

The Great American Loser

FADE IN.

EXT. NEW YORK STREET. DAY

EMMA DANIELS, 25, brown hair, short, carries a battered and heavy suitcase into Penn Station. She's continuously jostled by the taller, better dressed, much more confident New Yorkers in her path.

JONATHAN (V.O.)  
The Great American Loser...

INT. PENN STATION. DAY

Emma checks her ticket, a tiny spec in the teeming train station.

Some BUSINESS GUY trips over her suitcase in his haste, busting the worn zipper. Clothes spill onto the floor. The Business Guy doesn't look back. Other travelers step on her clothes as they rush by.

JONATHAN (V.O.)  
Just who the hell is he?

INT. TRAIN. DAY

Emma stuffs her suitcase -- now held together by duck tape -- into the overhead compartment. She's having trouble shoving it into the small space, much to the chagrin of the line of travelers behind her.

JONATHAN (V.O.)  
No friends, no style, a complete  
and utter social mistake...

One final shove wedges the suitcase into the space. Emma smiles apologetically at the people behind her. No one smiles back. Ducking her head, Emma takes her seat.

INT. TRAIN SEATS. DAY

Emma stares out the window at trees and grass giving in to Fall. A MOTHER reading a book and holding a BABY sits in the seat next to her.

JONATHAN (V.O.)  
Everything that can go wrong for  
this guy, does.

Emma turns and looks at the baby. She smiles at it. It looks like the baby might be smiling back, until it becomes apparent that the kid is just waiting to spit up - which he does. Emma turns back to the window.

INT. BOSTON, SOUTH STATION. DAY

Emma lugs her broken suitcase through the station. She has baby puke on her shirt.

JONATHAN (V.O.)

It's a wonder he doesn't just kill himself.

INT. BUS. DAY

Emma sleeps with her head against the window. In the seat next to her, A KID is chewing gum and staring in her direction. Suddenly, the gum falls out of his mouth into Emma's hair.

JONATHAN (V.O.)

American cinema has been obsessed with these social mutants since someone hand-cranked a camera.

The Kid quickly looks ahead, innocent.

EXT. EMMA'S PARENTS' HOUSE. DAY

Emma, gum still in her hair, steps out of a taxi and walks up the driveway of a nice, right-outside-of-Boston, suburban house.

JONATHAN (V.O.)

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is your assignment.

Emma rings the doorbell.

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

Why do we give a shit about these people? What's our obsession with the lonely oddball?

The front door opens and a giant golden retriever, PEANUT, stares out at Emma.

Emma reaches out to pet the dog, but it just gives her a look and walks away.

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

Seven pages, on my desk, next Monday morning.

(MORE)

And make sure there's research  
somewhere in between your falsely  
confident theories.

PAUL and JANICE DANIELS, 50ish and jolly, stick their  
heads out. They are the first people to really smile at  
Emma.

JONATHAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Class dismissed.

Paul and Janice open the front door wide and welcome Emma  
inside.

PAUL  
Emma beans!

JANICE  
Come in, sweetheart!

INT. DANIELS KITCHEN. DAY

Emma rolls her suitcase into her childhood kitchen.  
There's a cake on the table with "Welcome Home!" written  
in frosting.

PAUL  
Mom baked you a cake.

JANICE  
Just a little something...

PAUL  
Not still on that vegan kick, are  
we?

Janice grabs her daughter and takes her in.

JANICE  
You look wonderful.

Emma looks down at the baby vomit.

EMMA  
I look like I just failed a  
physical challenge on Double Dare.

Emma sets her suitcase against the wall and makes her way  
to the kitchen table, sitting down, exhausted.

PAUL  
Is something in your - ?

EMMA

Gum. The kid on the bus wouldn't spill but I'm pretty confident it was him.

Emma's parents look at her, glowing.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Guys, I'm only here for two weeks. The enthusiasm is weird.

JANICE

We know. We've been trying so hard to be more neglectful...

PAUL

Your mother almost opted for grocery store cake...but she's weak.

Janice is already cutting a piece of cake for Emma. Paul puts a glass of milk in front her.

EMMA

(eating)

Sheryl is such a bitch. Who cancels on a week in the Bahamas? I save up my vacation days for 6 months and then she goes and gets engaged. Totally selfish. Is there coconut in here?

JANICE

Of course. I know your obsession.

