

WAITING FOR HAPPINESS

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. TOWN - MORNING

The town exudes old-world charm with its aged homes and charming shops. Meticulously maintained lawns and a vibrant cluster of blue gardenias stand out. The entire scene appears to be plucked right out of a Norman Rockwell painting, portraying the quintessential American town.

Navigating through this idyllic scene, a white pickup comes into view. Emblazoned on the side: "Miguel Landscaping."

INT. BAKERY FACTORY - MORNING

Visitors, accompanied by their cheerful and energetic GUIDE, (30s), observe the bustling activity of employees on the assembly line.

GUIDE

Welcome to our bakery, folks.

Christina, (30s), appears somewhat detached from her surroundings. She's makeup-free, her black hair neatly secured under a white, nylon hairnet. She presents the group with a tray of freshly baked cookies.

The guide claps with excitement.

GUIDE (CONT'D)

And now, ladies and gentlemen, I'll take you through the process of making our famous cinnamon buns!

Christina walks off with the empty tray. Completely withdrawn, unable to engage.

EXT. FUNERAL HOME - DAY

VINCENT, (mid-30s), a Hispanic man with dark, sunken eyes, wearing a US Army jacket, emerges from the funeral home. He holds an urn tightly against his chest. His gaze lands on a MAN (40s) raising the American flag up a sixty-foot pole.

EXT. SCHOOL - TRACK FIELD - FLASHBACK

VINCENT, (13), his face streaked with tears, stares at a rope hanging down from the flagpole.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. FUNERAL HOME - DAY

A truck honks, bringing Vincent back to reality. He approaches the white pickup and climbs inside.

INT. PICKUP - DAY

Behind the wheel is SALVADOR, (50s), Mexican, with a weathered face, proudly wearing his sweat-stained, bone-white Stetson.

SALVADOR

Welcome back. It's good to see you, man.

VINCENT

You too, Salvador.

Vincent gazes out at the town, chewing his lip.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

It's just as I remembered.

Vincent's attention is drawn to a house completely covered in MAGA signs.

SALVADOR

Nothing's changed.

VINCENT

Yeah, no shit.

Salvador glances at the urn on Vincent's lap.

SALVADOR

I'm sorry you didn't get to see him. I've been trying to reach you for a while... I-- I didn't know what to do. It was cheaper to cremate him.

Vincent takes a deep breath.

VINCENT

What happened?

SALVADOR

He was mowing the lawn and suddenly collapsed.

VINCENT

Was he in pain?

Salvador shakes his head.

SALVADOR
It happened so fast. He didn't
suffer.

VINCENT
I-- I don't understand. Was he
sick?

Salvador hesitates for a moment before responding.

SALVADOR
He couldn't stop drinking. He was
never quite the same after what
happened to you.

Vincent looks out of the window, his pain palpable.

INT. STRIP MALL - DINER - DAY

Salvador and Vincent sit in a booth. Vincent holds the urn in his lap.

SALVADOR
I'm glad you're home.

Salvador eyes Vincent's army jacket.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)
Why on earth did you go there?

VINCENT
I had to get away from here.

SALVADOR
How long 'til you have to go back?

VINCENT
Honorable discharge.

SALVADOR
What if there's a war?

VINCENT
We're always at war.

SALVADOR
(after a pause)
So, what's going on? Do you have a
family? Wife? Kids?

Vincent shakes his head.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)
What are you waiting for?

Vincent shrugs, almost embarrassed.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)
You just haven't met the right
woman yet. Trust me.

VINCENT
Hey, you're not married?

A sad realization hits Salvador.

SALVADOR
Yeah. Well, then... Are you at
least happy?

VINCENT
With what?

SALVADOR
Your life.

Vincent looks around at the bland, passive faces of other diners.

VINCENT
It doesn't matter.

INT. BAKERY FACTORY - CAFETERIA - DAY

Christina sits alone at a table, her gaze fixed on the apple in her hand. As she takes a small, absent-minded bite, her eyes reflect a distant sadness, hinting at something broken deep within her soul.

INT. PICKUP - DAY

Salvador pulls out of the parking lot. Outside, Vincent sees ALEXIS, (37), slightly overweight, red-haired, exhausted, exiting a liquor store with two stuffed shopping bags.

Shocked, Vincent ducks, but it's too late. Alexis sees him.

VINCENT
Jesus, look at these people. Still
in the same fucking place.

Salvador follows his gaze.

SALVADOR
 Drunk all the time. Recently
 divorced. Her husband left her.

VINCENT
 Any kids?

SALVADOR
 Why torture yourself? Forget about
 her.

VINCENT
 I need to know.

SALVADOR
 She suffered several miscarriages.

VINCENT
 Good.

SALVADOR
 Sooner or later you're gonna have
 to forgive her.

Vincent looks out of the window, deep in thought.

INT. BAKERY FACTORY - WOMEN'S LOCKER ROOM - DAY

The loud buzzer rings, indicating quitting time. A flurry of employees rush in. Among them is Christina, who walks with PAULA, (50s), haggard, overweight, gray hair cascading wearily.

PAULA
 (whispers)
 Would you just look at that...

Paula motions to KATE, (30s), confidently clad in her underwear, oozing perfection.

PAULA (CONT'D)
 Just got back from Mexico. The
 works: boobs, butt, lipo. They even
 erased her C-section scar.

Christina's eyes briefly sweep over Kate's seemingly flawless body before she swiftly gathers her own clothes, a hint of self-consciousness in her movements.

EXT. BAKERY FACTORY - DAY

Amidst the scorching sun, Christina exits the factory carrying a box of cookies. She's dressed in oversized, dark-colored clothing as though perpetually in mourning.

INT. PICKUP - DAY

Salvador stops at a traffic light. Vincent spots Christina at a bus stop, running her fingers over some blue gardenias and inhaling their scent. Her raven-black hair cascades in one direction.

EXT. BUS STOP - DAY

Two other WOMEN, (30s), sporting flashy makeup and flaunting gaudy outfits, stand at the bus stop, engrossed in their cell phones, scrolling through Instagram and indulging in loud gossip.

WOMAN #1
She looks so fake.

WOMAN #2
Like a plastic doll.

WOMAN #1
Oh, my God.

WOMAN #2
What?

WOMAN #1
Look.

Woman #1 points towards the white pickup.

WOMAN #1 (CONT'D)
He's staring right at us.

The women giggle.

WOMAN #2
He's cute.

Christina remains oblivious.

INT. PICKUP - DAY

Vincent's gaze remains fixed on Christina.

SALVADOR

So, what's your plan now? Where are you headed?

VINCENT

I'm not sure.

SALVADOR

Well, I understand not much happens around here.

VINCENT

Yeah, not a lot going on.

Salvador pauses, considering his next words.

SALVADOR

I... I was hoping you'd stay. Take charge now that your father is gone. He worked so hard, and it would be a shame for it all to go to waste.

Vincent is taken aback, not expecting this.

VINCENT

I don't think so. It's strange, you know. My whole life has been about getting far away from here.

SALVADOR

I know.

There is a moment of silence between them.

VINCENT

How's business?

SALVADOR

It's been slow since Trump. Not many folks want to hire Mexicans around these parts.

Salvador follows Vincent's gaze and sees Christina.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)

We cut her lawn.

VINCENT

You know her?

SALVADOR

She just moved here.

EXT. BUS STOP - DAY

The bus arrives, and Christina looks up.

SALVADOR (O.S.)
Her name is Christina...

INT. PICKUP - DAY

The traffic light changes, and Salvador drives on.

SALVADOR
Just think about it, that's all.

Vincent continues to watch Christina in the rearview mirror until she boards the bus.

VINCENT
Okay.

EXT. LOW-RENT RESIDENTIAL STREET - DAY

The neighborhood is filled with old houses, their porches slumping, yards overgrown with yard-high grass, and broken fences.

INT. PICKUP - DAY

Salvador cuts the engine and points out a small house that stands out from the rest. It has perfectly trimmed grass, bright white fencing, a pristine porch, and a beautiful planting bed running along the railing. It is undoubtedly the best-looking house on the block.

Salvador's face beams with pride as he looks at the house.

SALVADOR
I built it myself, with a little help from your father, of course.

VINCENT
It's really nice.

Salvador nods, almost congratulating himself.

SALVADOR
I'm almost done paying for it.

Salvador hands Vincent the keys to the pickup.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)

Your father would want you to have
it.

Salvador hops out of the truck.

EXT. SALVADOR'S HOUSE - DAY

Salvador walks towards his house, his limp noticeable.

INT. PICKUP - DAY

After a few moments, Vincent slides into the driver's seat,
gripping the steering wheel tightly, and guns the engine.

EXT. VINCENT'S FATHER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The pickup stops outside an old, deserted, dilapidated house,
with an old boat rotting in the driveway.

INT. PICKUP - NIGHT

Vincent cuts the engine, and with a mix of anticipation and
apprehension, gazes at the house. He takes a deep breath,
gathers his courage, and steps out of the truck with the urn.

INT. SALVADOR'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Salvador plops down on the bed, exhausted. He slides his
pants up to his knee and removes his prosthetic leg.

EXT. HELEN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A well-kept mid-century house with an angled roof and a
charming stone facade. Colorful flowers brighten the
surroundings. Christina knocks on the door. No response. She
knocks again, a touch louder. Finally, the door creaks open:

HELEN, (79), tall with silver gray hair, stands there in a
silk Chinese smock and high-waisted khaki slacks. She leans
on a cane, swaying slightly. Her state: not quite sober, not
entirely drunk, but in a delightful tipsy zone.

CHRISTINA

I brought cookies.

HELEN

What?

Helen points to her hearing aid.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Dead battery.

Christina gestures towards the box of cookies.

CHRISTINA
Cookies!

HELEN
Ah, bless your heart.

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Stepping inside is like entering a mid-century dream. Authentic pieces from Eames, Knoll, Eero Saarinen, and Hans Wegner grace the space. No reproductions here.

On the walls, photos of Helen living her life to the fullest: flying a plane, swimming an ocean, riding a horse, and standing at the Great Wall of China. A true bon vivant.

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Christina and Helen sit at a beautiful marble Saarinen table, sipping tea. A content fat cat curls up on Helen's lap. Helen adds a splash of brandy to her cup and takes a sip.

HELEN
Oh, for the pain. It creeps from all sides, my darling.

Christina gestures towards her hearing aid.

CHRISTINA
I'll pick up new batteries tomorrow! Anything else you need?

HELEN
Oh, yes, I have a list...

She hands Christina a piece of paper, laughing.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Make sure to get plenty of Fancy Feast. She won't eat anything else. Quite the gourmet.

EXT. HELEN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Christina walks around the house, descending the stone steps.

INT. CHRISTINA'S BASEMENT APARTMENT - NIGHT

Christina secures the door with a chain lock, flips on the lights.

The apartment is small and minimalistic, furnished with Danish furniture that Helen has passed down to her. The walls are bare, devoid of decorations.

A perfect hiding place.

She turns on the television, not for anything specific, but to keep her company.

INT. VINCENT'S FATHER'S HOUSE- LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The room overflows with dusty old books, empty beer cans, loaded ashtrays. Faded family photos hang on walls, stacks of bills scattered atop the table alongside a collection of Spanish records.

Vincent absorbs the scene: a stark portrayal of one man's lonely existence.

INT. VINCENT'S FATHER'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Dirty dishes pile up in the cluttered kitchen. Vincent opens the refrigerator, only to find it empty.

INT. VINCENT'S FATHER'S HOUSE - VINCENT'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Still a boy's room, blue walls adorned with posters of bands like Nirvana, R.E.M., Pearl Jam, and Radiohead. A pile of CDs and a Discman sit on a shelf.

