

THE SMALLEST LIE

Written by

Bernard Mersier

BLACK SCREEN:

"The smallest lies create the most fatalities."

~Bernard Mersier~

FADE IN:

INT. THE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

The eccentric restaurant is filled with positive energy, consuming the patrons enjoying their evening. Glasses clink, and conversations merge with the smooth jazz coming from the speakers tucked in the corners.

Blake, a handsome Caucasian man in his mid-thirties is sitting nervously at a table wearing something casual, adjusting his collar for the third time. Light sweat is seen on his smooth skin, causing his shirt to slightly stick. Picking his phone up from the table, he checks the time.

INSERT PHONE SCREEN

7:28 PM

BLAKE (V.O.)
Why did I let Marcus talk me into
this?

He takes a sip of water.

DARRELL (O.S.)
(Deep smooth voice)
Blake?

Blake looks up.

Darrell stands at six-foot-two, with the kind of dark skin that catches the candlelight in a way that seems almost ethereal. He's wearing a fitted burgundy button-down, highlighting his sculpted frame. With his sleeves rolled up, they reveal intricate tattoos on his forearms. His smile is confident, warm and just a little bit devastating.

Blake quickly stands up, nearly knocking over his glass of water.

BLAKE
(Nervous tone)
Yes. I'm Blake.

DARRELL
Marcus showed me your picture on
our lunch break.
(MORE)

DARRELL (CONT'D)
(Blushes)
But seeing you in person is so much better.

BLAKE
You're not so bad yourself.

Once they take their seats, the awkwardness Blake was feeling instantly dissolves. Darrell has a way of making a conversation feel effortless as they begin talking about their jobs.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE RESTAURANT - MOMENTS LATER

The two are sitting with their meal, still laughing and talking.

BLAKE
(Laughing)
Wait, you actually jumped off a bridge?

Blake dabs at his eyes with his napkin.

DARRELL
(Chuckling)
Bungee jumping. And yes, I screamed like a little kid the entire way down. My friends recorded it, so I'll never live it down.

BLAKE
I have to see that video.

DARRELL
Absolutely not.
(Light chuckle)
That stays buried in the vault.

Blake takes a sip from his wine, while blushing.

DARRELL (CONT'D)
Can I ask you something?

BLAKE
Sure.

DARRELL
What made you decide to go through with this? A blind date takes a certain amount of courage.

Blake considers the question, twirling his fork through his pasta.

BLAKE

Honestly? I've been hiding for a while. From life, from possibilities, from getting hurt again. Marcus basically told me I needed to stop being so scared.

DARRELL

So, you were scared about meeting me?

BLAKE

Terrified. I still am, a little.

Darrell reaches across the table, covering Blake's hand. The touch sends electricity through Blake's entire body.

DARRELL

You don't have to be scared with me. I'm just a guy who's hoping to get to know you better.

Blake looks into Darrell's eyes and sees something he desperately wants to believe in.

BLAKE

I'd like that.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE RESTAURANT - LATER

The music has come to an end and patrons start clearing out.

Blake and Darrell don't notice until the server politely informs them that they're closing.

Getting up from the table laughing, they leave the restaurant.

I/E. THE PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

As the two walk through the parking lot, Darrell takes Blake's hand, and it feels like the most natural thing in the world.

BLAKE

(Soft tone)

I don't want this night to end.

Darrell stops, which causes Blake to stop and look at him.

DARRELL
Then it won't.

Darrell pulls him close, and their first kiss happens under the glow of shoebox lights, sweet, tender and full of promise.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

Blake and Darrell are at a coffee shop having a deep discussion.

Blake and Darrell are at a comedy show, enjoying themselves, releasing gut-busting laughter.

END MONTAGE:

INT. BLAKE'S HOUSE - THE DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The layout is a tad bit bold because of the colors, but it's peaceful.

They're having a quiet dinner

DARRELL
You are a master chef. I cannot lie.

BLAKE
(Blushes)
You're exaggerating.

DARRELL
I'm serious. This is incredible.
(Savors another bite)
Where did you learn to cook like this?

BLAKE
My grandmother raised me after my parents died. She taught me everything. How to cook, how to be kind, how to stand up for myself.
(Soft tone)
She passed away five years ago.
Cancer.

Darrell sets his fork down and reaches for Blake's hand.

DARRELL
I'm so sorry. She sounds like she was an amazing woman.

BLAKE

She was. She was the first person I opened up to. I was sixteen and terrified. She just hugged me and said, 'Baby, I already knew. And I love you exactly as you are.'

DARRELL

She gave you a beautiful gift... acceptance.

Blake squeezes Darrell's hand.

BLAKE

She did. What about your family?

A shadow crosses Darrell's face, quick but unmistakable.

DARRELL

It's complicated. I have three younger siblings I help take care of. My mom passed when I was twenty-two, and my dad... he's not in the picture. I've been trying to hold things together ever since.

BLAKE

That must be hard.

DARRELL

It is. But they're worth it.

(Slight smile)

Enough heavy talk. Tell me about this succulent Marcus mentioned.

BLAKE

(Laughs)

It's dying slowly on my windowsill. I think I'm watering it too much. Or not enough. I can't tell.

DARRELL

We'll have to fix that. I'm actually pretty good with plants.

BLAKE

Really?

DARRELL

My mom had a garden. She taught me how to care for things. How to be patient. Plants are honest. They show you exactly what they need if you pay attention.

BLAKE
(Quiet tone)
Unlike people.

DARRELL
Unlike people.

CUT TO:

INT. BLAKE'S HOUSE - THE LIVING ROOM - LATER

The room has a basic cozy feel.

They're sitting on Blake's couch pressed together, watching an old movie neither of them are paying attention to.

Darrell's fingers trace lazy patterns on Blake's arm, and Blake feels something dangerous blooming in his chest-hope.

