

FADE IN:

ALLY MCBEAL STANDS AT AN OFFICE WINDOW

Down in the streets below, cars are burning. Several men stand around another man, badly beaten and curled into a fetal position. They are urinating on him. Ally grimaces and takes a sip of coffee. During the voice-over narration, Ally continues to watch violence play out in the street. A limping person tries to flee a group of men and women armed with baseball bats. Two people wrestle awkwardly on the ground, the gravel cutting up their faces and arms as they try to hit each other and grind each other against the asphalt. People tear pieces off a car like hyenas dismembering an elephant carcass.

ALLY

(V/O)

The vibrant energy of humanity is usually a good thing. Recently, however, it seems to have turned ugly and mean. It doesn't have anything to do with the city. It's not like rural areas are any better.

The camera drifts away from her as she reminisces.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

A teenage Ally stands motionless and expressionless. There are screams and the sound of dogs snarling. It is a bright sunny day.

ANGLE ON (dogs)

In a sun-lit clearing, big black dogs are tearing at a man in a flannel shirt. He is on the ground, struggling to stand but they keep pulling him down. Both he and the dogs are wet with blood.

ANGLE BACK TO (Ally)

She cautiously walks forward. The snarling and screaming continues as she gets within a few feet of the violent spectacle. She kneels down and picks a mushroom. She holds it up, squinting at it with one eye. Putting the mushroom into a plastic bag along with a haphazard assortment of other mushrooms.

ALLY

(V/O)

I was really into mushrooms that summer for some reason. I don't know why. It's just one of those things: you can't really explain why you do what you do when you're growing up in the middle of nowhere. You have to come up with ways to keep yourself busy.

INT. GARAGE - NIGHT

The garage is dark and crowded with old cardboard boxes, oily rags, broken bicycles. Teenage Ally is feverish, sweating and shivering, rolling around on a pile of newspaper.

ALLY

(V/O)

I got really sick that night. I don't know why. It's not like I ate any of the mushrooms. I'm not stupid enough to do that. Maybe just touching one of them was enough to absorb something through my skin, I don't know.

Teenage Ally drags herself across the floor to a plastic jug of water. She frantically pries off the lid and, unable to sit up fully, tilts the jug towards her open mouth, spilling water all over herself in the process. She doesn't seem to notice or care. She drinks greedily.

ALLY

(V/O)

It was that night that I decided to leave. It was crystal clear to me then: the only thing I could hope for in that house in the woods was death. When death was some vague thing, a hazy idea of escape from the boredom of school and chores, I was ok with that. But now

that it felt so real, I didn't want it. I wanted something else.

EXT. PORCH - SUMMER NIGHT - A YEAR LATER

An old woman rocks slowly back and forth on her rocking chair. Ally climbs up the creaky wooden steps to approach her.

OLD WOMAN

I never thought you'd show your face here again.

ALLY

I didn't want to, believe me. But there are some things I refuse to leave unsaid.

OLD WOMAN

Let me stop you right there. You should can it as far as I'm concerned. Just can it right up. I couldn't possibly care what it is you have to say.

Ally's eyes flash with sudden fury. Her hand hits the rocking chair just above the old woman's head and jolts its rocking to a stop. The old woman can't help but flinch but covers for it quickly, looking up at Ally defiantly.

ALLY

(snarling)

If you can somehow stop yourself from hearing what I have to say, then go right ahead. But one thing I know for sure is you can't stop me from saying it.

She pauses for a response, but the old woman keeps glaring up at her and says nothing.

ALLY

Being alive is so incredibly painful. And it's your fault. Dad always said I was weak but I know now that all his drinking and punching walls was just the same as my crying and complaining. Just another

expression of the same thing. But he got to pretend that he was somehow escaping the pain through sheer force of will. And you let him live in that fantasy world.

OLD WOMAN

Well boo-hoo.

ALLY

(raising her voice)

And you acting smug and superior to me and all your snide remarks and put-downs, that's all part of the same thing too.

OLD WOMAN

(scoffs)

I never suffered even one day in my life.

ALLY

That's a filthy lie.