Vincent lies awake in his old, now too-small bed, staring up at the ceiling, thoughts consumed by Christina.

INT. VINCENT'S FATHER'S HOUSE - VINCENT'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Morning light floods through the windows, casting a bright glow. Vincent lies in bed, half-covered by a pillow as he attempts to block out the light.

EXT. SALVADOR'S HOUSE - MORNING

The pickup pulls into the driveway. Salvador, full of energy, limps toward the truck.

INT. PICKUP - MORNING

Vincent sits at the wheel, his face marked with fatigue, dark circles underlining his eyes. Salvador shoots him a concerned look.

SALVADOR
You look terrible.

Vincent rubs his eyes, attempting to shake off his exhaustion.

VINCENT
Can't sleep.

A brief silence lingers between them.

SALVADOR
So, have you come to a decision?

Vincent pauses for several seconds before replying.

VINCENT
All right. Let's do it.

A smile breaks across Salvador's face.

SALVADOR
You won't regret this, I promise.

EXT. MIGUEL'S LANDSCAPING YARD - DAY

Vincent inspects two trailers and well-maintained lawn equipment, along with another truck.

SALVADOR
Your father sold off three of the routes. It was becoming too much for him. White folks don't wanna work for Mexicans. Too much pride.

Vincent's guilt weighs heavily on him, and he casts his gaze downward.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)

Now, there are only two routes left. We can work together or separately.

VINCENT

What do you think?

Salvador considers the question for a moment.

SALVADOR

I say we team up. That way, I can show you how things run. Once you're ready, you can take one route, and I'll manage the other. We'll figure it out, don't worry.

Salvador looks at Vincent warmly.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)

Your father would be so proud of you.

INT. SUPERMARKET - DAY

Christina fills her shopping cart with various varieties of Fancy Feast. Vincent sees her, stops in his tracks. He takes a moment to compose himself, smoothing back his hair.

VINCENT

That's a lot of cat food...

Startled, Christina looks up at him, her guard up.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

Hi.

CHRISTINA

What do you want?

VINCENT

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to startle you. Uh, I cut your grass. Well, my dad did. I'm taking over. He just...

He extends his hand, a bit nervous.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

I'm Vincent.

She pushes her cart forward, and he follows her.

CHRISTINA
It's not my house.

VINCENT
Oh. Uh, I was wondering if, um...
you'd maybe like to get a cup of
coffee? Or go for a walk?

She looks at him, stunned, and gestures to her shopping cart.

CHRISTINA
The cat is hungry.

VINCENT
I see. Wh-- what about tomorrow?

CHRISTINA
No.

VINCENT
I just got back. I don't know
anyone. Uh, I thought maybe--

CHRISTINA
No!

She swiftly heads toward the register, leaving him behind. He watches her walk away, nervously chewing his lip, unsure of what to do next.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - DAY

Christina struggles with two heavy grocery bags. Vincent pulls up beside her.

VINCENT
Can I at least give you a ride?
Those bags look heavy.

CHRISTINA
Just leave me alone. I don't need
your help.

VINCENT
I-- I'm sorry if I've done
something to upset you. I didn't
mean to--

CHRISTINA
Stay away from me. Please.

VINCENT
Uh... I don't understand.

CHRISTINA

Do not speak to me. Do not look at me.

His disappointment is visible on his face as she turns a corner. He watches her go for a moment, conflicted and confused, before finally driving off in the opposite direction.

EXT. HELEN'S HOUSE - DAY

Christina knocks on the door, but there's no answer. She tries again, and when there's still no response, she decides to enter the house.

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

Christina walks through the hallway, glancing around in search of Helen.

CHRISTINA

Hello? Helen? Helen--

She hears moaning sounds coming from the living room and follows the noise.

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Christina enters the living room and finds Helen sitting on the couch, engrossed in watching pornography on her new iPhone, its open box resting nearby.

Helen looks up, matter-of-fact.

HELEN

Oh, hello.

Christina shifts uncomfortably, her cheeks flushing.

CHRISTINA

It's... um... It's quite loud.

HELEN

What was that, darling?

Christina gestures toward the iPhone.

CHRISTINA

It's loud!

Helen promptly turns off the video, a playful glint in her eyes.

HELEN

I'm not in the grave just yet, you know.

CHRISTINA

I know.

Christina replaces the batteries in Helen's hearing aid.

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Christina neatly arranges the cat food in the kitchen cabinet.

Simultaneously, Helen discreetly retrieves a small bottle of brandy from her Chinese smock. She adds a splash into her tea, careful not to draw Christina's attention.

CHRISTINA

It's a bit early for that, don't you think?

HELEN

Oh, God, just a little bit. It tastes better, darling.

Helen looks at Christina with warm, loving eyes.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Who would have imagined us sharing a hospital room, huh?

Helen chuckles softly.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Thank goodness my old hip finally gave in.

Helen gives her cat's belly a gentle rub.

HELEN (CONT'D)

I feel blessed that fate brought us together.

CHRISTINA

Me too.

EXT. SALVADOR'S HOUSE - MORNING

Salvador approaches the pickup, his face illuminated with a radiant "grateful to be alive" smile.

INT. PICKUP - MORNING

Vincent yawns, clearly exhausted.

VINCENT

Why the smile? It's six in the morning.

Salvador looks at the morning sun.

SALVADOR

We woke up today, Vincent. Many others didn't. We get another day.

Vincent's yawn turns into a faint smile, mirroring Salvador's perspective.

EXT. MIGUEL'S LANDSCAPING YARD - MORNING

Salvador works on the mower, using a socket wrench to loosen the mounting bolts and detach the blade. Vincent offers steady support to keep the mower in place.

SALVADOR

Nice and easy. Got it?

VINCENT

Yeah, I think so.

Salvador replaces the blade.

SALVADOR

Always have your gloves on, Vincent.

Salvador removes his gloves, revealing hands marked by wear and scars.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)

I've cut them countless times.

Vincent's gaze shifts to Salvador's prosthetic leg.

VINCENT

Can I ask you something?

SALVADOR

What is it?

VINCENT

I've always wondered... What happened to your leg?

Salvador wipes the sweat off his weathered face.

SALVADOR

On my first trip here, I jumped off a moving train while escaping a gang. My leg got caught in the wheels.

VINCENT

And you tried again after that?

Salvador nods, a steely determination in his eyes.

SALVADOR

Soon as I saved enough for a prosthetic leg, I was back on that train.

VINCENT

You risked your life once more to come here. Why?

Salvador gazes up at the sky, filled with emotion.

SALVADOR

Because I love this country, Vincent.

VINCENT

Even after everything?

SALVADOR

Yes.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - EXAMINING ROOM - DAY

Christina lies on the examination table, her legs bent and spread apart, feet in stirrups. She appears tense and deeply uneasy as the female DOCTOR (40s) examines her.

DOCTOR

Are you all right?

Christina briefly closes her eyes, attempting to compose herself.

CHRISTINA

No.

The doctor squeezes Christina's hand in a comforting gesture.

DOCTOR

I'm almost done.

The doctor reviews Christina's file.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

There doesn't appear to be any permanent damage. You'll be able to have children again.

Christina doesn't show much reaction, but she touches her stomach.

CHRISTINA

And my...

DOCTOR

If you choose to, you're ready to consult with a cosmetic surgeon.

INT. DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY

Vincent and Salvador browse through the aisles, shopping for new work clothes.

SALVADOR

Why the new clothes?

VINCENT

Fresh start.

Salvador eyes the price tag.

SALVADOR

You serious? Fifty bucks for a shirt I'm just gonna get dirty?

VINCENT

Just try it on.

Salvador unbuttons his shirt and slips into a Carhartt shirt from the rack.

SALVADOR

Why does it matter what we wear?

VINCENT

We gotta fit in.

SALVADOR
It costs a lot to "fit in".

VINCENT
Don't worry. I'm paying for it.

Vincent swaps Salvador's Stetson hat for a Carhartt cap. Salvador doesn't look thrilled, but he goes along with it.

SALVADOR
Jesus, you really have bad taste.

INT. AMERICA GARDEN CENTER - DAY

Vincent and Salvador step into the garden center, dressed in their new work clothes. Vincent notices a Confederate flag hanging on the wall, paired with a plaque bearing the words: "Make America Great Again."

PETER, (mid-30s), an all-American-looking man with blue eyes and blonde hair, intentionally bumps into Vincent.

PETER
Watch where you're going!

Vincent doesn't take the bait.

VINCENT
Pardon me.

Peter spots the still-attached price tag on Salvador's shirt. MITCH, (50s), a potbellied jerk with a handgun holstered at his side, chomps down on a sandwich at the counter.

PETER
(to Mitch)
Ain't that something? They're dressing like us now.

Mitch chuckles, Peter exits. Salvador promptly rips off the tag from his shirt.

MITCH
What do you want?

Vincent slides a list across the counter.

MITCH (CONT'D)
What the hell is this?

VINCENT
We'd like to place an order. Put it on my father's account.

Mitch appears surprised.

MITCH

You're not selling the business?

VINCENT

No, I'm taking over.

MITCH

Your old man paid up on time. But I ain't selling to any more Mexicans. Head on over to San Jose Garden Center, where you belong.

VINCENT

It's on the other side of town.

MITCH

That's your problem.

VINCENT

You have to sell to us.

Mitch points to the "Make America Great Again" plaque.

MITCH

Not anymore. You people are costing true Americans their jobs. Taking away what's rightfully ours. I'm sick and tired of it!

Vincent fights to control his anger.

VINCENT

Just place the order.

Mitch tears Vincent's list into pieces.

MITCH

No!

SALVADOR

Come on, Mitch. We're not the enemy. We're all the same--

MITCH

Right, right. Don't play that shit with me. You think I'm stupid?

SALVADOR

We're just trying to make a living, man.

MITCH

I don't give a shit. Get the hell
out of here!

Vincent clenches his fist.

VINCENT

All right, that's enough!

Mitch reaches for his gun.

MITCH

Go ahead. I dare you!

Salvador grabs Vincent's arm.

SALVADOR

Let's go. We don't want any
trouble.

Vincent and Mitch stare at each other with blind rage.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)

Please, let's just go.

Finally, Vincent heads out, with Salvador following closely
behind.

MITCH

That's right. Better walk away
before I blow your fucking heads
off!

INT. PICKUP - DAY

Vincent starts the car. Salvador's expression is tense, his
eyes burning with a mix of anger and disappointment.

SALVADOR

So much damn hate.

VINCENT

Not exactly shocking.

Salvador tugs at his new clothes.

SALVADOR

What a joke. This changes nothing.

Vincent rubs his neck.

VINCENT

Come on, you know how it is. They
don't want us here.

SALVADOR

We don't deserve any of this.

VINCENT

I know.

They drive in silence, their frustration palpable.

INT. VINCENT'S FATHER'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Vincent rummages through the kitchen, searching for something
to eat.

EXT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Vincent pulls into the restaurant parking lot and spots
Alexis wiping tables. He quickly drives away before she sees
him.

EXT. FAST FOOD DRIVE-THRU - NIGHT

Vincent pulls into a fast-food drive-thru.

EXT. SCHOOL - TRACK FIELD - NIGHT

Vincent sits on the bleachers, eating his food. He watches
the American flag blowing in the wind. He looks like a man
being slowly, quietly tormented by his surroundings.

EXT. SCHOOL - TRACK FIELD - FLASHBACK

A group of WHITE BOYS (13) and a GIRL (13), red-haired,
surround Vincent, (13), who's facing the school flagpole.

