

THE BELL CURVE

Written by
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INT. RESTAURANT - MORNING

CLOSEUP on MAX BELL (30), attractive features, but would make a good "every man." Right now, however, he's unkempt, looks like he hasn't slept in a while, and is staring ahead in a daze as he drinks a beer with:

LYDIA NGUYEN (late 20s), tightly wound, type A. Book smart; and

DARREN KING (early 30s), snarky, eccentric. Street smart.

Max has just broken the news that--

LYDIA

Andrea broke up with you!? But you guys just bought a house!

MAX

Yes we did. If by "you guys" you mean *she* bought a house. And allowed me to live there.

LYDIA

Max, I'm sorry.

MAX

If you think winning an argument with a significant other is tough in general, just wait til her drop-the-mic moment is *eviction*.

CUT TO:

INT. ANDREA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY - FLASHBACK

Max and ANDREA (late 20s - ethnically ambiguous and slightly-too-good-looking for Max) are fighting. Their DOG, a small Yorkshire Terrier, is YIPPING incessantly.

ANDREA

Max, the dog is acting crazy. I don't understand why you can't just take her for a walk during the day.

MAX

Because baby, it's not my dog, it's your dog, and contrary to popular belief I actually have shit to do during the day and don't have time to prevent it from acting like a little psychopath, and maybe you should have thought about your available time to take care of a living animal before you bought the thing in your early 20s!

ANDREA

(beat)

You owe me rent!

BACK TO:

INT. RESTAURANT

DARREN

She made you pay rent?

MAX

I-- of course I paid rent, I'm not going to freeload off of anyone.

DARREN

So that time you lived on my couch for a month was what?

MAX

A transitionary period.

LYDIA

Max, where did you sleep last night?

MAX

(ignoring this)

Ok, I may not have been consistent on rent, but I tried to be the man of the house, at least as much as I possibly could. There was always need for home improvement...

CUT TO:

INT. ANDREA'S HOUSE - DAY - FLASHBACK

The Dog is scratching at the back door. As Max opens the door, the rug underneath it catches and moves. Max tests this a couple times, annoyed...

MOMENTS LATER:

Max has a hammer in his hand and nails in his mouth. He kneels down and begins NAILING the rug to the floor.

BACK TO:

INT. RESTAURANT

MAX

She didn't notice for *weeks*.

LYDIA

So what are you going to do?

MAX

I don't know. Andrea was right, I don't have a lot going on.

LYDIA

Oh come on, that's not true.

DARREN

Yeah, she could be on to something there.

MAX

You know how some people are destined for greatness? Well, it occurred to me that *most* people aren't. It's not that I had grandiose ideas of what I was meant for, but it never crossed my mind that I was just-- average.

LYDIA

You're not, but even if you were, what's wrong with average? It's a defect of our entire entitled generation that people think everything is about *them*, and that they should be rich, famous, or powerful, so they post selfies and start blogs and... write self-indulgent TV shows about themselves.

DARREN
(to Lydia)
You're in Digital Marketing,
literally your whole clientele is
an entitled generation who thinks
everything is about them.

LYDIA
I'm an opportunist. And Max, you're
not average, you're a *model* for
god's sake.

CUT TO:

INT. COMMERCIAL SET - FLASHBACK

Max's face has bright lights on it. Equipment surrounds him.
A plain backdrop. A camera FLASHES.

PHOTOGRAPHER (O.S.)
Ok, now just a little to the right.

Max turns. FLASH. FLASH.

PHOTOGRAPHER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Little more...

FLASH. FLASH.

PHOTOGRAPHER (CONT'D)
Perfect. Now, tip the plate towards
me a little.

WIDE SHOT reveals Max is holding a PLATE OF FOOD. The
photographer is not taking shots of him, but of the plate.

BACK TO:

INT. RESTAURANT

MAX
Trust me, I still fall very much
within the bell curve in every
category. And worse, I don't even
have anything that stands out about
me. Like Lydia, you're an
opinionated control freak...

Lydia is unsure how to take this backhanded compliment.

MAX (CONT'D)
Darren, you are by--

DARREN

Pansexual, I'm *pan*-sexual, not bisexual, how many times do I have to explain that?

