEL
Indie screenwriter Kate
refuses the request of Supreme
Studios to write a romantic comedy
because she is morally opposed to
the genre...

KATE
Until she meets the down-to-earth
actor Michael...

MICHAEL
Who just may be her very own
leading man.

Kate laughs.

KATE

Funny.

MICHAEL

Yeah, but I'm serious.

She bites her lip.

MICHAEL

Make the writer a total slouch in need of a makeover and have the actor in it for his own gains--

KATE

How so?

MICHAEL

He wants a role in the movie.

Kate considers this.

MICHAEL

At some point, she goes through a transformation--inside and out, of course. And then he falls for her.

KATE

And then he falls for her? After this geek-to-chic cliché of a makeover. Then he falls for her.

MICHAEL

Fine, she's equally hot and smart, and when he meets her the first time, he falls instantly in love.

He meets her raised brow with a bashful smile.

MICHAEL

Anyway, somewhere along the way, she stops thinking of him as just some superficial actor. She falls in love with him and--

KATE

To be honest, I'm not really a fan of pulling from my own personal life experiences when I write. I mean, I know that's what you're supposed to do, but--

MICHAEL

So... are you saying that it is
your own personal life experience
to fall in love with the actor
helping you with your screenplay?

He asks the question with innocent flirtation, but his
interest in her response is intense.

KATE

No. I just...
(she looks away)
That's not what I was saying.

He tilts his head to look at her then smiles adoringly.

MICHAEL

(gently)
Maybe you should say it. If it's
true, you should say it.

She avoids eye contact with him.

MICHAEL

Because the down-to-earth actor
would secretly be in heaven if the
indie screenwriter faced her fear.
(he leans toward her)
Also, if you don't want me falling
in love with you... you should
probably stop me now.

He looks into her eyes, inching closer. When he gets close
enough, he closes her laptop. He smiles.

MICHAEL

You haven't stopped me.

KATE

I'm aware.

He leans even closer to her, his lips almost touching hers.

MICHAEL

Last chance.

With no protest, they meet in a gratifying and intense kiss.

The only barrier between them is the laptop. As they kiss,
Kate sets the laptop aside on the coffee table. This allows
Michael to move even closer to her.

He slides his hands up her arms and to her neck. She grabs
his shirt as he moves his body into hers.

EXT. KATE'S TOWNHOUSE - STOOP - DAY

Alex and Sandy stand together. Sandy has on a blue dress with her hair tied back. She looks lovely and winsome.

ALEX

Okay. You ready?

SANDY

You're sure it's okay to stop by like this? What if they're working?

ALEX

It'll be okay.

(a beat)

But if it turns out you end up hating me after this--

SANDY

Why would I--

ALEX

I just want to say that you look absolutely... beautiful.

Sandy blushes, but beams. They gaze at each other.

INT. LIVING ROOM - KATE'S TOWNHOUSE - DAY

Kate and Michael still kiss on the couch.

KATE

(between kisses)

What ever happened to not mixing business and pleasure?

MICHAEL

What are you talking about?

Business is over there.

(he nods over to the laptop)

Pleasure is right here.

(he kisses her neck)

Or, maybe here.

(kiss)

Or, over here.

She wraps her arms around him; he continues his kissing.

The door opens suddenly. Michael and Kate trade a look of amused panic. They break apart just as Alex walks in.

From his bed, Pierre sits up and watches.

ALEX

Hi, guys.

Michael grumbles. Kate, blushing, feigns nonchalance. She stands up and gestures toward Alex.

KATE

Michael, this is my Alex, agent. My agent... Alex Poole.

Michael barely nods in his direction.

KATE

Alex, this is Michael Hudson. My...

She glances at Michael who smiles and stands up.

MICHAEL

Her assistant.

He puts a hand out to shake with Alex. Alex obliges.

MICHAEL

So... what do you want?

Kate turns to him, her eyes narrowed in response to his rudeness. But her surprise shifts to Alex when he speaks.

ALEX

(to Kate)

I came to let you know that I sent Harry the screenplay and he's loving it so far.

KATE

What?

MICHAEL

What screenplay?

ALEX

(feigning confusion)

The one about the guy from Kansas... falls for the smart and beautiful biology tutor.

An angry flush fills Michael's face. He turns to Kate.