BOY #1

You better do it, or we'll make
sure your father gets sent back to
Mexico.

Vincent simulates sex by humping the school flagpole.

BOYS & GIRL

Faggot! Faggot! Faggot!

Vincent's face is streaked with tears as he looks up at the rope hanging from the flagpole.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. SCHOOL - TRACK FIELD - NIGHT

Vincent gazes into the vast expanse of the night sky, haunted by the painful memory.

INT. BAKERY FACTORY - HALLWAY - MORNING

Christina walks through the hallway when Paula appears, yawning. She looks disheveled and exhausted, with drooping shoulders and heavy bags under her eyes.

PAULA

Hey.

Christina slows her pace a bit but continues walking.

PAULA (CONT'D)

(mile-a-minute)

My son took a newspaper delivery job, and now he thinks he's too cool for it. This generation is so lazy, always glued to their phones. All they care about is snapping selfies and sharing every little moment online.

(mocking)

"Look at me, tell me you love me, tell me you like me." Oh for fuck's sake, it's embarrassing, really!

Christina has no reaction.

PAULA (CONT'D)

I'm covering for him until they find a replacement. It's only my third morning, and I can barely keep my eyes open. Could you cover my shift tomorrow? My brother-in-law owns the delivery service, and I don't want to look bad, you know? It would be a big help.

CHRISTINA

I'll do both.

Paula looks at Christina with a mix of surprise and confusion.

PAULA
Wait, really?

CHRISTINA
I need the money.

PAULA
Well, the pay is, um, not great, to be honest.

CHRISTINA
Doesn't matter. I'll do it.

PAULA
It starts at five in the morning.

CHRISTINA
Okay.

Paula raises an eyebrow, clearly taken aback.

PAULA
All right, then. Can you start tomorrow?

CHRISTINA
Yes.

EXT. HELEN'S HOUSE - FRONT LAWN - DAY

Salvador skillfully trims the hedge, his movements precise and effortless. Vincent, however, struggles while mowing the lawn, still learning the ropes. Salvador watches with an amused grin.

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - DAY

Helen stands by the window, puffing on a cigarette as she observes the scene outside.

EXT. HELEN'S HOUSE - FRONT LAWN - MOMENTS LATER

Vincent spots Christina approaching and his face lights up with a smile.

VINCENT
Hi.

However, Christina walks past him without acknowledging his greeting, her focus fixed on reaching her basement apartment.

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - DAY

Helen notices Vincent's interaction with Christina and becomes both curious and concerned. She moves away from the window.

EXT. HELEN'S HOUSE - FRONT LAWN - DAY

Salvador moves closer to Vincent.

SALVADOR
Stay away from her.

VINCENT
Why?

SALVADOR
She's been through a lot.

VINCENT
What happened to her?

Salvador leans in, speaking in a hushed tone.

SALVADOR
Her ex-husband brutally abused her,
and she lost the baby.

Vincent looks pained by this.

VINCENT
How do you know all this?

Salvador shrugs, feeling a sense of guilt.

SALVADOR
It's a small town. People talk.

He places a reassuring hand on Vincent's shoulder.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, man.

VINCENT
(almost to himself)
I can't believe this is happening.

SALVADOR
What?

VINCENT
Salvador...

SALVADOR

Yeah?

VINCENT

Do you ever wonder... if...

SALVADOR

Spit it out, son.

VINCENT

Do you believe in love at first sight? Like, it could just happen, right?

Salvador looks at Vincent, surprised by the question.

SALVADOR

I think it's possible.

VINCENT

Even though it doesn't make sense?

SALVADOR

Yes. But... you barely know her.

Vincent pauses, deep in thought.

VINCENT

I know it sounds crazy, but I feel a connection with her. I understand her pain.

SALVADOR

We're all healing from something.

VINCENT

It's like I've known her all my life.

Salvador smiles.

SALVADOR

Sometimes, what you're searching for is searching for you too.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - MORNING

A misty morning. Christina is making a delivery. Suddenly, a small but feisty chihuahua bursts out of an open gate and sinks its teeth into Christina's leg

An OLDER WOMAN, (60s), draped in a silky robe and a turban, rushes out in a panic.

OLDER WOMAN

Lola! Lola!

The older woman quickly scoops up the chihuahua and cradles it in her arms, showering it with kisses. Her attention then shifts to Christina's bloodstained pants.

OLDER WOMAN (CONT'D)

Shit.

INT. OLDER WOMAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - MORNING

The older woman kisses Lola on the mouth a little too intimately before closing the door.

INT. OLDER WOMAN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Christina sits on the couch, her pants crusted with dried blood. The older woman stands before her, visibly distressed.

OLDER WOMAN

I'm so sorry. Lola didn't mean it. She's usually such an angel, never causes any trouble.

Lola growls in the other room.

OLDER WOMAN (CONT'D)

Please, let me make it up to you.

She reaches for her checkbook.

OLDER WOMAN (CONT'D)

This is the third time it's happened. Animal control has threatened to put her down if it happens again. She means everything to me.

She scribbles on the check.

OLDER WOMAN (CONT'D)

This should cover your medical expenses.

She hands the check to Christina.

OLDER WOMAN (CONT'D)

And there's a little extra for your silence.

Christina just stares at the check.

EXT. VINCENT'S FATHER'S HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - DAY

Vincent secures the boat to the truck. Suddenly, a car honks, grabbing his attention. He turns to see Alexis pulling up, and his face reddens.

ALEXIS

There you are... How have you been,
Vincent?

He doesn't say anything, just continues hooking up the boat to the truck.

ALEXIS (CONT'D)

Hey, I'm sorry about your dad.

He climbs inside the truck, avoiding eye contact.

ALEXIS (CONT'D)

I never stopped thinking about you.

She is visibly wracked with guilt.

ALEXIS (CONT'D)

About what I did--

VINCENT

It's not a big deal. I don't really
remember.

He guns the engine.

ALEXIS

Oh. Okay, maybe I'll see you
around...

He pulls away, leaving her behind. She watches him go, a mix of emotions on her face. After a moment, she drives off.

INT. PICKUP - DAY

Vincent whacks the steering wheel. His eyes fill with tears.

VINCENT

Damn it!

INT. DRUGSTORE - DAY

Christina walks through the aisles, picking up bandages and gauze. She then fills her cart with several bottles of hydrogen peroxide.

EXT. VINCENT'S BOAT - NIGHT

Vincent stands near his boat, staring out at the vast ocean. He is visibly shaken by Alexis' visit.

INT. CHRISTINA'S BASEMENT APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Christina cleans the dog bite with hydrogen peroxide, wincing as it stings. She blows on it to alleviate the discomfort, but suddenly stops, overwhelmed by a memory. Her eyes well up with tears, but she chokes them down and resumes cleaning the wound.

INT. PETER'S TRUCK - MORNING

Peter and DAVE, (30s), his landscaping partner, come to a stop at a traffic light. They see Vincent and Salvador mowing the lawn and trimming hedges nearby.

PETER

That's just great. Look at those assholes. What the fuck is this country becoming?

Peter honks.

PETER (CONT'D)

We don't want you here!

Vincent and Salvador look up.

PETER (CONT'D)

This is our fucking country!

Salvador defiantly gives Peter the middle finger.

SALVADOR

We're not going anywhere!

Peter retaliates by shooting him the same gesture before speeding off.

DAVE

Fucking assholes.

PETER

Shut the fuck up.

DAVE

Hey, you started it.

PETER

You know what? I'm gonna fucked them up. Trust me. When they least expect it.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Salvador looks at Vincent, exasperated by the encounter.

SALVADOR

Jesus Christ. His wife left him for a Mexican, and now he's taking it out on us. Pathetic.

Vincent doesn't say anything, just continues working.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Pale and sweaty, Christina walks along the street. She begins to feel sick but doesn't quite know what's wrong. Suddenly, she doubles over and vomits.

INT. PICKUP - DAY

Vincent spots Christina and immediately pulls over.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Vincent jumps out of the truck and rushes to Christina's side.

VINCENT

Christina, are you all right?

She shakes her head, clearly unwell, and vomits again. She is covered in vomit. He quickly pulls out his handkerchief and begins to wipe her mouth and chin.

CHRISTINA

Please don't do that.

He hands her the handkerchief, and she wipes her mouth.

VINCENT

You can clean up at my place...

She appears on the verge of passing out, and he catches her before she falls.

INT. VINCENT'S FATHER'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Christina emerges from the bathroom in one of Vincent's shirts, holding her soiled shirt.

VINCENT
Are you okay?

CHRISTINA
Yeah, it's just my stomach.

He hands her a shopping bag.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)
Thank you.

She drops her shirt into the bag.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)
I'm sorry about the other day.

VINCENT
It's okay.

He looks at her, and she looks away, feeling somewhat uneasy.

VINCENT (CONT'D)
Can I get you anything?

CHRISTINA
Water.

VINCENT
Yes, of course.

He goes into the kitchen.

Her eyes wander and land on a framed photo hanging on the wall.

INSERT - FRAMED PHOTO

A picture of Vincent at 13 years old, looking scrawny, fragile, and deeply sad.

She looks moved by the image.

He returns and hands her the water.

VINCENT (CONT'D)
Do you want anything else?

CHRISTINA
Is this you?

He follows her gaze and looks down, feeling slightly embarrassed.

VINCENT

Yes.

CHRISTINA

Why are you so sad?

He stares at the photo for a moment, lost in his thoughts.

VINCENT

I don't remember.

She gulps down the water, and as she sets down the glass, her gaze drifts around the room, taking note of the clutter and boxes.

CHRISTINA

You have a lot of stuff.

VINCENT

It's my father's house.

CHRISTINA

Is he here?

He pauses before replying.

VINCENT

He passed away recently.

She looks at him briefly.

CHRISTINA

I'm sorry.

He looks at her.

VINCENT

It's all right.

Uncomfortable, she picks up an old book from the coffee table. The binding is broken. Some of its pages are loose. Title: "The Complete Poetry of Pablo Neruda."

VINCENT (CONT'D)

It was my mother's favorite book.

A thought crosses his mind.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

You can have it.

She puts the book down.

CHRISTINA
No, I can't.

VINCENT
I want you to have it.

CHRISTINA
Why?

VINCENT
I-- I think you'd like it, that's
all.

CHRISTINA
You don't want it?

He smiles.

VINCENT
I know it by heart. She would read
it to me before I went to sleep.

He hands her the book.

VINCENT (CONT'D)
Please, take it...

After a brief moment of hesitation, she accepts the book.
Their eyes meet. A moment between them. Then:

CHRISTINA
I should go.

VINCENT
I'll take you home.

CHRISTINA
No!

She looks at him, and he looks hurt.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)
I-- I'm sorry. It's just-- I'd
rather walk. It'll be good for me.
Thank you for everything.

Before he can say anything else, she heads out the door,
fast.

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Helen lights a cigarette. Bach's "Concerto in D Minor, BWV 974: II. Adagio" plays on a record player.

INT. CHRISTINA'S BASEMENT APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Christina lies in bed, engrossed in the poetry book Vincent gave her, carefully turning each page.

INT. CHRISTINA'S BASEMENT APARTMENT - BATHROOM - MORNING

Christina stands before the mirror, undressing. Her stomach reveals a series of haunting scars. The music ends.

INT. PETER'S TRUCK - MORNING

Peter and Dave cruise past Vincent's parked pickup outside a diner.

PETER

This just gets better and better.

DAVE

What?

PETER

Take a look. Our pals left their trailer wide open.

DAVE

Fucking idiots.

They both laugh.