MAX

I was going to say you are *by far* the most entrepreneurial person I know.

DARREN

Oh. Thank you.

MAX

Not me, I'm a thirty-something straight white guy who's a walking contradiction. If this were a sitcom, I'd be somewhere in between Joey and Chandler, or somewhere between Ted and Barney, or between Nick and Schmidt...

Lydia looks confused.

DARREN

(explaining)

"Friends", "How I Met Your Mother", "New Girl".

LYDIA

Oh.

MAX

I like "Les Miserables" and Jay-Z. I wear Harry Potter t-shirts and Air Jordans. I constantly preach against monogamy and consumerism, but all I want right now is to be back with my girlfriend in our house full of shit that I bought!

DARREN

Her house.

MAX

Ahhhhh!

DARREN

And you don't really have much shit. Except that weird rug.

MAX

I love that rug, it was the first major purchase I got for the house.

DARREN

It looks like a Jackson Pollock painting.

MAX

It really pulls the room tog--

DARREN

No! Don't you dare.

LYDIA

You know what you need to do?

MAX

Die in an alcohol-induced car crash?

(off the other two's
shocked looks)

Like Jackson Pollock.

DARREN

Oh...

LYDIA

No, you morose weirdo, I was gonna say you need to try something new. Something unique and different.

MAX

Like what?

LYDIA

Like *painting* like Jackson Pollock. Or singing and dancing. Or take up bungee jumping. It doesn't matter what. Right now you're in a slump and you think you're stuck, but you need to get out of your head.

DARREN

Like in Bull Durham when Kevin Costner made Tim Robbins wear girl's underwear.

LYDIA

I don't know dated pop culture references! But that's what you need to do, something that challenges you! Break out of it.

Their SERVER comes and hands everyone a bill.

MAX
(to the Server)
Easy does it love.
(to the others)
If I'm going to challenge life head
on, I need another drink. Who's
with me?

LYDIA
It's nine a.m. Max.

Max looks confused.

LYDIA (CONT'D)
When was the last time you slept--

MAX
(over)
It's been a while.

Lydia and Darren put cash with their bills and stand.

MAX (CONT'D)
You guys have somewhere important
to be?

DARREN
Lydia is going to coach me on how
to write a marketing plan.

LYDIA
He needs to work on his clichés.

Darren briefly looks excited that Lydia quoted "Bull Durham"
until he realizes it was on accident.

The Server returns with Max's drink.

SERVER
Thanks guys. And I'm supposed to
remind you about our comedy club
next door. Every weekend we have
four shows, and we have an open mic
night every Monday night.

Max's face lights up.

DARREN
That was predictable.

He pats Max on the shoulder.

DARREN (CONT'D)
The rose goes in the front big guy.

LYDIA

What--

DARREN

Just-- walk.

They exit.

FADE TO:

INT. CAR - DAY

The following will be a recreation of (nay, an homage to) the bus/writing scene from "8 Mile."

Max is seated in a Ride Share looking out the window. Where Jimmy from "8 Mile" was in the poorest part of town, Max is just rolling through a nice urban part of NASHVILLE. He slips on headphones, pulls out a pen and pad, and starts writing.

CLOSE ON Max's face, closing his eyes. LAUGHTER fades in (like the rap beat would).

MAX (V.O.)

You know the absolute worst thing
in the history of the entire
universe...

LAUGHTER. Max is bobbing his head and writing.

MAX (V.O.)

...her drop-the-mic moment is
eviction...

LAUGHTER, louder this time.

MAX (V.O.)

...Pussy willows.
(beat)
Decorative pussy willows...

UNCONTROLLABLE LAUGHTER! Max chuckles to himself.

He continues to write feverishly, in his own world, grinning to himself, bobbing his head, then...

SCREECH, THWAP! Max SLAMS his head against the seat in front of him as the car comes to a sudden stop. His headphones are knocked askew.

DRIVER

This you?

EXT. CAR/PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Max exits the car, but isn't in front of a house; he's behind an industrial space in a large parking lot. Still, this seems to be where he was headed.