MICHAEL

"Not for the studio," huh?

KATE

I--

She looks at Alex, still confused.

MICHAEL

(angry)

I mean, I tell you a story about
the love of my life and you write
it down and pass it off to be made
into a major motion picture?

Before Kate can explain, a smirking Alex pulls the photo strip of Sandy and Michael from his pocket.

ALEX

Love of your life? Her, right?

He holds up the picture.

MICHAEL

Where the hell did you get that?

ALEX

This picture doesn't do her
justice. She's quite beautiful in
person, isn't she, Mikey?

Michael stares at him, fuming. Kate is confused.

MICHAEL

Don't you dare call me that again.

KATE

Wait. She's alive?

Alex smirks.

ALEX

(shouting)

Hey, Sandy? Come on in.

Sandy walks in from the hall, smiling.

SANDY

Surprise!

She runs over to Michael, giving him a hug. Michael is taken completely off-guard as he feebly returns the hug and glares at Alex. When Sandy backs away, she looks around at the tense expressions on the faces of the people in the room.

MICHAEL

Yes, she is alive. Maybe you can add that as a twist to your screenplay. Supreme would love--

KATE

I don't think you have the right to lecture me about deceit.

MICHAEL

Except you'll have to explain that she

(he points at Sandy)
is my sister.

Sandy looks at Alex. He shrugs, feigning cluelessness.

KATE

(eying Sandy)

I don't get it. Why is your sister from Kansas standing in my living room... with my agent?

MICHAEL

That's a good question and I'm also interested in the answer.

(he shoots Alex a look)

But, at the moment, I'm more interested in why you gave him the screenplay that you said was just for me. I mean, you could have told me. You didn't have to lie.

KATE

I didn't lie. Alex...

Kate turns to Alex. Sandy eyes him curiously.

KATE

(to Alex)

How'd you get the screenplay?

Alex pretends to be confused. Sandy is genuinely lost.

ALEX

I got it off your printer yesterday. You were in the shower. I just assumed...

(he covers his mouth)

Was it something private?

KATE

If you read it, you know it was.
The second page was a letter to
Michael explaining that it was for
him. Just him. Come on, Alex.

Michael scoffs and walks over to Alex.

MICHAEL

Now I see what you're doing.

Alex's smirk prompts Michael to grab his collar.

ALEX

Whoa, back off, dude. No need to
get so... into the role.

Michael inhales deeply then shoves him away.

SANDY

What in the world is going on?

Kate rushes over to step in between Michael and Alex.

KATE

It's okay. He won't sell it.

She gives Alex a pointed look to emphasize the point. Alex
straightens his tie, avoiding eye contact with Sandy.

ALEX

I think this is getting a little
out of control. We should probably
just tell her.

Kate looks from Alex to Michael. Sandy cocks her head.

MICHAEL

(to Alex)

Oh, come on. Don't do this. Please.

Alex shrugs.

ALEX

(to Michael)

Gotta get to plot point two
somehow, buddy.

(to Kate)

I hired him to seduce you so you
could get a feel for this romantic
comedy stuff.

SANDY
You did what?

KATE
Yeah. What she said.

MICHAEL
You didn't hire me.

ALEX
Fine, I got you an agent in
exchange for fooling Kate into
thinking you're a decent guy.

MICHAEL
I...

Michael looks at Kate. Sandy looks from Michael to Alex.

ALEX
I mean, didn't you think it was a
bit of a coincidence to find the
guy you were eying at the coffee
shop chatting you up in the park?

Kate stares at Alex, processing. Sandy shakes her head.

MICHAEL
It was a coincidence. The whole
thing. He doesn't even know how we
met on the street that day.

Alex tilts his head looking at Kate. She shrugs. Sandy looks
to Alex, but he again avoids her eyes.

ALEX
(to Michael)
Regardless. You played this well.
She obviously fell for it... I mean
you. You must be an amazing actor.

Michael looks at Kate, his face showing all his emotions.

MICHAEL
It wasn't an act.

Kate folds her arms. Sandy stands next to her brother.

KATE
But it wasn't true.

Michael's chin drops to his chest.

KATE

Get out.

MICHAEL

Kate, I'm sorry. I'm so, so sorry.

KATE

I said... get out.