EXT. DINER - MORNING

Vincent and Salvador exit the diner, and their expressions darken as they see Peter hauling a mower from Vincent's trailer.

VINCENT

Fuck.

Vincent charges after Peter, Salvador hustling to keep pace.

Peter and Dave scramble into their truck and peel away.

INT. PETER'S TRUCK - MORNING

Peter leans out the window, reveling in his triumph.

PETER
Get off our land, assholes!

EXT. DINER - MORNING

Vincent kicks his truck in frustration. Salvador pulls out his cell.

VINCENT
What are you doing?

SALVADOR
Calling the police.

VINCENT
They'll do nothing. Not only that.
They'll laugh at us.

SALVADOR
But--

VINCENT
They're more interested in
arresting us than helping us.

Vincent locks the trailer. Salvador jams his cell in his pocket.

INT. PICKUP - DAY

Vincent drives, lost in thought. He spots Christina at the bus stop and gives a wave. Christina awkwardly waves back, and he pulls over.

VINCENT
Hi.

CHRISTINA
Hi.

A brief pause hangs between them, his heart racing.

VINCENT
How's your stomach?

CHRISTINA
Better.

VINCENT

I could give you a ride, if you want.

She looks down, uncertain.

CHRISTINA

No, I...

VINCENT

I'm actually heading that way for work.

CHRISTINA

But the bus is coming.

He steals a glance at the rearview mirror, but the bus is nowhere in sight.

VINCENT

(under his breath)
I hope it never comes.

CHRISTINA

What?

He clears his throat.

VINCENT

I mean... it's pretty hot out. I could give you a ride home.

He opens the passenger door.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

Come on...

She stares at the bus stop, unsure of what to do.

CHRISTINA

I'm sorry, I can't.

He looks at her.

VINCENT

I understand.

She looks away.

CHRISTINA

You don't.

VINCENT

I won't hurt you.

She turns her head, meeting his gaze.

INT. PICKUP - DAY

They drive in silence. Christina appears uneasy, twisting her hands and rubbing her neck.

VINCENT
Can I ask you something?

She doesn't say anything.

VINCENT (CONT'D)
I was just wondering...

CHRISTINA
What?

VINCENT
I guess what I'm trying to say
is... I'd like us to be friends.

CHRISTINA
We won't be friends.

He bites his lip, feeling the weight of her words. Silence returns. He inserts one of his father's old cassettes into the tape player.

"Cucurrucucú Paloma" starts playing, casting an immediate spell.

She leans back, looking out of the window, lost in the song.

INT. PICKUP - DAY

Vincent pulls into the driveway. Christina looks more relaxed, still under the spell of the song. She opens the door, stops, and turns.

CHRISTINA
I'm sorry. I didn't mean it.

VINCENT
Can we be friends?

Christina nods slowly.

CHRISTINA
The song... what's it called?

VINCENT
Um, it's an old Mexican song,
"Cucurrucucú Paloma."

CHRISTINA
What does it mean?

He continues with a small smile.

VINCENT
A mourning dove.

CHRISTINA
It's beautiful.

A moment passes between them.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)
Thank you for the ride.

She jumps out. He watches her go with a smile.

INT. CHRISTINA'S BASEMENT APARTMENT - BEDROOM- NIGHT

Christina lies awake in bed. Suddenly, she sits up.

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Christina thumbs through old records. Helen shuffles in and turns on a lamp.

HELEN
Can't sleep?

CHRISTINA
Sorry, I didn't mean to wake you
up.

HELEN
What are you looking for?

Christina struggles with the pronunciation.

CHRISTINA
"Cucurrucucú Paloma."

Helen smiles.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)
You know it?

HELEN
Of course, darling.

CHRISTINA
Is there a story?

Helen digs a cigarette out of her pocket, and Christina lights it.

HELEN
It's the same old story: love,
heartbreak, loss.

Helen looks at Christina.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Where did you hear it?

Christina shrugs, pausing briefly before responding.

CHRISTINA
Just... somewhere.

Helen gives her a look, and Christina looks down. Helen decides to leave it at that, not pushing it.

HELEN
I haven't heard it in quite a
while.

Helen finds the record and hands it to Christina, who moves over to the record player. The beautiful song fills the room.

Helen closes her eyes and sways to the song.

Christina gazes out the window at the stars.

INT. VINCENT'S FATHER'S HOUSE - VINCENT'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The song continues playing as Vincent lies in bed, smiling.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - HOUSE - MORNING

Vincent, carrying a leaf blower on his back, exits the backyard. Salvador heads towards the truck but stops abruptly, his expression filled with anger. The words "Build the Wall" are spray-painted on the side.

SALVADOR
Goddamn it. Fuck! I can't believe
this is happening again.

Vincent approaches the truck.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)
I thought I'd have seen the last of
this. I'll never understand it.

VINCENT
We've been through worse. We'll get
through this.

Vincent pulls out his handkerchief and attempts to wipe off
the spray paint, but only ends up smudging it.

VINCENT (CONT'D)
Don't worry about it. I'm gonna
take care of it.

EXT. PETER'S YARD - DAY

Peter wipes his hands, and Dave approaches him.

DAVE
Hey, what happened this morning?
Where were you?

Peter grins.

DAVE (CONT'D)
You seem happy--

Dave spots the spray can.

DAVE (CONT'D)
What's this? What did you do?

Peter casually tosses the can away.

PETER
(chants)
Build a wall! Build a wall! Build a
wall!
(laughs)
All over his truck.

DAVE
Be careful.

PETER
What are they gonna do? Call the
police?

They walk off, laughing.

EXT. AUTO PAINT AND COLLISION SHOP - MORNING

Vincent pulls up to the shop and jumps out.

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - MORNING

Helen looks at herself in the mirror, noting her gray hair.

HELEN

Good God. How time flies.

EXT. HELEN'S HOUSE - FRONT LAWN - DAY -

Vincent mows the lawn. Suddenly, the mower starts to rattle and choke.

EXT. HELEN'S HOUSE - FRONT LAWN - MOMENTS LATER

Vincent tilts the mower and discovers that the blade is jammed. He instinctively reaches for his work gloves in his back pocket, but realizes they're not there. Without hesitation, he attempts to unjam the blade with his bare hands.

His hand slips, and the blade slices into his flesh, causing intense pain.

VINCENT

Aaagh!

Blood spurts.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

Fuck.

Across the street, Christina approaches and notices the blood gushing from his hand.

CHRISTINA

You're hurt.

VINCENT

I'm okay.

CHRISTINA

Come inside.

He looks at her, taken aback.

VINCENT

W-- What?

CHRISTINA

I have hydrogen peroxide. Lots of
it.

INT. CHRISTINA'S BASEMENT APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

Vincent washes his bloody hand in the sink.

Christina emerges from the bathroom with hydrogen peroxide and cotton balls. She works in silence, tending to his wound. Despite the intimacy of the moment, she remains remarkably composed.

He winces, but is simultaneously enamored by her dark hair, delicate hands, naturally pink lips, and sad eyes. How could anyone hurt this beautiful creature?

INT. CHRISTINA'S BASEMENT APARTMENT - NIGHT

Vincent stands at the door, his hand now bandaged.

VINCENT

Thank you.

They both stand there, unsure of what comes next.

CHRISTINA

I like the book.

VINCENT

I knew it! Do you have a favorite
poem?

She nods slowly.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

Tell me.

She shakes her head.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

All right, I understand. It's too
personal.

He lingers for a moment.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

Good--

CHRISTINA

Wait.

He looks at her, confused.

She disappears into the closet and returns with his shirt.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)

Your shirt.

As they exchange the shirt, their fingers inadvertently touch, and their eyes meet.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)

Good night.

VINCENT

Good night.

He departs, and she closes the door.

EXT. SALVADOR'S HOUSE - MORNING

Vincent pulls up to Salvador's house and honks the horn.

Salvador approaches the truck and sees "Vincent Landscaping" freshly painted on the side. Heartbroken, he touches the letters and climbs inside.

INT. PICKUP - MORNING

Vincent drives, while Salvador rubs his head.

SALVADOR

What did you do? I don't get it.

Vincent concentrates on the road, avoiding eye contact with Salvador.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)

Go ahead, say it. You're ashamed.

VINCENT

I'm tired of being pushed around.

Salvador shakes his head.

SALVADOR

This is so stupid.

VINCENT

It's-- it's better this way.
They'll think--

SALVADOR

You're something you're not. The new clothes, the new name doesn't change who you are. It's not going to change the way they look at you.

(deeply felt)

Believe me, I know how hard it is for you. What they did to you was unforgivable.

Vincent's face reddens. He rubs his neck. Salvador has clearly struck a chord.

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Helen reclines in her Eames lounge chair with a bag of weed and rolling paper. Christina enters with two teacups.

CHRISTINA

Where did you get that?

HELEN

Health Collective. It's a service.

(whispers)

They sell medical marijuana. Gave it to me for my arthritis. Oh, the pain, darling.

Christina watches her skillfully roll a perfect, even joint, despite her arthritic hands.

HELEN (CONT'D)

So?

Christina looks at her, puzzled.

CHRISTINA

What?

HELEN

I see the way he looks at you.

Christina shrugs.

HELEN (CONT'D)

You can't hide in that basement forever.

Helen lights the joint and exhales.

HELEN (CONT'D)

"I love you without knowing how, or when, or from where." Pablo Neruda, right?

Helen looks at Christina.

HELEN (CONT'D)

I see you reading that book.

Christina looks down. Helen takes another drag and exhales, staring into space.

HELEN (CONT'D)

You know what I miss the most?

CHRISTINA

What?

HELEN

Smoking after sex.

(laughs)

I need sex.

INT. SEX SHOP - DAY

Christina browses, appearing a bit lost. The personable STORE OWNER (40s) approaches.

CHRISTINA

I'm looking for, um... something that vibrates. Do you have something like that?

The store owner points to a shelf filled with vibrators. Christina looks overwhelmed.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)

Um...

The store owner picks up a large vibrator and shows it to Christina.

STORE OWNER

This one is called the *Thrusts 3000*. It has multiple speeds and is really powerful. It's possible for some women to orgasm up to a hundred times an hour.

CHRISTINA

I-- I don't think she needs, uh...
It's for... She's older, almost
eighty.

STORE OWNER

Oh, I see.

The store owner then shows Christina a much smaller vibrator.

STORE OWNER (CONT'D)

This one is very gentle. The velvet-
shaft is really soft, and it's
simple to use with just one switch.

CHRISTINA

I-- I-- I'll take the other one
too. I-- I just don't know which
one she'd prefer.

STORE OWNER

It's good to have options.

EXT. SEX SHOP - DAY

Christina exits the sex shop carrying a large bag.

INT. PICKUP - DAY

Vincent and Salvador drive by and see Christina outside the
sex shop. Salvador stifles a chuckle.

SALVADOR

You see that?

VINCENT

Please, don't.

SALVADOR

Something's happening. Progress,
progress.

VINCENT

You're an optimist.

SALVADOR

I'm just rooting for you, son.

Vincent can't help but smile.

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Helen is sitting at her desk in front of the computer, posting on Craigslist. Christina enters the room, holding the large bag.

HELEN
What's that, darling?

Christina hands Helen the bag.

CHRISTINA
I wasn't sure what to get. I got a few options.

Helen looks surprised and deeply moved.

HELEN
Thank you, my darling.

They share a smile.

INT. HELEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Helen lies in bed, holding the large vibrator in her hand. She tilts her head back and closes her eyes.

INT. VINCENT'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Vincent tosses and turns in bed. He's caught in a vivid dream.