CUT TO:

INT. LYDIA AND DARREN'S APARTMENT - DAY

Lydia and Darren are sitting around a table that has stacks of paper, books, and binders.

LYDIA

Ok, read me what you have.

DARREN

This is such bullshit Lydia. I feel like I'm conforming to the corporate machine.

LYDIA

If you want investors to take you seriously, you have to sound like you are.

DARREN

As my C.O.O., I think you should really listen--

LYDIA

(over)

I'm not your C.O.O. I told you explicitly I wanted nothing to do with this, but as your friend and roommate I will help you.

DARREN

But when the magazine takes off--

LYDIA

(sternly)

No.

DARREN

Fine, we'll table that for now. But the idea sells itself! I'm gonna be the next Hugh Hefner.

LYDIA

As it stands, you'll be lucky not to be the next JFK Jr.

An awkward pause.

DARREN

Was that a reference to me crashing
and burning?!

LYDIA

Wow. No. He started a magazine
called "George" that failed
miserably. Before he... you know.

DARREN

You know *that* but you don't know
Bull Durham.

(beat)

Can't we just do something big and
fun to announce it to the world?
I'm a big idea guy!

LYDIA

Like when you started a record
label?

CUT TO:

INT. EVENT SPACE - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

An elaborate set-up with a banner saying "**DIK Musik Launch
Party.**"

Max, Andrea, Lydia and Darren all stand by a stage, dressed
up for a big night.

DARREN

Gonna be huge!

We PAN OUT to see that no one is there. Silence.

LYDIA

When do doors open?

ANDREA

Two hours ago.

A FOG MACHINE turns on behind them.

BACK TO:

INT. LYDIA'S APARTMENT

LYDIA

I've been in marketing for ten years. Yes, a lot of it is smoke and mirrors, and yes, sometimes it feels very similar to what I think prostitution might feel like, but it's the way the world works. Now what do you have?

Darren holds up the sheet of paper in front of him.

DARREN

(reading)

We believe that utilizing banal buzz words is the key to getting your attention and sounding both professional and cool while actually saying nothing to people who don't know any better.

He smiles. Lydia isn't amused.

LYDIA

You know how Richard Branson made Virgin the company that "disrupts" and "breaks all the rules?"

DARREN

He disrupted and broke all the rules?

LYDIA

He *branded* it that way!
(grabbing his paper)
Watch this.

Darren watches reluctantly as Lydia scratches things out and re-writes. When she's done, she hands the paper back to him.

DARREN

(reading)

We believe that utilizing strategic, creatively-driven processes is the key to representing unique brands and cultivating emotional experiences we can deliver to inspired consumers.

He looks at her, flabbergasted.

DARREN (CONT'D)
I don't even know what this says,
it sounds like I'm starting a
pyramid scheme!

LYDIA
Sounds good though, doesn't it?

Darren lets his head fall down to the table with a THUD.

LYDIA (CONT'D)
(beat)
Hey do you think Max will be ok?

DARREN
(without raising his head)
He'll be fine, they used to break
up all the time.

LYDIA
For like hours, not weeks. You
think he'll take my advice?

DARREN
(looking up)
And join the circus? Who the hell
knows, but it beats drowning in
self-pity.

LYDIA
Yeah.

She's lost in thought.

DARREN
(off her look)
No.

LYDIA
What?

DARREN
No! I know that look.

LYDIA
What look?

DARREN
You want to interfere.

LYDIA
No I don't!

DARREN
You always need to meddle. You're a meddler.

LYDIA
I'm not a meddler!

Darren gives her a look: *"Are you joking?"*

CUT TO:

EXT. PARK - DAY - FLASHBACK

Two young people, a GUY and a GIRL, are sitting in a romantic spot having what appears to be a lover's quarrel.

GIRL
I don't mean to pressure you, but I don't know why you won't just do it.

GUY
It's not the right time.

GIRL
When will the right time be?
Everyone thought you were going to do it last month, then I thought you might last weekend.

GUY
I'm just not ready yet, ok?

GIRL
What are you waiting for? I love you, but you're kind of being a pansy about this.