BEGIN MONTAGE

Blake and Darrell are in their separate homes, having a conversation on the phone.

The two are enjoying the paintings at a contemporary art exhibit downtown.

END MONTAGE:

INT. BLAKE'S HOUSE - THE DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The two are sitting at the table eating Thai food.

DARRELL
You're too talented to let idiots
like that get to you.

Darrell hands Blake a spring roll.

BLAKE
It's just frustrating. I spent
weeks on those designs, and he
completely dismissed them.

DARRELL
Because he's a fool who wouldn't
recognize good work if it slapped
him in the face. You're brilliant,
Blake. Don't let anyone make you
doubt that.

Blake feels tears pricking his eyes.

BLAKE

Thank you. I needed to hear that.

Darrell gets up and walks over to him, pulling him into an embrace, and Blake melts into it, breathing in his scent.

INT. BLAKE'S HOUSE - THE BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

Inside of the eccentric bedroom, the two are lying in bed, and Blake has his head resting on Darrell's chest.

The soft drops of rain tapping against the window can be heard.

BLAKE

That was...

DARRELL

(Kisses Blake forehead)

Yeah... It was.

BLAKE

I haven't felt this way about anyone in a long time.

DARRELL

Neither have I.

Blake tilts his head up to look at Darrell.

BLAKE

Promise me something?

DARRELL

Anything.

BLAKE

Promise me you'll always be honest with me. Even if the truth is hard.

Darrell's expression is unreadable for a moment, and then he smiles.

DARRELL

I promise. I'll always be honest.

Blake settles back against him, satisfied.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

Blake is standing by the front door in the living room, when Darrell comes in looking at him confused.

The two are having dinner at a restaurant, and when Blake playful goes to reach for Darrell's phone, Darrell quickly snatches it, shocking them both.

Darrell enters Blake's office in the graphic designer building with a bright smile, placing lunch and a coffee on Blake's desk.

Blake is lying in bed under the covers, smiling, reading the text messages on his phone.

Darrell is holding Blake close, while the two are in bed.

END MONTAGE:

EXT. BLAKE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Blake has a fairly decent house in a quiet upscale neighborhood.

Blake is standing on the steps wearing a tailored navy suit.

Darrell pulls up in his all black Mustang and comes to a stop.

He gets out wearing a sharp black suit that makes him look like he stepped out of a magazine.

Darrell approaches Blake with the brightest smile.

DARRELL
You look incredible.

Darrell pulls him in for a deep kiss.

BLAKE
(Blushing)
So do you.

Walking over to the, Darrell holds the door open for Blake, allowing him to get in.

Once he's seated and comfortable, Darrell walks over to the driver's side door and gets in.

They give each other a passionate kiss before he pulls off.

CUT TO:

INT. DELIGHTED TASTEBUDS - LATER

The layout is elegant, intimate. The private room features floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the city skyline, now ablaze with the colors of sunset.

A single table sits in the center, adorned with white roses. Blake's favorite.

BLAKE
(Overwhelmed)
Darrell, this is too much.

DARRELL
Nothing is too much for you. You worked hard for your promotion, and you deserve to be celebrated.

They start with oysters, and then move to a delicate lobster bisque, followed by seared scallops that melt on their tongues.

Throughout it all, they talk and laugh, falling deeper into each other.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DELIGHTED TASTEBUDS - LATER

The only things remaining on the table are a candle, their wine glasses and a bottle of wine.

BLAKE
(Buzzing, happy)
Can I tell you something?

DARRELL
Always.

BLAKE
I'm falling in love with you.
Actually, I believe I know for a fact that I'm in love with you.

Darrell's eyes soften, reaching across the table, taking both of Blake's hands in his.

DARRELL
I love you too. More than I thought
I could love anyone.

Tears spring to Blake's eyes.

BLAKE
Really?

DARRELL
Really.

Darrell stands and comes around the table, pulling Blake to his feet and into his arms.

They kiss, deep and passionate, pouring four months of connection into that single moment.

When they pull apart, they're both breathless.

BLAKE

There's something I want to ask
you.

A flicker of something—fear?—crosses Darrell's face.

DARRELL

What's that?

BLAKE

Move in with me.

The silence that follows feels like an eternity.

DARRELL

Blake, I...

BLAKE

I know it's soon, but it feels
right. We're always together
anyway. And I meant what I said.
There's room for your siblings too.
We could make it work.

Darrell steps back, and runs a hand over his face.

DARRELL

It's complicated.

BLAKE

What's complicated about it? If you
love me—

DARRELL

I do love you. But my situation...
I need more time.

BLAKE

...Okay. I can wait. I just want you
to know that I'm serious about us.
About building a future together.

Darrell pulls him close again.

DARRELL

I know. And I want that too.
Just... give me time to sort things
out.

BLAKE

Of course.

They return to their seats, but something has shifted. An
unease has crept into the space between them, subtle but
present.

INT. BLAKE'S HOUSE - THE KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Blake is standing in the kitchen smiling, pulling his phone
out so he can make a call to Darrell.

BLAKE

Let's go to the beach tomorrow. The
weather is supposed to be perfect.

DARRELL (V.O.)

(Hesitant tone)

The beach?

BLAKE

Yeah. We could use a day to just
relax, and be together. What do you
say?

There's a pause, and then Darrell's voice comes through,
warm again.

DARRELL (V.O.)

You're right. Let's do it.

BLAKE

Perfect. I'll pack us lunch.

DARRELL (V.O.)

You don't have to do that.

BLAKE

I want to. Besides, you love my
cooking, remember?

DARRELL (V.O.)

(Laughs)

Something I'll never turn down. How
about we save that for later, and
just enjoy our time on the beach?

BLAKE
(Blushes)
Okay.