INSERT - VINCENT'S DREAM

Vincent and Christina passionately make love. Their bodies intertwined, kissing and thrusting.

INT. CHRISTINA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Christina's eyes snap open. She having the same dream.

INT. VINCENT'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Vincent jolts awake. Sweating.

EXT. HELEN'S HOUSE - GARDEN - DAY

Vincent plants blue gardenias in the garden. Helen steps out of the back door, noticing the flowers.

HELEN

Well, that's remarkable. Thank you.
But... I don't remember ordering
them.

VINCENT

We had some leftover from another
job, and I thought...

She looks at him, intrigued.

HELEN

They're her favorite. Did you know
that?

He nods, a hint of a smile on his face.

VINCENT

It's hot... Should I water them
now?

HELEN

If it makes you happy.

He readies the hose, and she watches him for a moment, calm
and observant.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Don't you dare hurt her. If you
do...

In one swift motion, she pulls out an old cast-iron cap gun
from her pocket and aims it at him.

HELEN (CONT'D)

I'll kill you.

He remains unfazed, not even flinching.

VINCENT

I love her.

She eyes him skeptically.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

No one will ever hurt her again. I
promise you.

Finally, she puts the gun away.

HELEN

Oh, I hope so. I'd be greatly
disappointed.

She digs a cigarette out of her pocket.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Would you, darling?

He checks his pockets.

VINCENT
I don't have a light.

She points to a box on the patio table. He opens it and takes out a lighter, lighting her cigarette.

VINCENT (CONT'D)
Will you help me with Christina?

HELEN
Now, don't misunderstand me. I'll shuffle the cards. But love without a good fight is like war without blood...

She heads back into the house.

HELEN (CONT'D)
It must be fought for.

He waters the flowers, unable to suppress a smile.

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Helen and Christina watch TV, the Evening News onscreen.

HELEN
Enough nonsense. Turn it off. I can't stand it! Time changes nothing. We continue to destroy each other.

Christina clicks the TV off with the remote.

HELEN (CONT'D)
You know, you don't have to sit with me every night. Why don't you go out?

Christina shakes her head.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Oh, Christina. I'm just an old woman now. All I have left are false teeth and...

She looks at her sleeping cat.

HELEN (CONT'D)
...a fat cat.

CHRISTINA
You have me.

Helen places her hand gently on Christina's hand.

HELEN
He's a good man, darling. Give him
just a chance.

Christina looks at her stomach, remembering.

CHRISTINA
I wasn't good enough for him. So,
he-- I've got nothing left to give.
It's too late. I'm damaged...

HELEN
No. You're not.

CHRISTINA
I'm scared.

HELEN
I know. But you can't give up. You
just can't...

Helen closes her eyes.

INT. HOTEL - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Helen (20s) shuffles into the lobby with a YOUNG MAN (20s).
He grabs her. She pushes him off.

HELEN
Forget it. Go away.

YOUNG MAN
Come on. Be gentle and obedient.
Let me help you to bed before you
fall.

HELEN
I don't need your help.

YOUNG MAN
At least give me a good night kiss.

He forcibly tries to kiss her. She resists.

HELEN
Stop it! Go away!

He shoves her. Her purse spills open.

YOUNG MAN
Bitch!

HELEN
Fuck off!

He takes off. She collects the items on the floor.

RENATA RENDON (O.S.)
I guess he didn't care for your
language.

HELEN
The world's full of angry men.

She looks up and sees RENATA RENDON (20s) entering the hotel.

HELEN (CONT'D)
You're back.

RENATA
You made a promise, didn't you?

HELEN
Did I promise you something?

Renata locks eyes with Helen.

RENATA
Love like this comes once in a
lifetime...

END FLASHBACK

EXT. HELEN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Helen opens her eyes.

HELEN
"Love like this comes once in a
lifetime..." He won't keep knocking
on that door forever. Rejection
hurts, darling.

Helen looks over at Christina.

HELEN (CONT'D)

I spent my whole life trying not to get hurt. How stupid! Only when it's too late you realize there was nothing to fear. All I ask is that you try, darling. You can be different than me.

Helen searches her pockets.

HELEN (CONT'D)

I left my cigarettes on the patio table. Will you please fetch them for me?

Christina gets up and leaves.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Thank you, darling.

Helen grabs a cigarette from her pocket, lights it, takes a drag, and sinks back into her chair. A profound sadness fills her eyes, the weight of the memory reminding her of what she lost.

EXT. HELEN'S HOUSE - GARDEN - MOMENTS LATER

A seductive night. Christina steps out, and sees the blue gardenias swaying in the evening breeze. She becomes entranced by the flowers, her emotions stirred deeply. It's as if she's on the verge of a significant decision.

INT. COSMETIC SURGEON'S OFFICE - DAY

Christina lies on the medical table while a compassionate FEMALE COSMETIC SURGEON (40s) examines the scars on her stomach. The surgeon's gaze shifts to Christina's swollen leg.

SURGEON

What happened to your leg?

CHRISTINA

A dog bit me.

SURGEON

Have you been feeling nauseous?
Vomiting?

CHRISTINA

Yes.

The surgeon gently presses on the affected area.

SURGEON

Do you feel any pain?

CHRISTINA

Yes.

SURGEON

It appears to be infected. You should have a doctor look at it. You may get dressed now.

Christina begins to dress herself.

SURGEON (CONT'D)

Dermabrasion and chemical peels can improve the appearance of your scars. However, for better results, I would suggest excision followed by laser resurfacing. This treatment is more expensive, but we do offer financing options if you have good credit.

INT. SURGEON'S MAIN OFFICE - DAY

Christina sits with a caring FINANCIAL PLANNER (30s) who attentively reviews her paperwork.

FINANCIAL PLANNER

I'm so sorry your credit application has been declined... And your insurance doesn't cover this procedure as it's not considered a medical emergency.

Christina looks down, feeling lost and desperate. The financial planner notices her distress.

FINANCIAL PLANNER (CONT'D)

Are you okay?

CHRISTINA

I feel so stupid.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Christina walks, tears streaming down her cheeks.

INT. CHRISTINA'S BASEMENT APARTMENT - NIGHT

Christina stands by the basement window, gazing at the blue gardenias. She disappears into the closet and pulls out the check from the dog bite. She looks at it a moment, then slips it into her pocket.

INT. BAKERY FACTORY - WOMEN LOCKER ROOM - MORNING

Christina stares at Kate, who stands in her underwear.

CHRISTINA

Hi.

Kate appears taken aback.

KATE

I thought you were mute.

CHRISTINA

You are really beautiful.

Kate looks back, confused.

KATE

What?

CHRISTINA

Your body is perfect.

Christina looks down a moment.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)

I was thinking of going to Mexico
and--

Kate laughs, she now understands.

KATE

Oh, you want... I thought you were
hitting on me.

Kate gives Christina a look.

KATE (CONT'D)

Not that it would bother me at all.

Kate rummages through her bag, retrieves a card, and hands it to Christina.

KATE (CONT'D)

They're the best.

Kate twirls, proudly showcasing her figure.

KATE (CONT'D)
You won't be disappointed.

CHRISTINA
Thank you.

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Helen fiddles with her iPhone while Christina enters and hands her a brown paper bag.

HELEN
Perfect timing!

Helen pulls out a bottle of brandy from the bag. Christina glances around the room.

HELEN (CONT'D)
What's the matter?

CHRISTINA
What happened to your lounge chair?

HELEN
Oh, I sold it. You won't believe how much people are willing to pay for authentic Eames these days?

CHRISTINA
But you love that chair.

HELEN
It's just a chair, darling.

CHRISTINA
How did you sell it?

HELEN
Craigslist.

CHRISTINA
Please be careful.

Helen chuckles.

HELEN
Oh, I'm not very good at stopping myself. I'm impulsive, darling.

CHRISTINA
Please, try.

HELEN
You worry too much.

Helen points to a pair of Serge Mouille table lamps.

HELEN (CONT'D)
I'm selling those next. I'm ready
to live and let go.

A car honks outside. Christina looks out the window to see a car waiting in the driveway.

CHRISTINA
Who's that?

HELEN
My Uber.

CHRISTINA
Uber?

HELEN
I just joined.

CHRISTINA
Where you going?

Helen touches her gray hair.

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Helen admires her newly blonde hair in the mirror, reveling in her transformation.

HELEN
Isn't it fabulous, darling? Do I
look fifty again?

CHRISTINA
Yes.

HELEN
Music!

Christina heads towards the record player.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Something upbeat, darling. Nothing
sad.

Christina selects a record. "Ces Bottes Sont Faites Pour Marcher" by Eileen begins to play.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Twist and shout, baby! Twist and shout!

Helen lights a cigarette.

HELEN (CONT'D)
How do I look?

CHRISTINA
Like a movie star.

HELEN
Do me a favor...

She hands Christina her iPhone.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Take a bunch of pictures.

Christina raises the iPhone.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Just no close-ups, darling.

Helen strikes a pose.

HELEN (CONT'D)
How's this?

CHRISTINA
Perfect.

Christina snaps away.

HELEN
Okay, show me.

She hands Helen the iPhone. Helen swipes through the pictures until she finds one she likes.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Wonderful, wonderful. Okay, let's add it to my profile.

CHRISTINA
What profile?

Helen looks away, matter-of-fact.

HELEN
Facebook.

Christina looks worried.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Oh, come on. It's just for fun,
darling. I want to be social again
and catch up with old friends.

Helen navigates through the iPhone, still getting the hang of it.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Let's see...

Helen successfully adds the picture to her profile.

HELEN (CONT'D)

All done. Shall we take more?

CHRISTINA

Shouldn't you change first?

HELEN

Excellent idea! A new outfit,
perhaps?

Helen smiles at Christina.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Thank you, my darling.

INT. BAKERY FACTORY - CHECKOUT LINE - DAY

Vincent, carrying a full basket, waits patiently in line behind a customer. Christina, focused on her task, rings up the items.

Vincent finally reaches the front of the line, a little nervous.

VINCENT

Hi...

Christina looks up, and a flicker of a smile appears on her face.

CHRISTINA

Hi.

VINCENT

How are you?

CHRISTINA

I'm okay.

Christina rings up his items.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)
How's your hand?

VINCENT
Good, good.

Christina looks down briefly.

CHRISTINA
Thank you for the flowers.

VINCENT
You like them?

CHRISTINA
Yes.

He smiles to himself, pleased.

VINCENT
I'm glad.

He hands her the money.

VINCENT (CONT'D)
Have a nice day.

CHRISTINA
You, too.

He lingers for a moment, hesitant to leave.

VINCENT
See you soon.

CHRISTINA
Okay.

He walks out, and she watches him go with a smile.

EXT. VINCENT'S FATHER'S HOUSE - DAY

An open cookie box sits on the grass. Vincent removes the withered flowers and carefully plants new ones in their place.

EXT. VINCENT'S FATHER'S HOUSE - DAY - FLASHBACK

Vincent, (10), beside MIGUEL, (30s), his father, as they plant flowers in their funeral clothes.

MIGUEL
She is with God now.

Vincent wipes his eyes.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
Life goes on, son. It will take
courage to move forward in this
world.

Miguel digs his hands into the soil, feeling its texture slip
through his fingers.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
The earth will give you strength.
Roots. Be good to it. Always.

Vincent follows his father's lead, sinking his hands into the
earth.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. VINCENT'S FATHER'S HOUSE - DAY

Vincent stares at the dirt on his hands and smiles.

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Helen sits at her computer, posting an ad on Craigslist.
Suddenly, the lights go off, enveloping the room in darkness.
Christina enters, carrying a cake ablaze with candles.