GUY
Do you know how much planning we have to do for something like that? Neither of us have the time right now. And why does it have to be on me?

GIRL
Come on, what are you scared of?

Suddenly, Lydia POPS UP from behind them.

LYDIA

Just go for it buddy. She doesn't care about the price or the size, she just wants the commitment. And look at how pretty she is, come on man!

The Guy and Girl look shocked and appalled.

GUY

What are you talking about lady?

GIRL

This is my brother.

LYDIA

Wha-- I thought you were talking about proposing...

GUY

We were talking about whether or not to take our father off life support!

An extremely awkward pause. Then Lydia slinks away.

LYDIA

So sorry... You're still very pretty. Sorry.

BACK TO:

INT. LYDIA'S APARTMENT

LYDIA

I-- Fine, maybe sometimes.

DARREN

(on his phone)

I just got a text from Max. Looks like he's taking your advice. He's running jokes past me.

He hands Lydia his phone. She reads under her breath.

LYDIA

That could work. But see, what he would want to do after the set-up--

Darren shakes his head.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

Sorry.

FADE TO:

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Max approaches his car. Inside is a mess of food wrappers, liquor bottles, a handful of unwashed clothes. He climbs in the back seat.

INT. MAX'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Max finds a pillow and blanket. This is where he slept last night.

He gets comfy, then pulls out a SMALL BOX. It's full of weed and paraphernalia. As he shuffles through, he finds something else... a POLAROID of him and Andrea, at a "Burning Man"-type festival, both probably high. Happier times.

Max stares at this for a long time...

CUT TO:

INT. ANDREA'S HOUSE - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Max and Andrea come storming through the door together in the middle of a fight. They're both dressed in their ridiculous-looking BURNING MAN APPAREL.

ANDREA

Don't think I didn't notice the way you were looking at Maddie tonight.

MAX

What?

ANDREA

Yeah. I saw you watching her dance.

MAX

I was watching you *both* dance!

ANDREA

Oh sure.

MAX

What, you two were dancing, sometimes she danced in front of my eye line, I wasn't *gawking* at her.

ANDREA

You were talking to her for a long time in the corner.

MAX

She's the only one of your friends I actually relate to.

ANDREA

What? Why?

MAX

For starters, she's the only one who's not married or pregnant.

ANDREA

Is that it, you relate to the single girl?

MAX

That's not what I meant and you know it.

ANDREA

So where do I fit in, huh? You can talk to Maddie and to Lydia and Darren about whatever the hell... What do you and I have in common?

MAX

Well I'm not in love with them...

ANDREA

Don't fucking patronize me-- wait-- what?

MAX

Yeah.

ANDREA

You love me?

MAX

Yeah.

ANDREA

Why?

MAX

(pause)

That seems like a grandiose and odd question given the moment...

(aside)

(MORE)

MAX (CONT'D)
...and yet, one I probably should
have an answer to pretty easily.

She kisses him passionately.

BACK TO:

INT. MAX'S CAR

CLOSE ON Max lost in nostalgia. He closes his eyes and
settles in to sleep.

FADE TO:

INT. COMEDY CLUB - NIGHT

Darren and Lydia are sitting in an AUDIENCE with a handful of
people.

LYDIA
You think he's funny? I mean, he's
kind of funny to *us*, but you think--

DARREN
(looking O.S.)
Oh shit.

ACROSS THE ROOM... Andrea sits down.

DARREN (CONT'D)
Does he know Andrea's here? Did he
invite her?

Lydia looks guilty.

DARREN (CONT'D)
You didn't.

Darren gives her a judgmental look as the EMCEE takes the
stage and gets everyone's attention.

EMCEE
Alright, you ready to get started?

Some applause and clapping from the audience.

EMCEE (CONT'D)
Our first comedian tonight is
making his standup debut, so let's
give it up for him. Please welcome
to the stage, Max Bell!

Darren crosses himself.

Max takes the stage. He hesitates for a second. Then...

MAX

You know the absolute worst thing
in the history of the entire
universe?... Hyperbole.

A beat. A couple chuckles. Then Darren oversells it...

DARREN

HAHA!

People stare. Darren slinks down in his chair.