CUT TO:

INT. BLAKE'S HOUSE - THE BEDROOM - NIGHT

That evening, while Blake is folding clothes thinking about Darrell, his phone buzzes with a text from Darrell. He picks up the phone and reads the message that says

INSERT PHONE SCREEN

I can't wait until tomorrow. I love you.

Blake smiles, typing back.

INSERT PHONE SCREEN

I love you too. It's going to be perfect.

EXT. THE BEACH - AFTERNOON

The air is buzzing with carefree chatter under the endless blue sky as the packed beach glows under the warmth of the sun shining down on sand and water.

Laughter floats on the warm breeze, mingling with the soothing sound of waves.

People are spiking volleyballs over sagging nets, while others are sprawled on towels with their skin glistening.

Blake and Darrell come walking down the beach hand-and-hand wearing matching swim trunks that are a subtle declaration of unity, a quiet statement in a world that doesn't always understand.

Blake has a reddish glow that makes him look seductive in the sunlight, but the weight of eyes pressing on them causes the glow to slightly dim.

Some glances are fleeting, curious, or indifferent. Others linger, heavy with judgment and disapproval. A quiet sigh escapes him. His shoulders tense with that familiar ache he lost after being with Darrell. The ache of being seen but not accepted.

BLAKE
Why are gay people still frowned
upon?

Darrell's gaze sweeps over the joyful scene, with an unshaken smile, though something flickers in his eyes—too quick to catch.

DARRELL

Who cares what they think?

Blake's grip tightens on Darrell's hand, seeking the anchor of his touch.

BLAKE

I care. We're no different from anyone else out here.

Darrell stops walking, and gently pulls Blake to a halt.

He wraps his arms around Blake's waist, using his warmth as a shield against the world's cold stares.

DARRELL

As long as you know I love you, that's all that matters.

A blush spreads across Blake's cheeks. He buries his face in Darrell's shoulder, inhaling the faint scent of salt.

BLAKE

You always know how to lift me up.

Darrell's eyes drift, then quickly return.

DARRELL

All we need is each other.

Blake nods.

BLAKE

You're right. I won't let it get to me again.

Their lips meet in a tender kiss, a private vow sealed amidst the public display.

Some onlookers turn away, and their faces twist in disgust.

Others smile, warmed by the sight of love in its rawest form.

Blake and Darrell continue their stroll. The waves become a soothing backdrop to their shared silence.

DARRELL

I need to know one thing.

Blake's eyebrow arches, matching his partner's teasing tone.

BLAKE
Oh? What's that?

DARRELL
Are you making your famous meal
tonight?

Blake's blush deepens.

His hand trails playfully across Darrell's sculpted abs.

BLAKE
I'll make sure my man is more than
satisfied.

Darrell chuckles, leaning in to kiss Blake's temple.

DARRELL
That's just one of the many reasons
why I love you.

Blake giggles, bashful but delighted.

BLAKE
What do I get for this amazing
meal?

Darrell's smile grows wider as his lips brush against
Blake's cheek.

DARRELL
Tonight, the satisfaction I give
you comes with a bonus.

BLAKE
Oh. Let's get home.

DARRELL
I was thinking the same thing.

CUT TO:

INT. BLAKE'S HOUSE - THE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Blake is straddled on Darrell, with his hips moving in
urgent passion.

Darrell's hands grip Blake's waist, guiding him closer as
their moans weave a symphony of shared pleasure.

The rhythm quickens.

Sharp slaps from Darrell's hands meet Blake's skin, escalating their climax.

Their cries of release tear through the room simultaneously.

Blake collapses forward, pressing a breathless kiss to Darrell's lips before rolling to his side.

Both men lie glistening with sweat, and their chests heaving.

Blake reaches for the blanket, pulling it over them before snuggling into Darrell's side, with his heart still racing.

Darrell wraps an arm around him.

A quiet smile crosses his face, but his eyes remain distant, troubled.

BLAKE

(Soft, teasing)

Did you enjoy your meal?

DARRELL

(Hollow tone)

As always. Did you enjoy yourself?

Blake's fingers caress the faint lines of Darrell's tattoos.

BLAKE

Every time we make love, I feel complete.

DARRELL

Good. I'll always make sure you stay satisfied in more ways than one.

Blake kisses Darrell's chest.

BLAKE

And I appreciate you for that. I've been thinking...

Darrell's body tenses.

DARRELL

About what?

BLAKE

When are you going to move in with me?

DARRELL
(Deep sigh)
Here we go with this.

Blake props himself on an elbow.

BLAKE
Don't you think it's time we made
that happen?

DARRELL
(Defensive tone)
I thought you agreed to give me
time?

BLAKE
I have. And still, like I told you,
there's enough room for all of us.

Darrell's face hardens, sitting up abruptly, swinging his
legs over the side of the bed.

DARRELL
You had to ruin a perfect day with
this bullshit. You know I'm
faithful, so why are you rushing me
to move in?

Blake sits up too. Dread begins its frightful path through
Blake's body.

Darrell locates his boxers, and pulls them on with sharp,
jerky movements before snatching his phone from the
nightstand.

DARRELL (CONT'D)
Shit. Now you got me running late.

BLAKE
(Trembling tone)
I'm sorry for bringing it up again.
I just feel like we're building
something real, and I want—

DARRELL
You already have me running late,
neglecting my priorities. So
whatever you're about to say right
now doesn't matter.

BLAKE
I apologize if I'm the reason
you're running late, but... I'm a
priority too, right?

DARRELL
(Scoffs)
You're a man with insecurities.

Fully dressed, he turns to face Blake with a stare that could diminish his very existence.

DARRELL (CONT'D)
We need some time apart.

Blake's eyes sting with tears. The room suddenly feels enormous and empty.

BLAKE
Are you serious?

DARRELL
I gotta go.

Darrell walks to the door and pauses, placing his hand on the knob.

DARRELL (CONT'D)
(Whispers)
I deserve better than this.

He walks out.