CHRISTINA
Happy birthday to you.

HELEN
Cha-cha-cha.

CHRISTINA
Happy birthday to you.

HELEN
Cha-cha-cha.

CHRISTINA
*Happy birthday, dear Helen,
Happy birthday to you!*

HELEN
Cha-cha-chaaa.

Helen blows out the candles.

CHRISTINA

I love you.

HELEN

I love you too, darling.

CHRISTINA

You made it to eighty.

Helen beams with pride.

HELEN

You bet! And I'd like to live
another twenty years.

CHRISTINA

You will.

Christina heads toward the record player, ready to choose a familiar tune.

HELEN

No, no. Let's try something new,
darling.

CHRISTINA

Like what?

HELEN

Let's go out, have martinis, and
smoke the night away.

CHRISTINA

There's no more smoking in bars.

HELEN

Then we'll dance! I love parties!

INT. BAR - NIGHT

The bar is near closing time. Chet Baker's "Almost Blue" plays softly on the jukebox. Christina and Helen slow dance, visibly drunk. The song comes to an end.

HELEN

Play it again, Christina.

Christina shuffles over to the jukebox. The BARTENDER (20s) rolls his eyes. Helen waves her empty glass to him. He sighs. "Almost Blue" fills the bar once more.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Cry, Chet. Cry!

INT. UBER - NIGHT

Christina lies passed out on Helen's shoulder. The Uber comes to a stop at a red light. Helen glances out of the window and catches sight of two young men sharing a kiss. A warm smile spreads across her face, mixed with a tinge of longing.

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Helen sits on her bed, searching Facebook on her iPhone. Suddenly, something appears on the screen that shocks her. She recoils in horror, her eyes welling up with tears.

HELEN

Oh, my love. It can't be true. It
can't be true!

INT. VINCENT'S FATHER'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Vincent pauses in the hallway outside his father's bedroom, taking a deep breath to steady himself.

INT. VINCENT'S FATHER'S HOUSE - FATHER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Vincent enters his father's bedroom and begins sorting through the clutter. He opens a drawer and discovers his father's wedding band. He slides it onto his own finger.

He then picks up a photo album, flipping through the pages filled with various snapshots of him and his father on a boat. Overwhelmed with emotions, he sets the album down gently.

INT. VINCENT'S HOSPITAL ROOM - FLASHBACK

Vincent, (13), lies in a hospital bed connected to a breathing machine, unconscious. Slowly, his eyes begin to open.

Miguel, (30s), is at his side, his face filled with tears. He reaches out and grasps Vincent's hand tightly.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. CEMETERY - MORNING

A misty morning. A car drives through the cemetery.

EXT. CEMETERY - MORNING

Under a gentle rain, Helen stands before a grave marked "Renata Rendon."

HELEN

I saw two men kissing the other night, just like that, right in the middle of the street. Who would've imagined they'd let us fall in love?

She lets out a bittersweet laugh.

HELEN (CONT'D)

They even let us say, "I do."

Her eyes fill with tears, her voice trembling.

HELEN (CONT'D)

I'm sorry I didn't have the courage to fall in love. "I do," my love. "I do," forever.

The rain intensifies, large drops fall on Helen's face. She closes her eyes, letting the rain wash over her.

INT. VINCENT'S FATHER'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - MORNING

Vincent brushes his teeth, his gaze fixed on the wedding band on his finger. He attempts to remove it, but it stubbornly refuses to budge.

EXT. BUS STOP - DAY

Rain pours down accompanied by thunder. Christina struggles with a collapsing umbrella as she waits at the bus stop. Right on time, Vincent's truck pulls up beside her. Without hesitation, she jumps in as if they were already lovers.

INT. PICKUP - DAY

Vincent wipes the steam from the windshield with his hand, trying to clear his view.

VINCENT

I was thinking... maybe we could go out on my father's boat. I've been fixing it up.

Christina's eyes catch sight of the wedding band on his finger. Her entire body slumps, and she looks down. He stops at a traffic light and looks at her.

VINCENT (CONT'D)
Would you like that?

Suddenly, she opens the door and jumps out.

VINCENT (CONT'D)
Hey! No, wait--

He pulls over and quickly gets out, chasing after her through the pouring rain.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Vincent runs after Christina, his voice calling out to her amidst the downpour.

VINCENT
Christina! Christina! Where are you going?

She shakes her head, muttering to herself.

CHRISTINA
I'm such a fool. Never again.
Never! This is the last time.

VINCENT
Wait, wait! What's wrong?

CHRISTINA
Please, just leave me alone. Leave me alone!

VINCENT
No! What did I do? What are we fighting about?

CHRISTINA
I'm a stupid woman.

VINCENT
Talk to me. Talk to me!

She turns towards him, her emotions erupting.

CHRISTINA
Liar!

He has never seen her so passionate.

VINCENT

Come on, come on. Let it out, let it out!

CHRISTINA

How do you do this to someone?

He looks confused.

VINCENT

Do what?

She points at the wedding band on his finger, realization dawning on him. He laughs, a sense of joy overwhelming him.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

You care!

She just stands there, incredibly confused.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

It's my father's wedding ring. I can't get it off. It's stuck.

He proudly shows her that the wedding band is firmly glued to his finger. She blushes and looks down.

CHRISTINA

I'm sorry. I'm not myself. I... I thought--

In a bold moment, he interrupts her with a kiss. Surprisingly, she reciprocates. The rain hammers down on them.

EXT. HELEN'S HOUSE - DAY

The rain has ceased. Vincent and Christina, drenched from the downpour, stand by the truck, their eyes fixed on the ground, uncertain of what to do next. He looks at her, but she looks away.

VINCENT

Want to see my father's boat?

She steals a quick glance at him before responding.

CHRISTINA

Yes.

He smiles.

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - DAY

Helen stands by the window, watching them, a satisfied smile on her face, reveling in her victory.

EXT. SAN JOSE GARDEN SUPPLY - DAY

Vincent and Salvador load supplies into the truck. Salvador notices a neon sign that reads: "Los Mariachi."

INT. LOS MARIACHI BAR - DAY

A Mexican flag proudly hangs above the bar. The walls are adorned with photographs of renowned Mexican mariachi singers. A romantic Mexican song plays on the jukebox.

Vincent and Salvador perched at the bar. Vincent sips on a soda while Salvador enjoys a beer.

VINCENT
How can you tell?

SALVADOR
Tell what?

VINCENT
When someone loves you.

Salvador takes a moment to gather his thoughts.

SALVADOR
It's always in the eyes... The eyes
say more than words ever could.

VINCENT
What do you mean?

Salvador looks at him.

SALVADOR
Look deeply into her eyes, with
your heart and soul. Let her see
the real you. If she doesn't look
away...

Salvador gives Vincent a heartfelt shoulder hug.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)
You're one lucky son of a bitch!

EXT. STREET - DAY

Christina ambles along, window shopping.

INT. VINTAGE CLOTHING STORE - DAY

Christina sifts through a rack of dresses.

INT. CHRISTINA'S BASEMENT APARTMENT - NIGHT

Christina stands in front of a mirror, trying on a new dress. The garment is light and flowy, a departure from her usual dark and heavy clothes.

INT. CHRISTINA'S BASEMENT APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Christina stands before a mirror, applying lipstick. Her face takes on a newfound radiance, as if she has come alive.

EXT. HELEN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Christina walks up the stairs, approaching Helen's front door. For the first time we can see her womanly figure.

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Christina enters the room, and Helen's eyes widen in amazement.

HELEN

Oh! Oh, Christina!

Helen is at a loss for words, overwhelmed with joy to see Christina embracing life again.

HELEN (CONT'D)

I'm so proud of you, my darling.
You look divine. I love it!

Christina nervously rubs her arm. She looks down at her dress, feeling incredibly self-conscious.

CHRISTINA

It's not too see-through?

HELEN

No, it's perfect.

CHRISTINA

You can't see...

Helen affectionately smooths Christina's hair back.

HELEN

No need to be nervous, darling. It doesn't matter. I truly don't think he would ever care.

EXT. HELEN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Vincent stands by his truck, holding a bouquet of flowers.

Christina emerges from the house, visibly insecure. A wide smile lights up Vincent's face. He appears nervous yet overjoyed. It takes him a moment to find his words.

VINCENT

You look beautiful.

He offers her the flowers.

CHRISTINA

Thank you.

INT. VINCENT'S BOAT - NIGHT

Vincent and Christina stand on the boat's deck, gazing at the moon.

VINCENT

When I turned eighteen, I changed my name.

CHRISTINA

What's your real name?

He pauses before replying.

VINCENT

Vicente.

CHRISTINA

Why did you change it?

He drops his head.

VINCENT

I was ashamed.

She looks at him.

CHRISTINA
Vicente... Did I say it right?

VINCENT
Yes.

CHRISTINA
It's nice.

He extends his hand, hesitant. Does he dare? Then making up his mind, he reaches out slowly, he gently brushes his fingers against the side of her neck.

He studies her reaction, waiting to see if she pulls away. She doesn't. He continues.

She closes her eyes, savoring the warmth of his fingertips as they trace a slow path up her neck, reaching her face near her mouth.

She opens her eyes. Their gazes meet, and she holds his stare, unyielding. They remain locked in this silent exchange for a lingering moment.

Finally, he leans in and kisses her gently.

INT. BAKERY FACTORY - OFFICE - DAY

Christina sits across from the exhausted MANAGER, an indigenous woman in her 50s. The office is cluttered and confined, lacking windows, with stacks of bakery boxes filling the space behind the manager.

MANAGER
What is it?

For several seconds, Christina says nothing.

CHRISTINA
Um, I...

MANAGER
Is everything all right? I'm really busy.

CHRISTINA
I... I was wondering how many vacation hours I have.

The manager types on her keyboard and glances at the screen.

MANAGER

Quite a lot. You haven't taken any days off since you started.

Christina pauses.

CHRISTINA

I was hoping to take some time off.

MANAGER

What for? A trip? Vacation?

Christina nods slowly.

CHRISTINA

A trip.

MANAGER

Where are you going?

Christina pauses before replying.

CHRISTINA

Mexico.

MANAGER

You should visit Chiapas! That's where I'm from. It's incredibly beautiful.

The manager smiles wistfully.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

I'd love to go back one day.

Christina doesn't say anything.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

Well, you can take a couple of weeks off. How does that sound?

Christina nods.

CHRISTINA

Thank you.

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Christina and Helen sit at the kitchen table, eating. Christina looks at Helen and waits for a moment before speaking.

CHRISTINA
I'm going away for a couple of
weeks.

Helen looks at her, confused.

HELEN
What? Where are you going?

Christina touches her stomach.

CHRISTINA
I need to do this. So I can be
happy.

Helen looks at Christina's stomach, realizing what she means.

HELEN
Oh, God. You can't be serious.

Christina nods.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Oh, Christina. I know how much
you've been hurt. I know life is
not fair. But there is no magic
wand. You can't erase the past.
Whatever you're thinking about
doing, please don't do it.

CHRISTINA
I don't want him to see me like
this.

HELEN
Love is being able to tell the
truth.

Christina stares at her plate.

CHRISTINA
I can't.

Christina starts clearing the table, signaling that she
doesn't want to discuss it further. Helen watches her with
concern.

HELEN
What if I die?

CHRISTINA
You're not going to die.

HELEN

You don't know that. "Life changes
in the instant." Who said that?

CHRISTINA

I don't know.

HELEN

I was an editor, for God's sake!

CHRISTINA

It's okay.

Helen rubs her head.

HELEN

I'm confused. I'm losing my mind.
I'm dying. I know I'm dying!