Michael looks at her, his eyes pleading. Kate clenches her jaw. Michael nods, giving Alex one last dirty look before he exits. Sandy doesn't look at Alex as she follows Michael out the door. Pierre stands, wagging his tail as Michael and Sandy walk past. Sandy gives him an apologetic pat.

When they are gone, Kate turns her ire on Alex.

KATE

How could you?

ALEX

I wanted you to feel what it was like to be courted by a genuinely nice guy, and he is a genuinely--

KATE

Alex--

ALEX

He is a nice guy.

KATE

Get out.

ALEX

Kate...

KATE

Go.

She points to the door.

ALEX

Can we at least use the screenplay?

KATE

No.

ALEX

Oh, come on. It's a great story.

KATE

It's not my story. Now get out.

Alex shrugs, shaking his head. He exits in a hurry.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. VENICE BEACH - DAY

Michael and Sandy sit on the beach. A long beat passes.

MICHAEL

How's Scooby doing?

SANDY

The Gravenhorsts got a new cat.
Scooby couldn't be happier.

Michael smiles. A beat.

MICHAEL

I think I'm in love with Kate.

Sandy smiles and looks at Michael searchingly.

SANDY

She seemed nice.

Michael looks at her doubtfully.

SANDY

I mean, she seemed like she could
be nice, if she wasn't furious.

MICHAEL

She's smart. Too smart for her own
good. Too smart to forgive me.

He sighs, picking up then dropping a handful of sand.

INT. VENICE COFFEE COMPANY - DAY

Kate sits with Sally Burns who holds a script.

SALLY

I think you should forgive him.

Kate looks away. A beat.

SALLY
Well, anyway, the script is lovely.

KATE
Thanks, but I'm not using it.

SALLY
Why on earth not?

KATE
It's not my story.

SALLY
So tell your story.

KATE
I don't know that I can.

SALLY
Too bad.
(a beat)
I recommend against firing Alex. He meant well. Sometimes, when you're in the industry, you get so caught up in the fiction that you forget you live in reality.

Kate mulls it over with a sip of coffee.

EXT. LIVING ROOM - MICHAEL'S APARTMENT - DAY

A knocking echos through the apartment. Sandy answers to reveal Alex holding a coffee holder with three coffees.

ALEX
Hey, can we talk? All of us?

SANDY
Alex, you used my brother and, in the sick and twisted process of doing so, you also used me.

ALEX
I didn't use you guys. Michael and I had an agreement. He knew what--

SANDY
So it's just me you used then.

Sandy walks away, leaving the door cracked. Alex follows.

ALEX

I wanted you to be here for him.
Plot point two is really tough.

Sandy spins, walking back toward him.

SANDY

Plot point two? Am I even supposed
to know what the heck that means?

ALEX

Heck? Man, you are so Kansas-cute.

Sandy stares at him. Alex hands off the coffee. She sets it
down on the coffee table.

ALEX

Which, let's get real, is the main
reason I asked you to come to L.A.

SANDY

Alex... I like you, too... but...

The sound of footsteps silences her. Michael enters the room
from the hallway wearing just a towel around his waist.

MICHAEL

I thought I heard an idiot talking.

ALEX

Michael. I think things went well
with Kate today... considering.

MICHAEL

(to Sandy)

What the hell is he doing here?

ALEX

Look, all I wanted--

MICHAEL

I don't care what you wanted.

ALEX

I want you to--

MICHAEL

What, Alex? What do you want?

ALEX

I want you to get the girl.

MICHAEL
Get the girl? That's pretty much
impossible now... thanks to you.

ALEX
You really don't get this, do you?

Michael puts his hands up in an exaggerated shrug.

ALEX
This is the part where some sort of
elaborate charade is revealed,
forcing the leads apart. This was
the plan all along.

MICHAEL
Your plan.

ALEX
But your story.

MICHAEL
No. This isn't my story. It's hers.
I'm just the guy who messed it up.

Michael walks off down the hallway. Sandy turns to follow.

ALEX
Sandy?

SANDY
Just go.

Alex sighs, but complies. Sandy exits down the hallway.

EXT. PARK BY THE BEACH - TRAIL - NIGHT

Sandy and Michael walk together.

SANDY
So, what are you going to tell her?

MICHAEL
The truth.

SANDY
And you're sure she'll be out here?

A dog barks in the distance. Pierre suddenly appears from
the darkness and sits at Michael's feet with a red ball.