PAUL

Who needs Sheryl?! You have us!

EMMA

My parents are my best friends. Awesome.

Paul turns on some music and starts dancing around the kitchen.

PAUL

Any good news from the Big Apple?

EMMA

Like a boyfriend or a promotion?

Paul grabs Janice and starts dancing with her.

PAUL

Sure.

EMMA

Well, the leak above my bed stopped. And it turns out I don't have bedbugs after all.

JANICE

But what about -

EMMA

Remember how we promised we'd never have a conversation about my social life again? Because it's depressing? Because it's always been depressing? Because I have very few friends and they're all getting engaged or married or fat with babies? Your daughter is a loser. Let's not rub it in.

JANICE

Our daughter is not a loser. Our genes are too cool for that.

PAUL

You'll see. Two weeks at home will do wonders for your soul.

EMMA

My soul isn't the problem...

JANICE

Wonders for your stomach, then!

EMMA

Right. Gaining weight is surely the antidote to my sad existence.

PAUL

Think positively, sweetheart!

JANICE

Will the universe to throw you a happy little curve ball, and it'll happen. Now eat your cake.

Emma smiles a little and takes a bite as her parents continue to dance around the kitchen.

EMMA

(quietly)  
Curve ball away, universe...

INT. BAR. NIGHT

Dark and rustic, the place is full of people and lightly dusted with random Halloween decorations.

At the bar, three shot glasses are filled with tequila.

Emma sits with her two childhood friends, MOLLY, 25, skinny and blonde, and STEW, 25, goofily attractive.

STEW

They make their tequila as dirty  
in NYC as they do in Beantown?

MOLLY

Emma's forgotten how to drink dive  
alcohol...all they have in New  
York is top shelf.

STEW

Pansy liquor!

EMMA

Very funny.

STEW

Pansy liquor and the Yankees.

Stew spits in disgust.

EMMA

Publishing assistants don't get  
pansy liquor.

Everyone picks up their shots.

EMMA (CONT'D)

But we do get to clean it up after  
the important people vomit it all  
over the company bathroom.

STEW

To good friends who decide to  
grace us with their presence after  
five years in the big shitty  
apple!

EMMA

To townies who never leave!

They clink and take the shot, slamming their glasses down  
on the bar.

STEW

Ugh. I think I just got the worm.

MOLLY

There's no worm in tequila,  
sweetheart. At least not in  
America.

STEW

Then what did I just swallow?

JACK, 25, suddenly comes through the door, shaking his coat from the rain. He looks up and Molly waves him over.

STEW (CONT'D)

Seriously you guys, I swallowed something that had three dimensions...

JACK

Hey kids.

MOLLY

Hey Jack.

Molly looks over at Emma.

MOLLY (CONT'D)

Emma, you remember Jack, right?

Jack and Emma share a look. Something in Jack's face shifts.

MOLLY (CONT'D)

He was in the grade above us in high school...set about 1,000 crickets free in the principal's office Junior year?

EMMA

Cricket King!

JACK

That's me...Cricket King. Great nickname to have for all eternity.

Emma and Jack shake, their touch igniting a smile onto Jack's face.

JACK (CONT'D)

Nice to re-meet you, Emma.

EMMA

I totally envied you.

JACK

Really? Even with the nickname?

EMMA

Of course! Everyone knew who you were. People acknowledged your existence. That's a big thing in high school...especially to total nerds like me.

They continue to shake until it becomes awkward. Emma looks down and breaks the shake, embarrassed.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Sorry.

JACK

It's okay.

EMMA

As you can see, my nerdification is an ongoing thing.

MOLLY

Jack and Stew work together. Wasn't till we all went out for drinks and talked about our misfit days that we realized the high school connection.

JACK

I look a little different now.

STEW

Yeah. No more Jew-fro.

Suddenly, the bar erupts into shouts and cheers. Everyone looks over.

STEW (CONT'D)

What the hell...?

MOLLY

Oh shit...no way!

JACK

The devil rises again...

STEW

Jonathan Brooks. Motherfucker.

The crowd on the other side of the bar parts, almost in slow motion, and JONATHAN BROOKS stands in the middle of a group of highly attractive people.

Early 40's, casual smirk, self-consciously hot, Jonathan bends his neck obligatorily as an ATTRACTIVE COED licks salt from it and then takes a shot.