MAX

Anyway. It's good to be here. It's
good to be out of the house. My
girlfriend and I just bought a
house...

Darren and Lydia glance nervously over to Andrea. She doesn't
indicate anything.

MAX (CONT'D)

And by that I mean *she* bought a
house. And if you think winning an
argument with a girl is tough in
general, just wait til her drop-the-
mic moment is *eviction*.

A smattering of laughs.

MAX (CONT'D)

Since it's her house, she makes all
the decisions. So now I have
decorative pussy willows in my
bedroom.

(pause)

You heard me. I laugh every time I
hear myself say it. Pussy willows.
When you say it, it either sounds
dirty or like you should be saying
it with some flamboyant British
accent, like...

(in flamboyant British)

"Oh look, the pussy willows! I say
Nigel, we must get a bouquet of
pussy willows for the bedroom. Now,
let's have a spot of tea and a
fag."

Uncomfortable laughter.

MAX (CONT'D)

Shut up, that term's funny. And if you don't think so, 'pussy willows' definitely is.

(beat)

But that's what happens, man. That's what happens when you fall in love... Things change. Things just start happening that you never saw coming. Things like--

Boom. **He sees Andrea.** A long beat.

MAX (CONT'D)

Things like... what if she gets tired of you? Or falls out of love with you?

Max tries to compose himself. Looks out into the audience, all staring back at him. The RED LIGHT comes on. It's bright in his eyes.

MAX (CONT'D)

You know how I was talking about my girlfriend evicting me earlier? That's exactly what happened.

Andrea now looks wildly uncomfortable. Darren and Lydia look concerned.

DARREN

Oh no.

Max tries to put a clean tag on it.

MAX

So if that isn't the biggest goddamn punchline of the night, I don't know what is. Thank you for your time.

He hurries off stage. An awkward beat. Then some applause as the Emcee hurries back up.

EMCEE

Ok, that was awkward. One more time for Max everybody!

Andrea doesn't know how to react. She looks over and locks eyes with Lydia and Darren.

FADE TO:

INT. COMEDY CLUB BAR - NIGHT

Max is sitting by himself downing a beer as people exit the theater. Lydia and Darren approach.

LYDIA
Heeeey good job buddy!

DARREN
Yeah you killed it!

MAX
(sarcastically)
I don't know the ending seemed a little off, what do you think?

LYDIA
Hey, listen--

MAX
Who invited her?

LYDIA
What?

MAX
You two are the only people I told about this. And she wouldn't come here on her own, she doesn't even like standup.

An awkward pause.

LYDIA
I didn't think she'd come! I just put a flyer in her mailbox so she thought you were doing something good and proactive and--

MAX
Well she saw me almost meltdown in front of a packed house of *nine* people, so thank you.

He brushes past them to leave.

LYDIA
Max...

MAX
It's fine, really, I'll just-- I'll see you tomorrow.

He exits.

LYDIA
No, you didn't--

The BARTENDER shows up behind her with Max's bill.

LYDIA (CONT'D)
--pay your bill.
(beat)
Well, I suppose I could at least--

DARREN
(over)
Yeah I think you could buy him that
beer.

INT. HALLWAY - COMEDY CLUB - CONTINUOUS

Max walks out of the bar with his head low.

ANDREA (O.S.)
Max.

He stops and looks up.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
Hi. I, um-- I didn't know you
wanted to do standup.

Max doesn't know what to say.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
(trying)
You did a good job.

MAX
Thanks.

ANDREA
You didn't return my calls, so I--

MAX
Yeah, I'll come pick up my stuff
tomorrow.

ANDREA
You don't have to-- I mean, we can
talk first, if you want.

MAX
And then what, you'll stick around
and watch me pack?

ANDREA

No, I-- Can we talk before you do anything? I think we need to, I think maybe I was too impulsive asking you to leave.

Max hesitates.

MAX

Ok. Sure.

ANDREA

Ok. Well, I'll be home around six tomorrow, do you want to swing by then?

MAX

Six o'clock?

ANDREA

Yeah, anytime after that.

A beat...

LYDIA (O.S.)

Yes!

DARREN (O.S.)

No!