MICHAEL
Bonsoir, Pierre.

SANDY
Hey, I remember you.

Sandy kneels to pet him and look him over. Kate approaches.

KATE
You've got to be kidding me.

Sandy rises as Pierre hops at her feet.

SANDY
Oh, Kate! We weren't properly
introduced the other day. I'm Sandy
Hudson. I really am his sister.

KATE
(to Michael)
What are you doing out here?

MICHAEL
Looking for you.

Sandy ping pongs her gaze between them then nods to Pierre.

SANDY
Would he play fetch with me?

Kate stares at her icily then looks at Michael.

KATE
He'll play fetch with anyone.

Sandy smiles and picks up the red ball. Pierre eyes it,
chasing after Sandy as she runs off down the beach.

Kate and Michael face each other for a long moment.

KATE
(cold)
Alex was right about you being a
good actor. I had no clue you were
faking it... any of it.

MICHAEL
Come on, Kate. You know it was
real... all of it.

KATE
Except for the whole "Alex putting
you up to it" thing.

MICHAEL
I couldn't say no.

KATE
Why? Did he put a gun to your head?

MICHAEL
No. He put you in front of my face.
Half-caf vanilla latte girl.
(he searches for the words)
How do you think I ended up at
Venice Coffee? I wasn't looking for
a job. I was looking... for you.

She rolls her eyes.

KATE
Do you write all your own lines or
did Alex give you that one?

MICHAEL
(angry and escalating)
Are you kidding? Do you still think
it was all an act? Do you think
my--your--agent gave me all my
lines? Do you think my assistant
went out and interviewed people for
you? Do you think I had a stunt
double serve you coffee? Do you
think my sister is really my dead
fiancée? Huh? Do you think that I
haven't been falling madly in love
with you since the moment we met?

She hangs her head.

KATE
I don't know what I think.

MICHAEL
I think you do.

She looks up.

KATE
Fine. Then I think you're a fraud.

MICHAEL
And I think you're afraid.

Their shared stare tells equally of desire and distaste.

MICHAEL

In about thirty seconds, I'm going to call my sister over here. Then in a few days, I'm going to go with her back to Kansas so if you want to stop me, stop me now.

He looks at her; she stares back. He nods. Kate opens her mouth, but closes it again. Michael looks over to where Sandy kneels with Pierre near the shore.

MICHAEL

(yelling)
Sandy? Let's go.

He looks back at Kate.

MICHAEL

I'm sorry for hurting you.

They share a heartbroken look until Sandy and Pierre return. Michael looks at Pierre then at Kate one more time.

MICHAEL

Au revoir.

Pierre barks; Kate says nothing. Michael turns to leave. Sandy gives Kate an apologetic look, but goes with Michael. He walks quickly without looking back.

FADE OUT

EXT. ALEX'S OFFICE - DAY

SUPER: "Six Months Later"

Alex stands in front of the office, leaning on a large, rolling suitcase. He wears a long-sleeved t-shirt and cargo shorts. His sporty sunglasses are propped up on top of his head. Kate's car pulls up in the lot.

INT. KATE'S CAR - DAY

Kate drives. Alex sits in the passenger seat.

ALEX

Thanks for the lift to the airport.

KATE

No problem.

They sit silently for a moment.

ALEX

Can you believe they got Gwyneth Paltrow to sign on? Wow.

KATE

She's amazing. And Janice Jones has been great as casting the minor roles. She's also made a few suggestions for the male lead.

ALEX

But you rejected them all.

KATE

He's hard to pin down.

ALEX

Maybe that's because you wrote a story about a screenwriter and an actor who actually get together. Unlike in real life when you let him walk away because... why, again, did you do that?

KATE

Can we not talk about this? I forgave you. I wrote the screenplay for you. I'm in the process of directing the movie for you. And I'm taking you to the damn airport.

ALEX

All of which I appreciate, but none of which make you happier, Kate.

KATE

And what do you think would make me happier? Being with a guy who blatantly proclaimed someone else the love of his life?

ALEX

Jesus. This is about the dead fiancée? I thought it was my fault.

She looks away from him as she pulls up to the airport.

ALEX

When I get back, we'll talk.

KATE

Where are you going anyway?

ALEX
I told you, vacation.

