

DUKE

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FADE IN:

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - DAY

Morning light bathes the rain-slicked road as lawn sprinklers awaken in the front yards of houses.

Two people jog up the street, small at first, then closer until distinguishable. TAYLOR and JILL, both early thirties.

They keep pace with each other, though Jill has a noticeable hitch in her gait. On closer inspection --

She wears a prosthetic leg fitted below the knee.

They come even closer and stop, exhausted. Jill presses a button on her watch.

JILL

We made good time. Better than yesterday.

TAYLOR

That's good.

They move slowly down the street, their labored breaths returning to normal.

TAYLOR

So, did you think about it?

JILL

Yeah.

TAYLOR

And?

She sighs.

JILL

I just...don't know if I'm ready for that yet.

TAYLOR

It's been three months since you came home, Jill.

JILL

I know.

Taylor relents, doesn't want to press her.

EXT. COMMUNITY CENTER - DAY

A modest, stone-sided building flanked by greening trees.

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - ROOM - DAY

Four PEOPLE sit on chairs in a semi-circle, Jill among them. A bearded MAN in a sweater vest sits apart from the group, listening intently as a young MAN in Army fatigues speaks:

YOUNG MAN

I tried going back to my old job, right? I couldn't do the work anymore. And the worst thing is is I can't explain it. I don't even know what I'm qualified for now. I mean, things around me are the same, the people are still the same but, it's just... Somehow, everything's different since I returned.

On Jill, her face displays empathy. Understanding. She knows exactly how he feels.

The YOUNG MAN looks down at his shoes.

YOUNG MAN

I don't know. It's not like they give you a road map, you know?

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Jill climbs the steps to the front door.

INT. HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATER

She washes dishes as steam rises from the sink, shuts the faucet off, and gazes dolefully out the window.

INT. HOUSE - BEDROOM - LATER

Jill paces the floor, stops at a night stand where a framed picture rests. She picks it up.

PICTURE: Her and Taylor, a while back, on some vacation somewhere. Smiles on their faces. Happier times.

She puts the picture down.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Jill on the couch, reading a book.

The front door opens, in steps Taylor in a business suit. He sees her sitting there, closes the door.

TAYLOR

Hey.

JILL

Hi.

A curious silence follows.

TAYLOR

What?

JILL

Okay.

TAYLOR

Okay what?

JILL

Okay, I'll do it.

Taylor, shocked at first, then warming because he can hardly contain his excitement.

EXT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Jill can barely sit still. She cleans a table, fluffs the pillows, her face fraught with nerves.

As she rearranges trinkets on a shelf, she hears a car door shut from outside.

Her face goes white. She sits on the sofa and steels herself.

The door slowly opens, Taylor comes in, looks back outside.

TAYLOR

You sitting down?

JILL

Y-Yes.

Taylor holds a leash in his hand. A Shepherd mix timidly steps into the house, glancing curiously at the unfamiliar surroundings. He locks eyes with Jill.

She puts a hand to her mouth, lowers it, looks at Taylor.

TAYLOR

The lady at the shelter said they named him Duke. Said he didn't have a name when he came in.

Duke has the look of an older dog, and trembles noticeably. There's a bald patch just behind his ear.

TAYLOR

They said his old owner must have taken to mistreating him. He has nightmares sometimes. Wakes up whimpering. You want me to bring him over?

Jill, overcome, presses her lips together and nods.

Taylor crosses the room, Duke follows hesitantly.

TAYLOR

Just hold your hand out. Let him smell  
you.

She does just that. Duke sniffs her hand, then licks.

Taylor takes a knee next to them as Jill scratches the side of  
Duke's face. He seems to like that.

A tear slides down her cheek as she dares to move in closer.

JILL

Hey... You're a good boy, aren't you?  
You're a good boy.

She touches near the bare spot, the dog flinches.

JILL

Did somebody hurt you? Huh? It's okay.  
Mommy'll take care of you now. You  
don't have to worry...

Taylor watches in amazement, surprised at how this is going.

TAYLOR

You know, if you don't like the name  
we could always change it.

She peeks up at Taylor, wipes her face as Duke continues to  
nuzzle with her.

JILL

It's okay. I kinda like Duke.