MOLLY

I can't believe he's still around.

STEW

Who else thought his supreme douchiness would have caused him to die by now?

On the other side of the bar, amidst shouts of encouragement, Jonathan "begrudgingly" lifts up his shirt to expose a chiseled chest. ANOTHER COED does a shot off his stomach.

He seems to look right at Emma. Which causes the entire scene to flicker out and change.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM, THE PAST. DAY

16-year-old NERDY EMMA sits nervously in the back of a large prep school classroom. Jonathan, in his 30's, stands at the head of the class.

YOUNGER JONATHAN  
 ...And what do we learn from Woody Allen's portrayal of the nebbish Fielding Mellish in 'Bananas'?

No one raises their hand.

YOUNGER JONATHAN (CONT'D)  
 You've got to be kidding me.  
 Nobody did the assignment?

Jonathan happens to hone his gaze onto Nerdy Emma.

YOUNGER JONATHAN (CONT'D)  
 You, what's-your-name, answer the question.

NERDY EMMA  
 ...Me?

YOUNGER JONATHAN  
 Uh, yeah.

The rest of the class snickers as Nerdy Emma stands, clutching a notebook with the title "The Great American Loser" scrawled across it.

YOUNGER JONATHAN (CONT'D)  
 Did you watch the movie?

Nerdy Emma nods, numbly.

YOUNGER JONATHAN (CONT'D)  
 You sure you weren't out at a rager last night? You look like a chick who rages.

The rest of the class laughs at Jonathan's merciless teasing as Nerdy Emma looks uncomfortably close to fainting.

NERDY EMMA

(barely)  
I...watched it.

YOUNGER JONATHAN

And?

NERDY EMMA

I...Woody...I...had a...

Her eyes flutter and she falls back into her seat, almost passing out. Jonathan blinks.

YOUNGER JONATHAN

Anyone else besides Comatose Cathy  
over here watch the assignment?

The class bursts into laughter. Nerdy Emma sits, stunned and lost.

MOLLY (V.O.)

Emma?

INT. BAR. NIGHT

The past fades away as Emma shakes her head. Turns out Jonathan wasn't even looking at her. Instead, he grins and bears it as an obviously GAY COLLEGE GUY does a shot off his neck.

MOLLY

You okay over there?

EMMA

...Fine.

She signals the skinny, Goth-ish BARTENDER for another shot.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Just placing a face...

STEW

(to Emma)

Didn't you have that guy for  
cinema studies in high school?

Emma nods weakly.

STEW (CONT'D)

What was the name of that stupid  
class he taught?

JACK

"The Great American Loser."

Jonathan is now dancing provocatively with yet a THIRD COED.

STEW

Right. Of course. How could I forget?

The Bartender pours four more shots. Emma grabs one and drinks without waiting.

MOLLY

I hear he's teaching at BC now. Some girl I used to baby-sit went to a party on campus and he was there. Apparently he's a big fan of extra credit in the form of janitor closet make-out sessions.

Emma reaches for another shot, but Stew grabs it away from her.

STEW

Easy there, drinkerexia. Save some for the rest of us.

Molly can't help but stare appreciatively at Jonathan.

MOLLY

I know he's like Beelzebub and everything...but damn, I'd buy a ticket to the gun show.

STEW

Are you serious? The guy's almost as old as your dad now.

JACK

Tell that to his legion of underaged fans.

MOLLY

We should go over and say hi.

STEW

What? Are you fucked in the head?

He looks at Jack.

STEW (CONT'D)

Women. Fucked in the head.

MOLLY

He used to be our high school teacher. It'll be fun.

STEW

That guy was a greaseball who should have been fired multiple times and it looks like he hasn't changed at ALL. What reason could you possibly have for wanting to say hi?

Molly takes her shot.

MOLLY

He's got an eight-pack. I want to touch it.

JACK

If memory serves me - and I may be a little foggy on this since I spent a lot of time getting smashed into lockers - Jonathan Brooks helped to instate one of the worst clique situations this world has ever seen.

STEW

I'm with you, my friend. Remember those "study sessions" he used to have that only the popular kids got to go to? Like a really fucked up Roman Empire.

EMMA

(suddenly)  
I'll be right back.

She walks off without another word, doing her best to avoid the rowdy crowd around Jonathan, who is now somehow dancing with three girls at once.