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. BAR - DAY

The following day, the three friends are back in the same place we first met them. Max has just broken the news.

LYDIA

See, I told you she'd want you back after seeing that you're doing something cool!

DARREN

She sucks dude.

MAX

Ok. On the off chance I was going to get back together with her, how do you think that statement would play in the near future?

DARREN

Sorry.

(pause)

Ok I'm not sorry, she does!

(MORE)

DARREN (CONT'D)

She broke up with you, called you a loser, and kicked you out of your house!

MAX

Her house.

LYDIA

She wants you back. You guys really are cute together.

DARREN

Stop it, woman!

MAX

Guys, I'm just going over to talk things out. It'll be good for me, we could get closure.

DARREN

That's not what happened last time!

CUT TO:

INT. ANDREA'S HOUSE - DAY - FLASHBACK

Max enters looking like he didn't take this one very well. Andrea is nowhere to be seen; however, there are CANDLES lit and the lights are down.

MAX

Hello?

Andrea appears from the bedroom doorway... naked.

ANDREA

I missed you.

Max starts pulling his shirt over his head and rushes towards her so fast, he trips and FALLS OVER.

BACK TO:

INT. BAR

MAX

That was different! She only kicked me out for a couple days, and it was after we got in a big fight.

DARREN

Remind me again what the fight was about?

CUT TO:

INT. ANDREA'S HOUSE - DAY - FLASHBACK

Max is trying to hang a MANTLE on the wall. Well, he *was*. He's now half-drunk and the mantle lies on the floor with five huge HOLES in the wall.

He and Andrea are screaming at each other, and the dog is BARKING beside them like a maniac. It's chaos.

ANDREA

You're tearing my house apart! This is why we hire professionals!

MAX

Oh sure, when you bought it, you said this is *our* house, but any time something goes wrong, suddenly it's *your* house--

ANDREA

You can't hang heavy things on the wall after you've had seven whiskeys, you idiot!

MAX (CONT'D)

Why do you insist on buying this shitty, over-priced stuff! This isn't my fault, and I don't need fucking help!

BACK TO:

INT. BAR

MAX

Home improvement.

(beat)

I'm just going to hear her out, then I'm going to get my stuff and leave.

No one is convinced.

FADE TO:

EXT./EST. ANDREA'S HOUSE - EVENING

Max walks towards the door. He overturns a FAKE ROCK and finds the spare KEY to the house.

INT. ANDREA'S HOUSE

Max is wandering around packing his things alone. He looks around nostalgically. Then he makes it to the mantle on the wall...

CUT TO:

INT. ANDREA'S HOUSE - DAY - FLASHBACK

A continuation of the fight from before. (The dog is still BARKING.)

ANDREA You can't hang heavy things on the wall after you've had seven whiskeys, you idiot!	MAX Why do you insist on buying this shitty, over-priced stuff! This isn't my fault, and I don't need your fucking help!
---	---

ANDREA (CONT'D)
You're useless! This thing comes
with instructions!
(picking up a piece of
paper)
And a *blueprint*! You just had to
trace it to know where to put the
screws!

MAX
They're making me line up five
perfectly placed screws into a huge
chunk of wood? What am I supposed
to use, the power of prayer?!

ANDREA
Well congrats, now we have five
perfectly-placed holes in the wall!

YIP! YIP! YIP!

MAX
(to the dog)
Shut up!

ANDREA
Don't tell her to shut up, she
knows you're an idiot too!

MAX
That's unlikely... and mean.

ANDREA
(to the dog)
Oh come on!

She storms to the back door to let the dog out.

Max throws down a measuring tape on the couch and picks up his scotch. A long pause, and then...

ANDREA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Is this fucking mat **nailed to the floor?!**

Max reacts.

BACK TO:

INT. ANDREA'S HOUSE

Max grabs the last of his things and walks out the door. Beside the door is a **CLOCK, reading 5:30.**

EXT. ANDREA'S HOUSE - EVENING - CONTINUOUS

Max places the box in the front seat of his car. In the back, hanging way out the window is his JACKSON POLLOCK RUG.

Max gets in and drives away.

FADE TO BLACK.