OLD WOMAN

Not one day! I was happy every minute because I chose to be. Meanwhile, you were unhappy because you chose that. It's that simple.

ALLY

Happy? If you were happy you would have acted happy! You were miserable!

OLD WOMAN

Prove it.

ALLY

Prove it? The proof is you were a miserable bitch! Every minute!

The old woman sneers up at her.

OLD WOMAN

Oh yeah? That's what you have to go on huh? Well guess what. You only ever see

my outside. I'm the only one who knows
what's inside. I know that I was happy and
I'm the only one who can know. You don't
know anything! You never did!

Ally screams and shoves the rocking chair. It tips back, the old
woman flailing her arms, then she and the chair tip and crash down
onto the deck. Ally stomps towards her, hands balled into fists.

ALLY

And you're happy now, huh?!

The old woman starts trying to crawl away, grimacing in pain.

OLD WOMAN

(defiantly)

Yes!

Ally blocks her crawling and steps on her fingers, causing the old
woman to yelp in pain

ALLY

How about now?

OLD WOMAN

(through tears)

Yes! Happy, happy, happy and you
can't prove I'm not.

Ally's face contorts with fury, then suddenly relaxes into a blank
expressionless mask. She looks very tired. She lifts her foot,
freeing the old woman's fingers, and turns to walk away. The old
woman clutches her injured fingers to her chest.

OLD WOMAN

(voice quavering)

I didn't do anything wrong. Not once.

Ally walks down the porch steps.

OLD WOMAN

(spitefully, mockingly)

I win and you lose! I win because I'm
happy and that's the kind of game this
is and you lose! I win! You lose!

Ally gets into her car and drives away as the sun sets sickly orange
behind the power poles on the horizon.

EXT. HARVARD - DAY

Ally speed-walks across campus, her hair unkempt and dark circles
under her eyes. She glances down at her wristwatch. At that moment
Billy Thomas rounds a corner and crashes into her, accidentally
knocking the papers out of her hands and scattering them all over the
ground.

BILLY

Oh my gosh! I'm-

ALLY

What is wrong with you?! What is your
problem huh?!

BILLY

I'm sorry, it was an accident!

ALLY

Well have you ever thought of paying
attention? Have you ever thought of
keeping an eye out for where you're going?

BILLY

I was in a rush, I didn't mean-

ALLY

Oh, YOU'RE in a rush, ok! Well that's
the important thing isn't it. Who cares
if I was or wasn't in a rush!

Flustered, Billy starts trying to pick up the scattered papers. Ally
kicks them out of his hand.

BILLY

Ow! What the heck?

ALLY

You don't get it. It's over. I stayed up all night to finish that project and now you've made me miss the deadline.

BILLY

But you can just pick the papers up and-

Ally picks up the papers and starts to tear at them with her teeth while Billy stares horrified. Ally spits paper scraps out on the ground.

ALLY

Give me your papers now.

BILLY

What? No, I-

Ally rips the folder out of his hands and starts taking out pieces of paper, biting and tearing at them, ripping them to shreds. Billy stares in shock, then tries to grab his folder back but Ally leaps back out of reach.

BILLY

No, I need those! Please...

ALLY

(spitting paper scraps)

Well maybe you'll learn to watch where you're going, how about that?

BILLY

(starting to cry)

Please, I don't understand you. Why... my papers... it wasn't...

Ally's eyes widen and she slowly lowers a piece of paper from her mouth.

ALLY

(gently)

Hey, don't cry. I don't know what came

over I me, I just... it's ok, don't cry. We can fix this, ok? We can both fix both of our projects.

Sniffing and wiping tears from his eyes, Billy watches her suspiciously.

BILLY

You mean it?

Ally reaches out and touches his arm.

ALLY

Yeah, it's going to be ok! I'm really sorry I just... I don't know what came over me, it's just that I've been up all night. I didn't sleep at all, and to be honest I took a lot of adderall. I was just feeling completely crazy. I'm sorry, come on, let's- we can fix this, come on.

He doesn't say anything, but when she takes his arm and starts leading him he doesn't resist. They leave the papers strewn behind them on the grass and the wind starts to blow them away.