EXT. HUDSON VETERINARY CLINIC - KENSINGTON - DUSK

Sandy, dressed in her white jacket, is helping get Scooby into his owner's car. Sandy waves as they drive away. The office phone rings from her jacket pocket. She pulls it out.

SANDY
Hello?...
(she grins)
Oh, hi.
(dutiful)
I really don't think you should be
calling me at--What do you mean
"look across the street"?
(she looks)
Oh no...

Alex, on a cell phone, crosses toward her.

ALEX
Hi.

He holds the phone up with a shrug. They both turn off and put up their phones. She snaps out her momentary shock, grabs his shirt and pulls him into a nearby alley.

SANDY
Are you crazy? If Michael sees you
here, he'll...

ALEX
Be even more sad and brooding?

SANDY
I was thinking "shoot you."

ALEX
(gulping)
Does he actually have a gun?

SANDY
Maybe. So explain. What are you
doing here? Quickly.

ALEX
Kate let Michael walk away because
she thought he still loved Sarah
more than he could ever love her.

SANDY

What? I thought it was all about that dumb stunt you organized.

ALEX

Me, too. I was thinking Michael should know the truth.

SANDY

So you got on a plane to come and tell him?

ALEX

No. I actually found out about that on the way to the airport.

He looks at her pointedly and sincerely.

ALEX

See, I was getting a little sick of talking to you on the phone.

(he leans toward her)

Don't get me wrong, I love talking to you. I could do it forever, but

(he touches her hair)

I'd rather do this...

He leans in to kiss her, but she pulls back.

SANDY

I don't know, Alex...

He clears his throat and adjusts his sunglasses.

ALEX

I had a little speech prepared so we can do that instead.

Sandy looks at him curiously. He takes a deep breath.

ALEX

When I picked you up at the airport in L.A. six months ago, you were--you are--so beautiful and appealing to me. And even though this all started because I was trying to help Michael get the girl, I would really, really love... to get the girl.

She grins then moves in to kiss him.

MICHAEL(O.S.)
What the hell?

Alex and Sandy break apart before they kiss.

ALEX
Tell me he's not holding a gun.

Sandy smiles, stepping between Alex and Michael.

MICHAEL
I repeat: what the hell?

Alex puts an arm around her waist, using her as a shield.

SANDY
Michael, don't get mad.

MICHAEL
Too late.

SANDY
We've talked everyday since L.A.

Michael's jaw drops. Alex never takes his eyes off Michael, moving Sandy from side to side as Michael paces.

MICHAEL
Get the hell off my sister.

He makes a move toward Alex who lets out a small yelp.

SANDY
I've been trying to think of a way
to tell you for months, but--

ALEX
It's my fault really.

MICHAEL
Who the hell asked you?

ALEX
You've said "hell" four times now.
I'm going to take that to mean
you're really pissed.

Michael stares at him for a moment then looks back at Sandy.

MICHAEL
You're an adult so do what you
want, but know that this guy is a
creep and--

ALEX

I'm a changed man.

MICHAEL

And I'm sure he has something up his sleeve. He's probably been using you to get to me.

SANDY

I've got it covered.

Sandy folds her arms. Michael shrugs and walks back down the alley, annoyed. Alex smiles and takes a step toward her.

ALEX

You handled that so well.

Sandy shrugs.

ALEX

He didn't even try to kill me.

SANDY

I think he was hoping you actually did have something up your sleeve--in the form of a cute and quirky screenwriter.

ALEX

I wish I did. For his sake and hers, but, unfortunately for them, my intentions are true.

She smiles, smitten with him.

SANDY

Care to prove that?

He smiles and nods, taking a step toward her. She meets him for a well-received kiss.

INT. HUDSON VETERINARY CLINIC - KENSINGTON - DUSK

The door opens, and Michael enters.

KATE(O.S.)

I was starting to wonder if anyone worked at this place.

She stands at the counter holding Pierre. Michael scowls.

MICHAEL
I knew it.

KATE
You knew it? You knew what?

MICHAEL
That he was using my sister.

Kate looks around, her face twisted in confusion.

KATE
Who?

MICHAEL
(exasperated)
Alex.

KATE
Alex is on vacation.

MICHAEL
I don't know if you'd call making
out with my sister in the alley
next to her office a "vacation--"

KATE
Wait. Did you just say that Alex--

MICHAEL
Is making out with my sister in the
alley? Yes, I did just say that.