Blake burrows under the covers, burying his face in the pillow where Darrell's scent still lingers.

INT. DENTIST OFFICE - AFTERNOON

The dentist's office feels warmer than the beach.

Blake's thoughts are spiraling into darkness because he hasn't heard from Darrell all day.

Slumping into the dentist's chair, Blake's hands won't stop trembling.

He pulls out his phone for the dozenth time, letting his thumb hover over Darrell's contact.

The pressure against the screen feels like the weight of their entire relationship balanced on that single point of contact.

He presses call.

Voicemail.

Blake tries again, and gets the same result.

On the verge of breaking down, a flicker of defiance ignites within him. He stands with determination as he leaves the room.

In the crowded waiting room, his gaze fixes on the exit. Parents with children, elderly couples, strangers living their ordinary lives, they blur into background noise.

His steps are purposeful as he strides out.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. DARRELL'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Darrell is sitting behind his mahogany desk, staring at the laptop screen glowing with spreadsheets that might as well be written in ancient hieroglyphics.

His phone vibrates, another call from Blake.

The name on the screen sends a wave of guilt crashing through him, followed immediately by irritation.

He glances at it before declining, watching Blake's face disappear from the screen.

Another vibration, this time it's a text.

He grunts, shaking his head, already anticipating Blake's words of hurt and confusion as he picks up the phone with a heavy sigh.

INSERT SCREEN

I can't believe you're treating our love like shit. That's okay. We're about to find something out in a matter of minutes.

He slams the phone down on the desk with enough force to crack the screen protector.

He stands and paces, with his Italian leather shoes squeaking against the polished floor.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. BLAKE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Blake is sitting in his car at a red light, gripping the steering wheel so hard his knuckles have gone white.

The empty street stretches out before him like a mirror to the bleakness in his heart.

Darrell's silence is a suffocating weight pressing down on his chest, making each breath feel like work.

But beneath the sadness, something harder crystallizes, a need for answers, for truth, no matter how painful.

His eyes drift to a couple on a nearby park bench.

They're young, wrapped in each other's arms, laughing at something on a phone screen.

The light turns green.

He floors the gas pedal.

The car leaps forward with a growling engine and rubber.

Darrell's office is just around the corner.

Screeching into the parking lot, Blake parks directly in front of the building with reckless abandon and launches himself out of the car.

Fire burns in his lungs as he storms inside, with each step echoing his racing pulse.

The receptionist—a middle-aged woman with kind eyes—tries to stop him, rising from her chair with an outstretched hand.

RECEPTIONIST

Sir, you can't just—

But Blake moves past her like a force of nature. His focus is unyielding. His entire being is aimed at the truth like an arrow toward a target.

As he nears Darrell's office, the blinds are drawn, but he can hear Darrell's voice raised in distress.

He's about to burst in when a woman's voice cuts through the air, sharp with pain and fury.

SABRINA (O.S.)

All I need is an explanation! Just one honest word from your lying ass mouth!

Blake's hand freezes on the doorknob.

Time seems to slow, and each second stretches.

Then, with a surge of adrenaline, he snatches the door open and steps inside.

He freezes.

The scene before him is a waking nightmare rendered in vivid, terrible detail.

Darrell is standing behind his desk, with his hands raised in surrender and fear etched so deeply on his face that he looks like a stranger.

Facing him is Sabrina, beautiful and terrifying in her fury.

She's in her mid-thirties, caramel-skinned with curves that speak of femininity and strength, wearing a designer dress that suggests taste and affluence.

But it's the nine-millimeter pistol aimed directly at Darrell's head that commands Blake's attention.

She whips her head toward Blake with predatory speed.

Confusion flickers in her tear-stained eyes, red-rimmed from crying.

SABRINA (CONT'D)

Can I help you?

BLAKE

What is this?

SABRINA

None of your fuckin' business. You can leave. Now.

BLAKE

I can't do that.

He takes a step further into the room.

SABRINA

Excuse me?

Her eyes narrow to dangerous slits, and the gun shifts slightly in his direction.

BLAKE

I said I can't do that.

Her grip on the gun tightens.

Blake notices her wedding ring, a simple gold band with small diamonds, catching the light. The sight of it sends his mind reeling.

SABRINA
Why is that? Who are you?

BLAKE
I'm Darrell's—

DARRELL
Stay out of this, Blake!
(To Sabrina)
Sabrina, listen to me. I'm sure we
can work this out. Just put the gun
down, baby. Please.

Blake's eyes get wide.

SABRINA
This situation is about to get real
fuckin' ugly if you don't start—

BLAKE
Get that fucking gun out of my
man's face!

Disbelief crosses Sabrina's face.

The gun lowers slightly, though it remains pointed in
Darrell's general direction.

SABRINA
Excuse me? What did you just say?

Darrell lets out a deep, defeated sigh that seems to deflate
his entire body. His shoulders slump forward as if the
weight of the world has finally broken through his defenses.

BLAKE
I won't repeat myself. Tell me why
you're pointing a gun at—

SABRINA
Wait, wait, wait. Did you just say
my husband is your man?

BLAKE
He's your husband?
(Bitter, broken laugh)
A man who's been gay his entire
life would never be with a woman.
You're lying. You have to be lying.

Sabrina turns to Darrell slowly.

SABRINA

What the hell is he talking about,
Darrell?

Darrell slowly lifts his head, meeting her gaze with the
look of a man facing execution.

DARRELL

Baby, I can explain.

BLAKE

Baby? That's what you call me when
we make love. When you whisper in
my ear in the dark. When you
promise me forever while we're
tangled up in sheets that smell
like us.

Sabrina's hand flies to her mouth.

The gun wavers in her grip, trembling. A strangled sound
escapes her throat, something between a sob and a gasp.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

Explain. Both of you. Right now.

Darrell ignores Blake completely, moving from behind the
desk toward Sabrina with careful, measured steps.