INT. HARVARD LIBRARY - NIGHT

Ally and Billy are sitting next to each other, leaning into each others' personal space to examine a large book sitting open on the table in front of them. The library is dimly lit and seemingly deserted. They sit together in a pool of light cast by a desk lamp on the table in front of them, which is littered with library books, spiral bound notebooks with handwritten notes, and crumpled up pieces of paper.

ALLY

(excitedly)

So the question is - the most important question but probably an unsolvable one - is which is it? Is a fixation on power a way to cope with the meaninglessness of life? Or is a fixation on the meaninglessness of life a way to cope with an absence of power?

Billy is smiling at how animated and cheerful she has become.

BILLY

Those are the only two options, huh?

ALLY

When you drill down to it, probably. What else is there?

BILLY

I dunno, what about... love?

Ally is a little taken aback.

ALLY

What about it? It doesn't take much to see the power struggles in any relationship. They're not even buried, they're just right there a millimeter under the surface.

BILLY

That's pretty cynical, isn't it?

ALLY

(scoffs)

Are you going to sit here and tell me that relationships don't have built-in power struggles?

BILLY

I didn't say that. But just because there are power struggles doesn't mean that's the most important part. Why are you focusing on that to the exclusion of everything else?

ALLY

Everything else like what?

BILLY

Come on, now you're just being difficult.

Ally narrows her eyes at him suspiciously.

ALLY

So your adopting a naive attitude to be cute. That's your strategy.

BILLY

If it means you think I'm cute, then sure! That's me, the master strategist.

Ally laughs and shakes her head, then turns a page of the book in an exaggerated theatrical motion.

ALLY

Come on, we're getting distracted. We came here to study, remember?

BILLY

Right! Gotta focus. Gotta study!

Ally picks up her notebook and pencil and starts to write something.

ALLY

So anyway, the ultimate verdict in Warren v. District of Columbia was that the police have no specific duty to protect people. And in the years since then--

BILLY

Did you ever see that episode of the Simpsons where it flashes forward in time and Lisa meets this guy at college? There's a scene where they're in a library together and I don't know why but I always thought--

Ally tosses her notebook and pencil down on the table, grabs Billy's shirt with both hands, and pulls him closer to kiss him. Billy is taken aback at first, then closes his eyes and starts to kiss her back. He leans backwards onto the table, knocking a stack of books onto the floor, and pulls Ally on top of him while she runs her fingers through his short-cropped hair and bites playfully at his lips. The camera pans away from them as they start to undress each other.

A EXT. HARVARD - DAY

Ally stands by the sidewalk, holding two lattes in paper cups. She glances furtively around as students hurry past until at last she sees who she was hoping to see and her face lights up.

ALLY

Hey! Over here!

Billy spots her and smiles tightly, then glances down and rubs the back of his neck before walking slowly in her direction, not making eye contact. Ally's smile fades as she tries to interpret his body language, but she brightens up again as he crosses the sidewalk to meet her.

ALLY

Hey, I got you something.

She holds out a latte to him. He glances down at it but doesn't take it.

BILLY

Hey, listen. I um... Well I think we're both thinking it so... about last night I mean.

ALLY

(uncertain)

Yeah?

BILLY

Well, you know, I think emotions were kind of running a little high, with us being so stressed and all. Like, when your pulse goes up sometimes your body doesn't know how to interpret that? So like... I mean, you see what I'm saying right?

ALLY

I don't... your pulse...?

Billy sighs and looks away, then forces himself to make eye contact

again.

BILLY

I'm just trying to say that, like... we may have gotten a little confused you know? About what we were feeling?

Ally stares at him, her mouth open as if about to say something. Billy laughs awkwardly.

BILLY

God, I'm so bad at talking. But I think we're on the same page here, right? Like, it's no one's fault. But sometimes these things just happen. Right?

Ally shakes her head, not believing what she's hearing. After moving her mouth silently a couple times, she's finally able to speak.

ALLY

Right. Of course. Yeah.

Billy lets out a sigh of relief and laughs again.

BILLY

Yeah? Ok. I'm so glad we're on the same page about this. I was worried you might think... but yeah, mistakes happen, no big deal. That's life, you know?