KATE
(confused)
When I dropped him off at the
airport, I had no idea...
(she shakes her head)
Is he really out there?

Michael nods.

KATE
Making out with your sister?

MICHAEL
I'm assuming.

KATE
Did he say why?

MICHAEL
(confused)
I'm starting to think that maybe
it's because... he likes her.

KATE
I can't believe I didn't think of
that subplot. It's so obvious.

Michael, taken with her again, has to force the smile away.

MICHAEL
So if Alex didn't bring you here...
what are you doing here?

KATE
Pierre's due for a check-up, but
his regular vet was unavailable.

Michael stares at her searchingly. Finally, he smiles.

MICHAEL
Take him into exam room two.

Kate smiles with a sigh of relief.

INT. EXAM ROOM 2 - DUSK

Michael weighs Pierre on a scale.

MICHAEL
Twenty-four pounds.

Michael examines Pierre's ears.

MICHAEL
I read in the trades that you got
Gwyneth Paltrow for your movie.

KATE
You've been keeping up?

Michael shrugs, but then nods.

KATE
We're having the hardest time
casting the male lead.

MICHAEL
Can't find anyone to play the
down-to-earth actor, huh?

KATE

No, I can't. And it's sort of becoming a problem in my life.

A beat. Michael swallows.

MICHAEL

Pierre is good to go. Although I bet he could use a walk.

Pierre perks up at the word "walk."

EXT. KENSINGTON - MAIN STREET - TWILIGHT

Kate and Michael walk along silently. Michael holds Pierre's leash; Pierre trots proudly in front of them. They trade curious looks with one another.

MICHAEL

What are you doing here? Really.

KATE

I... wanted to thank you.

MICHAEL

For what?

KATE

For teaching me that even though life goes on after happy endings, they're still special enough to be put on paper, produced then projected onto big silver screens in small towns just like this one.

Michael stares at her, unable to stop his smitten smile.

MICHAEL

In that case, you're welcome.

A beat as they stop in front of an old movie theater.

KATE

You know... you shouldn't walk away from a happy ending because you're afraid of what might happen next.

MICHAEL

I wasn't afraid. I just thought--

KATE

And you shouldn't stay away because you're too stubborn to accept an apology and move on--

MICHAEL

Stubborn? I was the one who apologized to you.

KATE

And I was the one who was afraid and stubborn. You know that.

(beat)

And I'm still afraid.

(she looks down)

I'm afraid that you'll never love me the way you loved Sarah.

MICHAEL

Oh, Kate--

KATE

But I'm even more afraid that... you will.

He gives her a lopsided smile.

MICHAEL

You're afraid of a happy ending?

He takes a step toward her in an attempt to kiss her, but she backs out of the way. He stumbles forward and into her. Embarrassed, he looks away. She gently releases his arms.

KATE

But then what?

MICHAEL

Then what what?

KATE

We kiss. Pan out. Long shot.

(beat)

Then what? What happens after that?

Michael smirks, considering the options.

KATE

The answer is... life. Like, real life. The parts they don't show in movies like the one I'm making. The parts I left out of your story.

MICHAEL

The hard parts. The sad parts.

KATE

Right.

MICHAEL

The funny only to us parts, the dialog-free parts, the R-rated parts. The X-rated parts.

(he steps toward her)

The parts where we sit together and drink coffee in the morning.

(another step)

I mean, Kate, life has a lot of parts, but we're allowed to have that one part. That part we tell our kids about. That we each think about to help us through all those other parts. That one really, really, really good, happy part.

KATE

And what part is that?

MICHAEL

This part.

He looks into her eyes intently. She nods slightly. He leans toward her. They kiss and Kiss and KISS.

The shot pans out to become a LONG SHOT of the couple kissing on the sidewalk with Pierre at their feet.

FADE OUT

EXT. STREET - GRAUMAN'S CHINESE THEATER - NIGHT

A movie premiere is underway. Fans line up across the street while reporters interview celebrities on a red carpet. The place is abuzz with Hollywood-style excitement.