JACK

Can they not feel the aura of all-encompassing ego?

STEW

Can they not feel the aura of all-encompassing dog shit?

MOLLY

I don't see anyone doing a body shot off you two.

Stew drinks his tequila, eyeing Jonathan.

STEW

Who needs a bunch of hot chicks tonguing you anyway?

Jack drinks his tequila, also eyeing Jonathan.

JACK

Seriously.

INT. BAR BATHROOM. NIGHT.

Emma stares at herself in the grimy mirror, shouts and laughter pushing through the crack in the door.

She touches her face.

EMMA

Stop panicking. Stop.

A forgotten drink sits on the sink and Emma chugs it in desperation. She wipes her mouth.

EMMA (CONT'D)

High school is over.

After a deep breath, Emma turns and reaches for the doorknob.

But the door swings open before she can touch it, Jonathan and two COEDS suddenly in front of her.

Jonathan can barely hold up the two giggling girls, his shirt completely soaked with sweat and liquor.

JONATHAN

Hey! Sorry about that, wasn't locked!

Emma is frozen in horror. After looking at her for a moment, Jonathan flashes a characteristic Jonathan smirk.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

You can join us if you want. We need a brunette.

GIGGLING COED 1

Are you serious? She's like four feet tall!

GIGGLING COED 2

Yeah! No midgets allowed!

Freed by embarrassment, Emma pushes past them.

As the two girls drag Jonathan into the bathroom, he looks back at Emma, almost like he sees something he didn't expect.

INT. BAR. NIGHT

Sufficiently drunk, Molly and Stew are both nursing a beer. As Emma rejoins them, Jack's cell phone vibrates. He takes it out and looks.

STEW

(to Emma)

You okay there, sport?

Emma sits down on a stool, doing her best to hide her mental state.

EMMA

Oh yeah. Fine. Totally.

MOLLY

Well, that's good...because I am DRUNK.

STEW

When she gets drunk she tells people about it. It's cute.

Jack is putting his jacket on.

JACK

My mom just texted. She thinks the dog got out.

He smiles tightly.

JACK (CONT'D)

Duty calls.

STEW

Okay. See ya, partner.

MOLLY

Drive safe...because I am DRUNK!

Jack looks at Emma.

JACK

How long are you back for, Emma?

EMMA

Two weeks.

JACK

Cool. It'd be great to see you again...if...I mean...

EMMA

Yeah. Yes. Sure thing.

She smiles awkwardly. Jack's phone buzzes again, but he stops it immediately. He waves and then walks out of the bar, pulling his jacket against the cold.

MOLLY

That guy's got a heart of gold...

STEW

His mom is kinda wackadoodle.  
Stayed home to take care of her  
instead of finishing college.

EMMA

Really?

STEW

Really. Unless he's a big fat  
liar.

The rest of the bar seems to have cleared out. Molly puts her head on Stew's shoulder.

MOLLY

Honey...I'm drunk.

STEW

Honey, we know.

MOLLY

I'm so drunk I think I'm gonna  
barf dinner up on you.

Quickly, Stew stands, putting Molly's arm around his shoulders.

STEW

Gotta drag Little Miss Can't Hold  
Her Tequila to the bathroom.  
Don't take off till we get back.

EMMA

Okay...

Stew and Molly lumber off. Emma is left at the bar alone, drinking the random drink from the bathroom.

She studies a fake pumpkin on the bar counter, pushing it around.

JONATHAN (O.C.)

I hate Halloween.

Emma whips around and comes face to face with Jonathan. The Coeds are nowhere to be found. In fact, the place is pretty deserted.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)  
 Bunch of sexy cats and playboy  
 bunnies and naughty nurses running  
 around...totally tasteless.

Emma stares at him dumbly until he cracks a grin.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)  
 I'm joking. I make horrible jokes  
 when I'm drunk.

He motions at the stool next to Emma.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)  
 That taken?

The straw of her drink still in her mouth, Emma tries to  
 nod, but Jonathan sits regardless.

He's even hotter close-up.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)  
 This is gonna sound like a total  
 line, but don't I know you?

EMMA  
 No - I mean...I don't live here.  
 I mean, I used to...but not  
 anymore.

JONATHAN  
 Were you ever in my class?

Emma blinks.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM, THE PAST. DAY

Nerdy Emma stands, clutching her "American Loser"  
 notebook, at the mercy of Younger Jonathan. The rest of  
 the class points at her and laughs.