DARRELL

Sabrina, baby, please. Just let me
explain. We can fix this.

BLAKE

You're tending to her?! You're
comforting her when you hold me
every night?! When you make love to
me and tell me I'm your world?!
When you say you've never felt this
way about anyone?!

Darrell's head snaps toward Blake.

DARRELL

Will you shut the fuck up?! I'm
trying to keep my wife from
shooting us both! Do you understand
that she has a gun?!

BLAKE

Wife? She's not lying? She's
actually your wife? You're actually
married?

Sabrina shoves Darrell's outstretched hands away with violent force.

SABRINA

Get your fuckin' hands off me!
Don't you ever touch me again!
Every time you've touched me has
been a lie!

DARRELL

I can—

SABRINA

You can't explain shit! Can you
explain how you have a whole
woman—a wife at home—but you're
fuckin' a man?! Can you explain how
you can look me in the eye every
single morning and kiss me goodbye
like we're living some perfect life
while you're living a double one?!
Can you explain how you held my
hand at my mother's funeral and
lied to her grave?!

Blake stands silently against the wall, pressing his back
against it as if he's trying to disappear into it.

Darrell straightens.

His shoulders slump in defeat, and when he speaks, his voice
is flat, dead.

DARRELL

What can I say? I'm bisexual.

Silence.

Then—

SABRINA

You're bisexual? You're telling me
as my husband, as the man I've
shared a bed with for three years,
that you're bisexual?

DARRELL

Yes.

SABRINA

And you were bisexual before we
met, right? Before you proposed?
Before you said vows in front of my
family?

Darrell shifts his weight, unable to meet her eyes.

DARRELL

Well, I recently realized—

SABRINA

You're full of shit.

(Sharp, bitter laugh)

That's what you realized? You recently realized you're a coward, a liar and a user?

DARRELL

I'm not about to argue about my sexuality with you.

SABRINA

Because you can't!

She steps forward, and the gun rises again.

SABRINA (CONT'D)

Because this isn't about sexuality. This is about deception. This is about betrayal. This is about you destroying two people who loved you. Who trusted you. People who gave you everything.

DARRELL

(Hollow tone)

I understand. I should've told you both from the beginning.

SABRINA

(Brittle laugh)

Oh, it's fine, believe me. It's absolutely fine.

Tears stream down her face even as she smiles.

SABRINA (CONT'D)

I'm not about to waste another second of my life on this bullshit. You're not worth my energy. You're not worth my tears. You're not worth the air you're breathing.

She turns to Blake, and in her eyes, he sees a reflection of his own devastation.

Two souls shattered by the same hand.

SABRINA (CONT'D)

As for you. I'm not even mad at you. You hear me? You're as much of a victim as I am. But I'll tell you this much. I don't know if you're naturally gay, if something happened to make you this way, or if you're like that piece of shit over there. But you can explain this to him.

She reaches into her designer purse with a trembling hand and pulls out a crumpled piece of paper.

Walking over to Blake, she shoves it into his chest with enough force to make him stumble back.

SABRINA (CONT'D)

Good luck. We both deserve so much better than this.

She walks out, slamming the door behind her with such force that the framed degrees on the wall rattle.

The sound echoes in the sudden silence.

Blake unfolds the paper with trembling hands.

INSERT PAPER

Patient: Sabrina Morris. Test Date: This morning. Results:
HIV - POSITIVE

The paper slips from his numb fingers, floating to the floor in slow motion like a falling leaf.

BLAKE

Now I see why you wouldn't move in with me. Everything you've been telling me was a lie. Every promise. Every plan. Every word.

DARRELL

I'm not in the mood for this conversation right now, Blake.

Darrell runs a hand across his head, with his composure cracking.

DARRELL (CONT'D)

You heard the truth. That's what you came for, isn't it?

BLAKE

Telling the truth from the beginning would've prevented all of this. You never had plans on giving me what I wanted. A real relationship, a future together, a life. Your wife is right about you. You're exactly what she said.

Darrell's eyes burn with desperate anger, like a cornered animal lashing out.

DARRELL

A gay man is siding with a heterosexual female because she flashed a gun and started yelling. Isn't that funny? Isn't that rich?

BLAKE

Not as funny as your pathetic excuse for a life. Yes, I'm gay, and I'm proud of who I am. I'm not ashamed. I don't hide. But you... You're a confused, selfish man who'll sleep with anybody who's available. Men, women. It doesn't matter. As long as they give you what you want at that moment.

DARRELL

(Hollow, low laugh)

I heard the dramatic version from her, and now you're delivering the righteous version. What you both fail to realize is that I'll continue doing whatever the fuck I want because that's who I am.

BLAKE

That should be the outcome after what just happened. That's exactly what someone like you would say. But since I can only speak for myself, I'll opt to save what's left of my life. This situation has taught me something I should've known from the very beginning.

DARRELL

(Scoffs)

What's that?

Blake bends down and picks up the paper.

He walks over to Darrell, and stands inches from him, gently placing the paper in Darrell's palm, closing his fingers around it.

BLAKE

When you take in untamed stray animals and give them your love, your home, your heart... They'll still revert to their nature. They'll still bite the hand that feeds them. No matter how much you love them.

DARRELL

(Laughs)

You loved every minute of it, Blake. Don't act like the victim now. You wanted this. You chose this.

BLAKE

I sure did love it. And I'll keep loving the memory of what I thought we had. What I believed was real. This—

He gestures to the paper now crumpled in Darrell's hand.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

This is the price people pay for blind love, and I'm done paying it. One day you'll wish you could've been a man instead of the coward you are. One day you'll understand what you destroyed.

Without another word, Blake turns and walks toward the door, and his movement is steady despite the trembling in his hands.

DARRELL

She's just scared, Blake. This test... It means nothing. False positives happen all the time. I'll see you tonight, baby. Make my favorite meal, that pasta I love. We can work this out. We can fix this.