A nearby FEMALE ENTERTAINMENT REPORTER begins her piece:

REPORTER

I'm here at the premiere of The Happy Ending. This film marks Kate Albright's directorial debut. Albright is most known on the indie circuit for her cerebral scripts, but today she shows everyone a softer side, including Michael

(MORE)

REPORTER (cont'd)
 Hudson: the film's virtually
 unknown leading man who also
 happens to be Albright's real-life
 main squeeze.

EXT. VENICE BEACH - NIGHT

Alex and Sandy stand next to a limo while Pierre runs around on the nearby beach. Alex wears a tux; Sandy a designer dress. Sandy has her eye on Pierre, but Alex only has eyes for Sandy. She glances at him and smiles.

SANDY
 I can't believe I'm going to an
 actual Hollywood premiere.

ALEX
 I can't believe the most beautiful
 girl in the world is my date.

She beams; he takes her hand.

ALEX
 If we ever get there, that is.
 (he pounds on the limo door)
 Can we get in yet, or what?

INT. LIMO - NIGHT

Michael, in a tux, and Kate, in an evening gown, are in the middle of a seriously intense make out session. They part.

MICHAEL
 I think they're ready to go.

KATE
 I think they can wait.

She kisses him again. He reciprocates.

MICHAEL
 Have I mentioned how hot you look?

KATE
 Have I mentioned how scared I am?

MICHAEL
 (grinning)
 I know just what you need.

INT. VENICE COFFEE COMPANY - NIGHT

Seth stands behind the counter, absently wiping it down. Michael barges in and rushes to the counter.

MICHAEL
Half-caf vanilla latte.

SETH
Are you serious?

MICHAEL
Do I ever joke about coffee?

SETH
I can't come to the premiere, by the way. I have to work.

Michael looks around.

MICHAEL
There's no one here.

SETH
Plus, as you know, my fiancée dumped me so I don't have a date.

Michael grins.

MICHAEL
Since when did you need a date to watch and enjoy a romantic comedy?

Seth considers.

EXT. RED CARPET - GRAUMAN'S CHINESE THEATER - NIGHT

Sandy and Alex get out of the limo and walk down the carpet.

Seth, still in his work clothes, hops out the limo with Pierre in his arms. He waves to the cameras all the way down the red carpet. Pierre gives an occasional bark.

INT. LIMO - NIGHT

Michael watches Kate take one last gulp of her coffee.

EXT. RED CARPET - CONTINUOUS

Kate and Michael exit the limo. All eyes turn to them. Cameras flash. Reporters ask questions. Hand-in-hand, Kate and Michael walk down the red carpet together.

DISSOLVE TO

EXT. STREET - GRAUMAN'S CHINESE THEATER - NIGHT

Reporters mill about, recording or phoning in their stories. Movie guests exit the theater, smiling and chatting.

Kate, Michael, Alex and Sandy walk out together. The four stop due to sidewalk congestion. Alex holds Sandy's hand.

SANDY

The movie was amazing, Kate.

KATE

Thank you.

ALEX

I still say it needed an epilogue.

SANDY

Why?

ALEX

It's a treat for the audience. A quick peek into the future to show where your characters end up after the happily ever after.

KATE

Yeah, but that misses the point. It's called The Happy Ending.

ALEX

Life goes on after a happy ending.

MICHAEL

But the story is self-contained, and if you go beyond it, you're basically sabotaging the integrity of the entire thing. Right?

KATE

Exactly.

Alex considers this and shrugs. Amused, Sandy walks ahead with Alex. Michael stands with Kate. He runs a finger up then back down her arm, looking at her lovingly.

MICHAEL

(to Kate)

I hope you're not still afraid that
I'll end up loving you.

(he leans in close)

Because I do, Kate. I love you.

She smiles, looking down.

MICHAEL

I have to admit, I kind of like the
romcom epilogue scene, too. The
audience would actually get to hear
the actor tell the writer he loves
her... and get to hear the writer
say it back without being afraid.

(he clears his throat)

I said, the audience would get to
hear the writer tell the actor that
she loves him. Anytime now...

She leans to him, grazing his cheek with her lips.

KATE

I do.

(even closer)

I love you, Michael.

He matches his lips to hers. They kiss fervently. Around
them, photographers snap pictures, but they see nothing,
hear nothing, feel nothing but each other.

EXT. LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA - ESTABLISHING - NIGHT

The Hollywood sign stands tall against the Hollywood Hills.

THE [HAPPY] END[ING]