CHRISTINA

You're not dying.

Helen pleads with her.

HELEN

You can't leave.

CHRISTINA

I will come back.

HELEN

Something can go wrong.

CHRISTINA

I promise you, I'll come back.

HELEN

You're making a big mistake.

Christina starts washing the dishes, avoiding further
conversation. Helen closes her eyes briefly.

HELEN (CONT'D)

If you wait too long, you'll end up
with nothing.

Christina doesn't say anything.

INT. VINCENT'S FATHER'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Covered in paint, Vincent sprawls on the couch, feeling
content.

VINCENT
Thank you, father.

EXT. SALVADOR'S HOUSE - DAY

Salvador waters his flowers in the front yard when Vincent pulls into the driveway and quickly gets out of the car.

Salvador sees a freshly painted sign on the side of the pickup that reads "Miguel Landscaping." They exchange a smile.

EXT. HELEN'S HOUSE - GARDEN - DAY

Helen stares at the gardenias with a sense of dread.

INT. CHRISTINA'S BASEMENT APARTMENT - NIGHT

Christina stands naked in front of the mirror, her scars exposed. She stares at her reflection, revealing the profound pain she carries within.

INT. DINER - NIGHT

Vincent finishes his meal when Alexis enters the diner, clearly drunk. She approaches him, stumbling and slurring her words.

ALEXIS
Wanna grab a drink? Come on, have a
drink with me. Just one drink.

Vincent recoils, a look of intense disgust crossing his face.

VINCENT
You belong in jail.

ALEXIS
I was a child.

VINCENT
And that makes it okay?

ALEXIS
It kills me. What we did to you.

VINCENT
I don't care.

ALEXIS

Can't we just forget the past?
Let's forget it, okay? Move on--

VINCENT

You and your friends beat me. Spit
on me. Raped--

ALEXIS

Stop! Please, stop!

VINCENT

You don't want to hear it--

He grabs a knife from the table.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

How would you feel if I shoved this
up--

ALEXIS

Stop!

There is a long, charged silence. She appears on the verge of
collapsing. He drops the knife and storms out of the diner.
Tears well up in her eyes.

ALEXIS (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Shaken, Vincent reaches the pickup, then doubles over and
vomits.

INT. SCHOOL BATHROOM - FLASHBACK

A group of WHITE BOYS (13) and a GIRL (13), red-haired,
surround Vincent (13).

BOY #1 holds Vincent in a headlock while the others force him
down on the floor and pull down his pants.

The girl watches on, laughing and cheering.

BOY #1

Give it to him, he fucking wants
it.

BOY #2

My dad says Mexicans love it up the
ass.

BOY #2 rams a hockey stick up Vincent's rectum. He SCREAMS.

EXT. VINCENT'S FATHER'S HOUSE - FLASHBACK

Miguel, (30s), not quite sober, talks with a white POLICE OFFICER, (30s).

MIGUEL

You can't be serious?

POLICE OFFICER

They're just kids. They were playing a game.

MIGUEL

A game? They belong in fucking jail!

POLICE OFFICER

Don't make trouble, or I'll make sure it gets worse for you.

The police officer walks off. Miguel's eyes filling with angry tears.

EXT. SCHOOL - TRACK FIELD - FLASHBACK

Vincent (13) wraps a rope hanging down from the flagpole tightly around his neck.

Silence.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. OCEAN BED - DAY

The silence is broken by the loud roar of a boat. Vincent's boat heads out toward the open sea.

INT. VINCENT'S BOAT - DAY

Vincent steers. Christina beside him.

VINCENT

I'm glad you're here.

CHRISTINA

Me too.

Christina looks at the water and closes her eyes. An image flashes in her head.

INSERT - IMAGE

Christina, wearing a bathing suit, free from scars, radiates confidence as she runs into the water toward Vincent.

Christina opens her eyes, a sense of clarity washing over her.

INT. VINCENT'S BOAT - TWILIGHT

Vincent pours his father's ashes into the sea, burdened with guilt.

VINCENT

I treated him so bad after the-- I blamed him for everything. I left him behind. I-- I abandoned him.

He starts crying.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

I don't think he ever knew how proud I was of him. I-- I never told him how much I loved him.

She puts her arms around him and holds him tightly. He holds onto her.

EXT. OCEAN - DAWN

A beautiful sunrise.

INT. VINCENT'S BOAT - DAWN

Christina and Vincent lie entwined in each other's embrace, sound asleep.

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Christina neatly stacks cans of cat food in the cabinet.

CHRISTINA

This should last the whole month.

HELEN

What are you planning to tell him?

CHRISTINA

Nothing.

HELEN

What should I tell him then?

CHRISTINA

Nothing.

HELEN

But he'll be worried sick, darling.

CHRISTINA

Just tell him... I'll be back soon.

Christina turns around. Helen is on the verge of tears.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)

Please, don't be sad.

Unable to hold back her emotions, Helen clings to Christina.

HELEN

No more waiting, Christina. No more
wasted time...

INT. AIRPORT - DAY

Christina sits in the bustling waiting area, deep in thought.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT (O.S.)

(loudspeaker)

Now boarding Delta Flight 451 to
Mexico at gate 13.

Passengers hurry past her towards the gate. She stares at her
boarding pass.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Last call for Flight 451.

She remains seated, grappling with her decision.

EXT. MEXICO - DAY

A stunning aerial shot showcases the breathtaking beauty of
Mexico.

INT. MEXICO AIRPORT - DAY

Christina steps out of the bustling terminal.

EXT. MEXICO HOSPITAL - DAY

The grandeur of the hospital resembles a luxurious resort. A taxi glides to a stop outside. Christina looks out, her eyes fixated on a magnificent statue of Jesus. His arms outstretched towards the heavens, enveloped by gardenias.

INT. PETER'S TRUCK - DAY

Peter and Dave spot Vincent and Salvador working on someone's lawn.

DAVE

Look at those assholes. Who do they think they are? I can't believe how this fucking country's changed.

Peter sees red.

PETER

I've had enough! They're taking everything from us!

Peter abruptly pulls the truck over.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - DAY

Peter jumps out of the truck, grabbing a shovel. Dave follows.

DAVE

What are you doing, man?

PETER

There ain't many of us left. We'll become extinct if we don't stand up to them!

Dave grabs Peter's arm.

DAVE

Hey, calm down. Let's just go, okay?

Peter's face twists in blind rage.

PETER

My wife left me!

DAVE

It happens all the time, man.

PETER
For a fucking dirty Mexican!

DAVE
Come on, let's go. Let's get out of
here, man.

PETER
They're gonna fucking pay!

Peter viciously smashes the shovel into Vincent's truck
windshield.

DAVE
Fucking shit.

Vincent and Salvador run towards the truck.

VINCENT
Stop!

PETER
You don't deserve to be here.

VINCENT
I served two tours in Afghanistan.
What have you done?

Peter salutes Vincent.

PETER
Thank you for your service,
asshole.

Peter raises the shovel and strikes the side of the truck,
vandalizing Vincent's father's name.

PETER (CONT'D)
What are you going to do? You're
too fucking weak.

Vincent simply stares at his father's name.

PETER (CONT'D)
Where are your damn balls, you
chickenshit cocksucker? Get off our
land! Get off!

VINCENT
Make me.

PETER
What did you say? I'll rip your
damn head off! I'll kill you!
(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)

(to Dave)

Un-fucking-believable. Can you believe this guy?

Peter points to his chin.

PETER (CONT'D)

Come on. Take a swing. Right here. Go ahead. I know you want to!

VINCENT

I heard about your wife.

PETER

Shut the fuck up!

Vincent's stare intensifies. Peter spits at him.

PETER (CONT'D)

Fucking coward.

Enraged, Vincent charges at Peter, unleashing a relentless barrage of punches.

DAVE

(to Peter)

Come on, man! You're getting your fucking ass kicked!

Peter falls to the ground.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Fuck! Get up! Come on! Get up! Swing, man! Swing!

Dave is about to intervene, but Salvador gives him a firm look, signaling him to stay back. Dave complies.

A small crowd of HOUSEWIVES gather around like moths around a flame.

Adrenaline fuels Vincent as he lands punch after punch, leaving Peter bloodied and battered.

HOUSEWIFE #1 (O.S.)

What is wrong with you people? You're all criminals!

HOUSEWIFE #2 (O.S.)

Those Mexicans! Always causing trouble! This is a respectable neighborhood!

HOUSEWIFE #3 (O.S.)
I'm calling the police! I'm not
kidding! Savages!

Salvador steps in.

SALVADOR
Vicente, enough!

Vincent stops. Peter is a bloody mess. Salvador suppresses a
chuckle.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)
We should probably leave before
these ladies spray us with RAID!

Salvador blows a playful kiss to the housewives.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)
Goodbye, ladies.

HOUSEWIFE #1
Just get out of here!

HOUSEWIFE #2
Stay off my lawn!

HOUSEWIFE #3
You all should be behind bars!

A police car pulls over, and two young and arrogant POLICE
OFFICERS hastily step out. The housewives point accusatory
fingers at Vincent and Salvador.

The tension rises as the police officers swiftly draw their
weapons.

POLICE OFFICER #1
Stay right where you are!

POLICE OFFICER #2
Hands up!

SALVADOR
What? They started it!

POLICE OFFICER #1
Get your fucking hands up!

SALVADOR
Take it easy. Don't shoot.

POLICE OFFICER #2
I'll blow your fucking head off!
Hands up!

POLICE OFFICER #1
Hands up now! Right now!

Vincent and Salvador raise their hands in the air, as if they expected this outcome.

INT. MEXICO HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Christina reads the battered book Vincent gave her.

CHRISTINA (V.O.)
"I found you after the storm, the
rain washed the air and in the
water your sweet feet gleamed like
fishes..."

INT. COUNTY JAIL - CELL - NIGHT

OFFICER JOHNSON (30s) forcefully throws Vincent into a cramped holding cell.

CHRISTINA (V.O.)
"...The thief will come out of his
tower some day. And the invader
will be expelled. All the fruits of
life will grow in my hands
accustomed once to powder. And I
shall know how to touch the new
flowers gently because you taught
me..."

EXT. MEXICO HOSPITAL - DAY

The sun emerges from behind passing clouds, casting a warm glow on the vibrant gardenias. Christina gazes at them.

CHRISTINA (V.O.)
"...At first I did not see you: I
did not know that you were walking
with me, until your roots pierced
my chest, joined the threads of my
blood, spoke through my mouth..."

INT. COUNTY JAIL - CELL - DAY

Through a barred window, Vincent stares at the sun.

CHRISTINA (V.O.)
"...and that there where I am,
under rain or under fire, my love,
I wait for you..."

INT. MEXICO HOSPITAL - DAY

A nurse cleans Christina's scars, preparing her for surgery.

CHRISTINA (V.O.)
"...I wait for you in the harshest
desert and next to the flowering
lemon tree, in every place where
there is life, where spring is
being born, my love, I wait for
you..."

INT. MEXICO HOSPITAL - DAY

A nurse wheels Christina into the operating room.

CHRISTINA (V.O.)
"...Love, I am waiting for you.
Farewell, love, I am waiting for
you. Love, love, I am waiting for
you..."

INT. COUNTY JAIL - CELL - NIGHT

Vincent lies on a cot, wide awake, deep in thought.

CHRISTINA (V.O.)
"...we shall always be alone, we
shall always be, you and I, alone
upon the earth to begin life."

INT. MEXICO HOSPITAL - NIGHT

A nurse wheels Christina out of surgery.