ALLY

Yeah, no big deal.

BILLY

Exactly. Anyway!

(looks at his watch)

I gotta get going. Good luck with your big project thing, ok?

Before Ally can answer he turns on his heel and walks quickly away into the crowd of milling students. Ally is left standing there holding two lattes. Her expression is hurt at first, maybe on the verge of tears for a few brief seconds, and suddenly the emotion is

gone. She stares into space, her face still like the waters of a lake on a windless day. She turns her back on the crowd and starts walking. As she passes a trash can she tosses both lattes at it, not noticing that only one makes it into trash, the other splattering on the ground. She wraps her arms around herself and keeps walking.

Cut to:

INT. LYNE AND FANBROE RECEPTION - DAY

Ally, smiling professionally and dressed in a pant suit, is shaking the hand of a client, a mid-forties man in a business suit.

ALLY

Don't worry about it, Mr. Scarborough.
The situation is fully under control.

CLIENT

And you're certain they'll drop the
charges?

ALLY

After they see how we're positioned to
counter-sue? They'd be out of their
minds not to.

The client smiles, relieved. He and Ally continue to chat, the handshake going on an uncomfortably long time, but the sound drops out. Instead of hearing their voices we hear Ally's voiceover.

ALLY (V.O.)

At work, I have to think hard to connect
my tasks together. I have to form them
into some kind of narrative or it's unbearable.

The client finally releases Ally's hand and turns to go, waving at her as he heads towards the glass doors at the front of the lobby. Ally waves back and smiles professionally. She pulls out her Palm Pilot and begins typing an e-mail with her thumbs.

ALLY (V.O.)

Each individual task by itself is absurd.
Without a narrative thread, with my life
being a series of disconnected tasks, living
would be a feverish nightmare.

As she types on her phone, her coworker Jack Billings approaches from behind.

JACK

Ally!

The sound of his voice snaps Ally out of her reverie and the noise of the lobby comes rushing back. Startled, she turns to face him.

ALLY

Hey Jack, how can I help you?

JACK

(grinning)

You're fired.

Ally blinks in surprise.

ALLY

I'm... fired?

JACK

That's what I said.

ALLY

What? Why?

JACK

Because firing people gets my dick
hard.

Ally stares at him, mouth open in disbelief.

JACK

It's a power thing. You understand. Pack
your desk and get out.

Jack turns and leaves, smiling and rubbing his crotch. Ally continues

to look shocked. Another lawyer walks by her and nudges her in the ribs

LAWYER

(sarcastically)

"That went well," am I right?

Ally, stone-faced, turns and walks away.

INT. COURT - DAY

Ally sits next to a defendant at a table. The prosecutor is pacing back and forth in front of the judge. As he talks, Ally's expression is clouded more and more by a desperate sadness.

PROSECUTOR

I think we have to think carefully about the precedent we're setting here. If one person commits these acts, I concede, what's the big deal? Sure. But once more than one person sees that acts of this nature can be committed in this way without consequence or reproach, we will start to see more and more similar acts being committed, at which point we will have to think back on what we decided here today, in this courtroom, and how we will feel when we think back on it to now. Will we really, truly be able to say that, this proposed act of leniency here, today, in this courtroom will be something that, upon reflection, will-

Ally stands up abruptly, interrupting the prosecutor.

ALLY

Your honor, may I approach the bench?

The judge, whose carefully practiced professional and impartial demeanor masks a deep-seated annoyance, gestures for Ally to approach. The prosecutor raises his eyebrows and returns to his seat. Ally walks up to the bench and leans in to speak quietly to the judge.

JUDGE

This better be good.

ALLY

I'm sorry, your honor. I just... I really don't like courtrooms or any of this kind of legal stuff.

The judge eyed her incredulously, yet not without sympathy.

JUDGE

Well, that seems like it's going to be a problem.

ALLY

Yes.

JUDGE

What with you being a lawyer and all.

ALLY

Well that's the thing, your honor. I was fired yesterday, actually. I'm not a lawyer anymore.

JUDGE

I see... and so, why exactly are you here?

Ally sighs deeply.

ALLY

I don't know, your honor. I don't know.

She starts to cry.