JONATHAN (V.O.)  
 I'm an assistant professor over at  
 BC.

INT. BAR. NIGHT

Emma shakes her head, back from the past. Jonathan is  
 looking at her intensely, his smile flickering.

JONATHAN  
 A bit of a fixture in that moth-  
 eaten establishment, you could  
 say.

EMMA

I went to Columbia for college.  
In New York.

Jonathan raises his eyebrows and leans back.

JONATHAN

Columbia, huh? What'd you study?

EMMA

English.

JONATHAN

English. Fancy that. Me too.

EMMA

You went to Columbia?

JONATHAN

Pi Kappa Alpha all the way.

Jonathan leans in.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

I know you. Somehow.

EMMA

I...

JONATHAN

Did we meet in Cancun?

EMMA

(blurting it out)

In high school. You taught me in  
high school.

Jonathan is caught off guard; not what he expected.

Stew and Molly come lumbering back towards Emma and  
Jonathan.

JONATHAN

Benjamin Foster Academy?

EMMA

Sophomore year film studies.

JONATHAN

Well, fuck me...

Still carrying the wasted Molly, Stew glares at Jonathan.

STEW

We're back.

MOLLY

Jonathan Brooks. You are a greasy  
HOTball!

Jonathan smiles and reaches out to shake Stew's hand.  
Stew declines.

STEW

Sorry, bro. Drunk girlfriend.

Stew looks at Emma.

STEW (CONT'D)

I called a cab. Let's go.

MOLLY

(to Jonathan)

Can I touch your eight-pack - ?

STEW

Emma?

EMMA

Coming.

Emma slides off the stool and starts to follow Stew and  
Molly towards the door. Jonathan grabs her arm.

JONATHAN

You should call me.

EMMA

What?

JONATHAN

I don't usually fixate on a face.

Emma rips her arm away.

EMMA

I doubt that.

She walks away. Jonathan watches the group leave.

JONATHAN

Nice to meet you!

MOLLY

Nice to HOT you!

STEW

Dude, shut up...

The door slams. Jonathan is left alone on the bar stool.  
He signals the Bartender.

BARTENDER  
Last call, man.

JONATHAN  
Vodka, straight.

BARTENDER  
What kind?

JONATHAN  
It's two in the morning. Do I  
care what kind?

BARTENDER  
Whatever.

The Bartender pours Jonathan's drink as Jonathan looks down at the fake pumpkin Emma was pushing around earlier.

JONATHAN  
High school...No shit.

The Bartender sets the drink down in front of Jonathan, who downs it in one gulp.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)  
No shit.

After dropping money on the counter, Jonathan grabs his coat from the floor and heads toward the door.

BARTENDER  
You need a cab or something?

JONATHAN  
No thanks.

BARTENDER  
Maybe you should take next weekend  
off.

JONATHAN  
Oh yeah?

BARTENDER  
You're here more than the kids  
with fake ID's.

JONATHAN  
Tell you what, I'll lay off the  
booze when you lay off the  
eyeliner, Jonas Brother.

Jonathan slams out.

BARTENDER  
Condescending asshole.

He grabs Jonathan's empty glass.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM, THE PAST. DAY

New day, same classroom. Nerdy Emma is standing in front of the class, trying to read from a report.

Younger Jonathan sits on his desk, watching her in amusement.

NERDY EMMA

"In the 1989 film 'Say Anything,'  
Cameron Crow depicts a lead  
character who..."

Nerdy Emma swallows.

CLASSMATE

We can't hear you!

Nerdy Emma looks to Younger Jonathan for help. He provides none.

NERDY EMMA

"A lead character who can only be  
described as a noble  
underachiever..."

CLASSMATE 2

She's whispering!

CLASSMATE 3

Tell the geek to speak up!

NERDY EMMA

(to Jonathan)  
I can't do this.

Younger Jonathan gives her a smirk.

YOUNGER JONATHAN

It kills you, doesn't it? That  
you hate and want me at the same  
time? I can taste your obsession.

INT. EMMA'S CHILDHOOD BEDROOM. MORNING

Emma bolts awake, breathing hard.

EMMA

He never said that. That never  
happened. ...And you can't taste  
obsession.

Falling back onto her pillows, Emma covers her eyes.

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