INT. COUNTY JAIL - DAY

Officer Johnson removes Vincent's handcuffs. Vincent anxiously scans the surroundings, searching for Salvador.

VINCENT
Hey, where's my partner?

OFFICER JOHNSON

Who?

VINCENT

Salvador Morales.

Officer Johnson flips through a file.

OFFICER JOHNSON

ICE picked him up.

VINCENT

Wh-- What? Why?

OFFICER JOHNSON

He's being deported.

Vincent slumps in shock, the weight of the news hitting him hard.

INT. IMMIGRATION DETENTION CENTER - DAY

The detention center is a scene of chaos and confusion, filled with noise and a swarm of people. Vincent impatiently sits in the overcrowded waiting area. In the distance, he spots Salvador's ACLU LAWYER, (mid-20s), a determined and eager young lawyer arguing with someone at the administration desk

ACLU LAWYER

See you in court!

She takes a seat beside Vincent.

VINCENT

What's going on? Why are they holding him?

ACLU LAWYER

He has a criminal record.

VINCENT

No way! They're making it up.

ACLU LAWYER

He was arrested in '93.

VINCENT

For what?

ACLU LAWYER

Working with a fake social security number.

VINCENT

Are you kidding me? That was over two decades ago.

ACLU LAWYER

Under the new administration, the perception is that every immigrant is considered a criminal. Everyone is a target now.

VINCENT

Can they do this to him?

ACLU LAWYER

Unfortunately, yes.

VINCENT

He didn't do anything wrong. I told them. It was all my fault!

ACLU LAWYER

It doesn't matter. They don't care.

VINCENT

Will they deport him?

ACLU LAWYER

They will detain him until the case goes before a judge.

He slumps back in his chair, overwhelmed by the situation.

ACLU LAWYER (CONT'D)

I will do everything in my power to get him out.

VINCENT

Can I see him?

ACLU LAWYER

Yes.

INT. IMMIGRATION DETENTION CENTER - VISITING ROOM - DAY

Vincent sits across from Salvador.

VINCENT

I got you a lawyer. She's young but ambitious. We're going to get you out of here.

Salvador looks at Vincent, his expression numb.

SALVADOR
Keep working. Please don't stop.

VINCENT
Okay.

SALVADOR
Remember, Mrs. Shepard likes her bushes trimmed perfectly, and tell her not to overwater them.

VINCENT
Don't give up.

SALVADOR
Please, don't let my flowers die. Will you water them?

VINCENT
Yes.

Vincent fights back tears.

VINCENT (CONT'D)
I love you. You're my only family. I promise you, I will get you out of here.

Salvador's eyes well up with tears.

EXT. HELEN'S HOUSE - DAY

Vincent rings the doorbell, and Helen opens the door.

VINCENT
I'm sorry to bother you. I just... I don't know what to do. Christina isn't answering her phone.

HELEN
She's not here.

VINCENT
Where is she?

She hesitates before responding.

HELEN
I can't tell you.

He looks down, filled with concern.

HELEN (CONT'D)
She'll be back soon. She promised.

EXT. STRIP MALL - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

In a daze, Vincent walks out, holding a brown takeout bag. He sees Alexis stumbling toward her car.

VINCENT
You can't drive like that.

ALEXIS
What do you care?

VINCENT
I'll take you home.

ALEXIS
Leave me alone!

VINCENT
You're pathetic!

ALEXIS
You want to hit me, huh?

He simply stares at her, refusing to engage.

ALEXIS (CONT'D)
Go ahead, hit me. Just do it. It's what I fucking deserve. Hit me!

VINCENT
Stop.

ALEXIS.
Do it!

VINCENT
No.

ALEXIS
Just fucking hit me!

Vincent shakes his head. She breaks down in tears.

ALEXIS (CONT'D)
Just do it. Just hit me. I-- I can't bear this anymore. Vincent, please. Please, just fucking hit me.

VINCENT
It won't make me feel better.

ALEXIS
Then, what will?

VINCENT
I don't know. What would make you
feel better?

Alexis collapses against her car, sobbing uncontrollably.

ALEXIS
Nothing. Nothing. What we did-- I'm
sorry. I'm so sorry for everything.

Vincent slumps down next to her, and they sit in silence for
a long moment.

VINCENT
Why did you hurt me?

Alexis pauses before replying.

ALEXIS
We hated you.

VINCENT
Why?

ALEXIS
It's what we were taught. At
church, at school, at home.
Mexicans are--

She stops, overwhelmed by shame.

ALEXIS (CONT'D)
I can't-- I can't stand it here. I
can't take it anymore. I want to go
away. I want to leave this fucking
place.

She looks at him.

ALEXIS (CONT'D)
And you?

Vincent looks completely at peace.

VINCENT
Not anymore. I'm home.

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Helen sits at the table, deep in thought. Her cat peacefully curled up next to her.

HELEN

What should we do today?

She reaches for the brandy.

INT. MEXICO HOSPITAL - MORNING

Sweating and feverish, Christina jolts awake with a gasp. She instinctively checks her stomach, finding the scars still there. Panicked, she presses the emergency button.

The DOCTOR and a NURSE rush into the room. Christina touches her stomach.

DOCTOR

I'm sorry, but we couldn't proceed with the surgery.

The doctor pulls back the covers, revealing a swollen, purplish-blue, and bleeding leg. A gruesome sight.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

It's worsening. The infection is spreading.

Christina tries to get up.

CHRISTINA

I need to go. I need to go home.

The doctor exchanges a glance with the nurse.

DOCTOR

Don't worry. You're going to be all right.

The nurse prepares a needle, and Christina shakes her head in fear.

CHRISTINA

Wh-- What's happening?

Ignoring her pleas, the nurse injects the needle into Christina's IV line.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)

No, no, no...

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - DAY

Helen opens the door and finds a pale, gaunt MAN (20s) standing outside. She sways for a moment, steadying herself by holding onto the door.

HELEN
Hello.

MAN
I'm from--

HELEN
I was expecting a woman.

MAN
My wife sent me. Sh-- She's still
at work.

HELEN
All right. Well, don't just stand
there. Come on in.

He wipes his shoes on the welcome mat. Helen looks surprised.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Thank you.

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Loud music blares from the record player, a fun and upbeat tune.

MAN
It's quite loud.

HELEN
What's that?

MAN
The music.

HELEN
Oh, I see.

She changes the music to something haunting and slow.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Is that better?

MAN
I really don't care.

He cases the room.

MAN (CONT'D)

You have so many beautiful things.

She gestures to the Serge Mouille table lamps.

HELEN

That's one of my favorites.

He picks up one of the lamps, causing her to become alarmed.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Hey, be careful. They're very delicate.

He pauses for a moment, then slowly puts the lamp back down. She laughs.

MAN

What's so funny?

HELEN

Sorry-- I-- I think I've had too much to drink.

MAN

You sure did.

HELEN

I didn't mean to offend you.

He stares at her, creating an uncomfortable silence.

HELEN (CONT'D)

I'm afraid I've made a mistake. I've changed my mind. You should go.

MAN

Shut the fuck up!

Realizing the danger, she backs away, as one backs away from a loaded gun.

HELEN

Just take-- take whatever you want.

He stalks toward her. Her eyes widen in terror.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Please, just go. Please, go--

Desperate to defend herself, she swings her cane.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Stay back! Stay back!

In one swift motion, he grabs the cane and knocks her to the ground.

The cat screeches, sensing the danger.

He stands over her, raising the cane like a hammer.

HELEN (CONT'D)
God, no!

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Helen lies on the floor, unconscious, her lip split, head oozing blood, and her eye swollen shut.

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Early morning sunlight pours in through the window as Helen slowly regains consciousness. She opens her eyes and realizes she has been robbed. The house is in disarray, and her iPhone is shattered.

She attempts to move, but pain shoots through her body, and her arm appears to be broken.

HELEN
Oh, God. I really messed up this time.

Despite the intense pain, she manages to pull a throw from the couch to cover her broken and bloodied body. The cat curls up next to her.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Don't worry, darling...

Her eyes glance at the clock on the fireplace mantel.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Christina will be home soon.

She closes her eyes and prays to herself.

INT. MEXICO HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - NIGHT

A nurse wheels Christina down the hallway, she is semi-conscious.

INT. VINCENT'S FATHER'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Vincent sits on the couch, anxiously checking his watch. He dials a number on his cell.

INT. CHRISTINA'S BASEMENT APARTMENT - NIGHT

The phone rings in the darkness.

INT. VINCENT'S FATHER'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Vincent hangs up, worried.

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Helen struggles to stay awake. She mutters names, dates, and titles, as images flash before her eyes.

HELEN (V.O.)
 1969. Sartre. Camille
 Claudel. Juhl. Giacometti.
 Oh, Chet. Black on Gray, Red
 on Red. New York City. Renata
 Rendon...

IMAGES
 Stonewall Riots. "We are our
 choices." Sakountala ou
 L'Abandon ou Vertumne et
 Pomone. The Chieftain chair.
 Grande femme II 1960 bronze.
 Chet Baker's death in
 Amsterdam. Rothko's
 paintings. Helen's lost love
 in New York.

Triggered by the image of Renata, she closes her eyes tightly.

HELEN
 I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry.

EXT. CHRISTOPHER STREET PIER - NEW YORK CITY - FLASHBACK

A hot summer night. Helen (20s) and Renata (20s) gaze up at the stars.

HELEN
 We need to end this.

RENATA
 I love you.

HELEN
 I'm scared.

RENATA
I'm not scared.

HELEN
I don't want to hurt you again.

Helen gently touches Renata's face. Two young black DRAG QUEENS shuffle past them.

DRAG QUEEN #1
Kiss her!

DRAG QUEEN #2
If you love her, kiss her!

Helen and Renata gaze into each other's eyes, and Helen leans in to kiss her.

END FLASHBACK

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Helen breaks down in tears.

HELEN
Darling. Oh, my darling. I'm sorry
I left. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

EXT. CHRISTINA'S BASEMENT APARTMENT - MORNING

Vincent knocks on the door, but there's no answer.

EXT. HELEN'S HOUSE - MORNING

Vincent rings the doorbell and waits, but there's still no response. He steps back and calls up to an open window.

VINCENT
Helen! Helen!

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Helen calls out, her voice barely a whisper.

HELEN
Help. Help. Please... help me...

She takes a deep breath, gathering all her strength.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Help!

She eyes the TV remote control, just inches away.

EXT. HELEN'S HOUSE - MORNING

Vincent starts to walk away from the house.

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Helen reaches out for the remote, wincing in pain.

EXT. HELEN'S HOUSE - MORNING

Vincent stops abruptly, his attention caught by the sound of a blaring TV coming from inside the house.

The cat slinks out through the open window.

He heads back towards the house.

INT. MEXICO OPERATING ROOM - MORNING

Christina drifts in and out of consciousness.

CHRISTINA

I'd like to go home now.

DOCTOR

Just hold on a little longer.

CHRISTINA

They're waiting for me.

DOCTOR

Everything's going to be fine.

Christina looks up at the clock on the wall, tears welling up in her eyes.

CHRISTINA

Tell them I'm coming...

The doctor places a mask over her face.

DOCTOR

Close your eyes and think of home...

Christina's eyelids grow heavy and begin to close.

The silence is punctuated by the TICKING of the CLOCK.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. OCEAN - DUSK

Vincent's boat glides beneath the setting sun.

INT. VINCENT'S BOAT - DUSK

A breathtaking sunset and a howling wind. Vincent and Christina look ahead.

Salvador attempts to light Helen's cigarette.

SALVADOR

You shouldn't smoke. It can kill
you.

Helen laughs.

FADE OUT.