Blake pauses at the door, with his hand on the knob.

He doesn't turn around.

BLAKE

The only thing I'll be making is a
doctor's appointment. Goodbye,
Darrell.

He walks out, closing the door with a quiet click that
sounds louder than any slam.

Darrell unfolds the paper with shaking hands, reading the
results carefully. His eyes scan past the positive diagnosis
to the additional note at the bottom.

INSERT PAPER

Additional Testing Recommended. Partner notification
advised. Recent exposure risk: HIGH.

Below that, in Sabrina's elegant handwriting, a final
message

I trusted you with my life. How many others have you
endangered? How many more lies are there?

The laughter dies in his throat, choked off as if by
invisible hands.

He grabs his phone with a shaking hand, scrolling to
Sabrina's number.

Call.

Voicemail.

He tries Blake.

Voicemail.

His hand shakes violently as he scrolls through his
contacts.

His phone rings, shattering the silence.

He answers without looking, desperate for any human
connection.

ASHLEY (V.O.)

(Sultry tone)

Hey, baby, what's going on? I
haven't heard from you in a few
days.

DARRELL

Nothing much. I need to tell you
something important.

ASHLEY (V.O.)
Ooh, mysterious. You'll be over in
thirty minutes, right? I have that
wine you like.

DARRELL
No. It's something important. When
was the last time you had a full
STD panel done?

Silence.

ASHLEY (V.O.)
What the fuck did you just say?

DARRELL
When was the last time—

ASHLEY
What?! Are you fucking serious
right now?

The line goes dead.

Darrell sits frozen, with the phone still pressed to his
ear.

Slowly, he lowers it.

The office around him seems to darken as the sun sets
outside.

He starts to dial the next number, and then stops.

In the reflection of his darkened computer monitor, he sees
himself—truly sees himself—for the first time.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. BLAKE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Sitting in the silent car in front of his house, Blake
stares at the steering wheel.

His hands are still gripping it as if letting go means
confronting what comes next.

A sob tears from his throat, animalistic, completely beyond
his control.

It's followed by another, and another, until he's doubled
over with his forehead pressing against the steering wheel,
while his entire body shakes with the force of his grief.

When the sobs finally subside into hiccupping breaths, Blake forces himself out of the car.

Each movement feels like wading through wet cement. His legs are heavy. His chest aches as if someone reached inside and carved out everything vital.

The walk to the house door stretches into infinity. Twenty steps that feel like twenty miles.

His key slides into the lock. The sound of the deadbolt clicking open is unbearably loud.

The door swings inward.

E/I. BLAKE'S HOUSE - THE LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

And there it is. Their life. Or what he thought was their life.

The house greets him with a cruel indifference.

Blake's eyes scan the living room with the gaze of a stranger.

The framed photograph on the bookshelf.

INSERT PHOTOGRAPH

The two of them at Pride last year, with Blake's head thrown back in laughter and Darrell's arm around his waist.

He walks to the photo with wooden steps and picks it up.

His thumb traces Darrell's face through the glass.

The frame slips from his trembling hands and shatters on the hardwood floor.

Glass scatters like stars across the dark wood.

He stares at their broken, smiling faces among the shards.

He leaves it there and moves to the bedroom.

Standing in the doorway, Blake can't bring himself to enter.

His eyes drift to Darrell's nightstand. The phone charger. The half-read thriller novel. The bottle of cologne Blake bought him for his birthday.

Blake's vision blurs again, gripping the doorframe to keep from collapsing.

He stumbles to the bathroom, barely making it to the toilet.

His body purges everything.

When there's nothing left, Blake collapses against the cool tile wall, gasping.

Slowly standing up, when he looks at his reflection in the mirror, he can't comprehend what he sees.

Eyes red and swollen, face blotchy, hair disheveled.

Blake grabs Darrell's toothbrush and hurls it into the trash. Then the shaving cream. The body wash. The cologne from the bedroom.

His movements become frantic, desperate. He tears through drawers, pulling out Darrell's things—razors, deodorant, hair products—dumping them all into the trash can until it overflows onto the floor.

He sinks to the floor again, and the tears come in a fresh wave. These aren't the shocked, gasping sobs from the car. These are deeper, quieter—the sound of something fundamental breaking inside him.

CUT TO:

INT. BLAKE'S HOUSE - THE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Blake is sitting on the living room floor, with his back against the couch, staring at nothing.

He pulls his phone out.

INSERT PHONE SCREEN

Seventeen missed calls. Thirty-two text messages. None from Darrell, but three from his best friend, Marcus. Hey, where are you?

Blake, seriously, call me back. I'm getting worried.

If I don't hear from you in 30 minutes I'm coming over.

Blake stares at the messages.

The phone buzzes again. Marcus calling. Blake watches it ring, looking at his friend's smiling face on the screen.

On the last ring, some instinct for survival kicks in, and he answers.

MARCUS (V.O.)
Blake? Jesus Christ, where have you
been? I've been—

BLAKE
(Sadden tone)
Marcus.

MARCUS
What happened?

BLAKE
I need you to come over.

MARCUS
I'm already in my car. I'm a block
away.

The line goes dead.

Blake drops the phone and pulls his knees to his chest,
making himself small.

The doorbell rings, and Blake forces himself to get up and
walk to the door, opening it.

Marcus takes one look at him and his face crumples with
concern.

Marcus is handsome, light-skinned and has long hair.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Oh my God, Blake. What happened?
Are you hurt? Did someone—

BLAKE
He's married.

MARCUS
What?

BLAKE
Darrell. He's married to a woman
named Sabrina.

MARCUS
That's impossible. He told me he
was gay. You guys were happy, and
together for—

BLAKE
(Laughs)
She showed up at his office today.
With a gun.

MARCUS
A gun? Blake, what the hell—

BLAKE
She has HIV, Marcus.

Blake finally looks his friend in the eyes.

BLAKE (CONT'D)
His wife has HIV. Which means he
might have HIV. Which means... Which
means I need to get tested.

MARCUS
Oh my God.

BLAKE
I don't know what to do. I don't
know how to... How do I even
process this?

MARCUS
You need to get tested. First thing
tomorrow, I'll go with you. There's
medication. Prophylaxis. If you
take them soon enough after
exposure, they can—

BLAKE
PEP. Post-exposure prophylaxis. I
googled it in the car. You have
seventy-two hours. It's been...

He checks his phone.

BLAKE (CONT'D)
Seven hours.

MARCUS
Then we need to call the pharmacy,
now.

Marcus pulls out his phone.

Blake rattles it off mechanically.

As Marcus speaks to the after-hours service, explaining the
situation in hushed, urgent tones, Blake stares at the
broken picture frame still on the floor.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
They're calling in a prescription.

Marcus hangs up.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

We can pick it up tonight. But Blake, you need to get tested. Full panel. And you'll need to test again in a few weeks, and then again in a few months to be sure.

BLAKE

Months. I have to live with this uncertainty for months.

MARCUS

You'll get through this.

Marcus grips his shoulder.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

I'll be with you every step. You're not alone.

CUT TO:

INT. BLAKE'S HOUSE - THE GUEST ROOM - LATER

Blake is lying on the bed, and Marcus is asleep on the couch.

The PEP medication is sitting on the nightstand.

BLAKE (V.O.)

How long was he married? How did I not know? Were there signs I missed? Was I so in love I was blind?

Blake rolls onto his side, pulling his knees up again. The fetal position has become his default. Protection. Safety. Even though there's no safety anymore.

His phone lights up on the nightstand. Against his better judgment, he looks.

A text from an unknown number.

INSERT PHONE SCREEN

This is Sabrina. I don't know if you want to hear from me, but I wanted to say I'm sorry. Not for today—you needed to know. But I'm sorry this happened to you. To us. If you need to talk, I'm here. We're in the same boat, after all.

Blake stares at the message.

He doesn't respond. He can't respond. But he doesn't delete the message either.

INT. THE CLINIC - MORNING

Blake is sitting in a sterile room inside the clinic, waiting for his test results. Marcus is sitting beside him, with his thumbs flying over his phone, pretending to be casual but he's radiating anxiety.

The doctor, a middle-aged woman with kind eyes and the demeanor of someone who delivers difficult news regularly enters the room.

DOCTOR

Mr. Smith. Your rapid HIV test came back negative, which is good news at this stage. We've also tested your full STD panel. Everything came back negative except for—

She pauses, consulting her chart.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

...You do show antibodies for HPV, which is extremely common and usually harmless, though we'll want to monitor it.

Blake releases a breath he didn't know he was holding.

BLAKE

So I'm negative? For everything serious?

DOCTOR

For now, yes. But you need to understand that HIV can take several weeks to show up on tests. The window period is typically two to four weeks, though it can be longer. You're on PEP, which is excellent. You started within the optimal timeframe. But you'll need to come back for follow-up testing in six weeks, then three months, and then six months after that.

BLAKE

Six months.

DOCTOR

I know it's scary. But the PEP medication is highly effective when it's started early. You're doing everything right.

She hands him some pamphlets.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Here's some information on support groups. Many people find it helpful to talk to others who've been through similar situations.

She walks out.

Blake sits in silence, staring at the pamphlets.

INSERT PAMPHLETS

HIV Support Groups. Living with Exposure Risk. Coping with Betrayal & Trauma.

MARCUS

At least you're negative so far.
That's something.

BLAKE

For now. I'm negative for now. I get to spend the next few months wondering if my life is about to change forever.

Blake leaves the room, and Marcus is right behind him as they walk out of the clinic.

E/I. THE CLINIC - CONTINUOUS

Outside, when they get into Marcus' car, Blake breaks down again.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

I trusted him.

(Sobs)

I gave him everything. My heart, my body, my future. And he just... he didn't care. None of it mattered to him."

Marcus reaches over and grips his hand.

MARCUS

It mattered. You mattered. His inability to see that, to honor that. That's his failure, not yours.

BLAKE

Then why do I feel like I failed? Like I should have known? Like I'm stupid for not seeing it?

MARCUS

Because you're human. Because you loved him. Love makes us vulnerable. That's not a weakness. It's what makes us capable of beautiful things. He's the one who weaponized it.

Marcus starts the car up and pulls off, while Blake leans his head against the window.

INT. BLAKE'S HOUSE - THE LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Blake is standing in the room with a stack of boxes. It's time. He can't live here anymore, surrounded by ghosts and memories.

As he packs, he finds reminders everywhere. A concert ticket stub from their second date. A silly birthday card Darrell gave him with a terrible pun inside. A T-shirt Darrell left behind—Blake brings it to his face automatically, and then recoils when he catches the scent. It doesn't smell like home anymore. It smells like betrayal.

Into the donation bag it goes.

His phone buzzes.

Another text from Sabrina.

INSERT PHONE SCREEN

How are you holding up?

Packing. Moving out. How about you?

Divorce papers filed. My lawyer says it'll be quick since there's infidelity. No kids, thank God. Have you heard from him?

Blake pauses. The answer is yes. Darrell has called thirty-seven times. Left seventeen voicemails he hasn't listened to.

Sent texts that Blake deletes unread. No. You?

He's been staying with a friend. He doesn't want to see me in my current state. Like he has the right to judge my state.

We're going to be okay, Sabrina texts. I don't know how or when, but we will.

INT. THERAPIST OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Blake is sitting in his therapist's office, and across from him is Dr. Chen, a beautiful Asian woman in her mid-forties.

DR. CHEN

How are you sleeping?

BLAKE

Better.

DR. CHEN

And the intrusive thoughts?

BLAKE

Still there.

He picks at a thread on his jeans.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

I'll be doing something normal.
Grocery shopping, watching TV... And suddenly I'm back in that office.
Seeing the gun. Seeing her face.
Hearing him call her 'baby'.

DR. CHEN

That's normal for trauma. It takes time for your nervous system to understand that the threat has passed.

BLAKE

Has it passed?

Blake looks up.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

I still won't have my final test results for two more months. Every day I wonder if that moment destroyed more than just my relationship. If it destroyed my health. My future.

DR. CHEN

Those are valid fears. But I want you to notice something. You're still here. Still moving forward. You left the house. You're going to work. You're taking your medication. Those are all acts of courage.

BLAKE

It doesn't feel courageous. It feels like survival.

DR. CHEN

Sometimes they're the same thing.

Blake looks out the window at the people walking by.

BLAKE

(Low tone)

I trusted my judgment. That's what I can't forgive myself for. I pride myself on being smart, aware. But I missed every sign. What does that say about me?

DR. CHEN

It says you were in love with someone. It says you gave someone the benefit of the doubt. Those aren't character flaws, Blake. They're evidence of your humanity.

BLAKE

My humanity almost killed me.

Dr. Chen leans forward.

DR. CHEN

Darrell's deception almost killed you. Your humanity is what's keeping you alive. It's what brought you here. It made you reach out to friends, to your support group, to me. Don't let him take that from you too.

BLAKE

(Sniffles)

I don't know how I'll trust anyone again. Every time I think about dating, about letting someone in, I panic.

(MORE)

BLAKE (CONT'D)

What if I miss the signs again?
What if I choose wrong again?

DR. CHEN

You didn't choose wrong. You chose to love. He chose to betray that love. Those are different things.

BLAKE

Are they? Because from where I'm sitting, they led to the same place.

DR. CHEN

For now. But you're still in the acute phase of trauma. Your perspective is skewed by pain. Give yourself time. Six months from now, a year from now, you'll have distance. Clarity.

BLAKE

Two months from now I'll know if I'm HIV positive.

DR. CHEN

(Gentle tone)

Yes. You'll have that answer. And whatever that answer is, you'll handle it. Because you're stronger than you think.

INT. THE CLINIC - MORNING

Blake is sitting in the clinic again, and Marcus is with him.

The same kind doctor from before enters.

DOCTOR

Mr. Smith. I have your results.

Blake's heart stops, staring at her with sadness in his eyes.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

You're HIV negative. All of your tests came back negative.

The world rushes back in. Color. Sound. Breath.

BLAKE

I'm negative?

DOCTOR

You're negative. At six months post-exposure with consistent PEP usage, this is very reliable. We'll do one more test in another six months to be absolutely certain, but I'm very optimistic. You're going to be fine.

Blake breaks down. Right there in the clinic room, he sobs, but these aren't tears of grief. They're tears of relief so profound it feels like his body is purging all of the fear he's been carrying.

Marcus wraps him in a hug, and now both of them are crying.

MARCUS

You're okay. You're going to be okay.

BLACK SCREEN:

One year later...

INT. COFFEE SHOP - AFTERNOON

Blake is sitting reading a book, drinking an overpriced latte.

His phone buzzes. A dating app notification. He's been on there for a week now, just browsing, not quite ready to engage but taking small steps forward.

INSERT PHONE SCREEN

Hey, I saw your profile. I love your taste in books. How about grabbing some coffee sometime?

Blake stares at the message. A year ago, this would have sent him into a panic spiral.

But today, right now, in this coffee shop with sunlight streaming through the windows, it just feels like a possibility.

INSERT PHONE SCREEN

Sure. How about Saturday?

As he returns to his book, Blake catches his reflection in the window. He barely recognizes himself.

He's lost weight, and gained some gray hair. The trauma has marked and changed him in ways that will never fully fade.

But he's still here capable of hope, however he's cautious for something better.

He takes another sip of his latte, turns the page of his book, and allows himself to imagine... Just for a moment... What Saturday might bring.

BLACK SCREEN:

Two years later...

INT. ART GALLERY - NIGHT

The gallery is packed with people. Art collectors, critics, curious patrons drawn by the buzz surrounding the new exhibition.

INSERT BANNER

'Fractured: A Study in Reconstruction'

Blake is standing near the back, watching people examine his work.

The centerpiece of the exhibition is a large mixed-media installation: shattered mirrors reassembled into a new form. The cracks are filled with gold leaf in the Japanese tradition of kintsugi. It's titled 'After the Breaking.'

DANIEL (O.S.)
It's powerful.

Blake turns to find Daniel. Tall, kind eyes, genuine smile, silky white skin, late forties.

BLAKE
Thank you.

DANIEL
The artist's statement says these pieces are about trauma and transformation. Personal experience?

Blake considers the question.

BLAKE
Very personal. I went through something that nearly destroyed me. These pieces are what came after.

DANIEL

The gold in the cracks. It makes them more beautiful than they were before.

BLAKE

That's the idea. That we're not diminished by our scars. We're enhanced by them. That breaking doesn't have to be the end of the story.

Daniel extends his hand.

DANIEL

I'm Daniel.

Blake shakes it.

BLAKE

Blake.

DANIEL

The artist?

BLAKE

The artist.

They talk for twenty minutes about art, about healing, about the strange beauty that can emerge from pain.

When Daniel asks for his number, Blake gives it without hesitation. When Daniel suggests coffee next week, Blake says yes.

Across the gallery, Sabrina catches his eye. She's here for the opening, along with Marcus and several members of their support group. She raises her glass of champagne in a quiet toast. Blake returns the gesture.

They made it. Both of them. Against all odds, through all the darkness, they made it to the other side.

Blake takes a sip with a smile as he makes his way over toward her.

FADE TO BLACK:

END CREDITS: