

36 Questions for the Rest of Our Lives

written by

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based on "The 36 Questions that Lead to Love"

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FADE IN:

MONTAGE - MORNING ROUTINES - DAY

INT. JULIET'S APARTMENT - MORNING

JULIET HART (late 20s) - meticulous, guarded, a fortress built of disappointment - stands before her closet with military precision.

She selects a dress, then changes her mind. Then again. A protective ritual.

Her apartment is immaculate. Almost sterile. Art books arranged by color on shelves, but a sketchpad hidden underneath them, barely visible.

She checks her phone: Calendar notification "36 Questions Event - 7PM" with three reminder alarms set.

Her thumb hovers over "DELETE."

Instead, she takes a deep breath and places the phone down.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Juliet applies makeup with surgical precision, like armor being assembled piece by piece.

In the mirror, a flicker of vulnerability crosses her face. She quickly suppresses it, resuming her mask of indifference.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

She makes coffee, measuring the grounds to the exact gram.

On her refrigerator: a single drawing of a dress design, faded and yellowing. The only hint of creativity in an otherwise controlled space.

Her phone BUZZES with a text from MIA:

MIA:

"Don't you dare cancel. I'll know. I always know."

Juliet almost smiles. Almost.

INT. LUKE'S APARTMENT - SAME TIME

LUKE CARTER (early 30s) - rumpled charm hiding bone-deep fatigue - wakes up fifteen minutes late, phone alarm blaring.

His apartment is organized chaos. Books everywhere. Notebooks with started stories, abandoned after a few pages.

Coffee mugs with half-finished novels beside them. A life lived in fragments.

He grabs clean-ish clothes from a chair, sniffs them. Good enough.

His laptop sits open to a blank document titled "THE NOVEL - FOR REAL THIS TIME."

INT. LUKE'S BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Luke brushes his teeth while scrolling dating app profiles. Swipe left. Swipe left. He's not even really looking.

In the mirror: a practiced smile that doesn't quite reach his eyes. He tries another one. Better.

INT. LUKE'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Luke makes instant coffee, spilling some. He doesn't clean it up.

On his wall: one framed photo of him and his mother at a carnival. He glances at it, a moment of genuine emotion breaking through.

His phone BUZZES with a text from MASON:

MASON:

"20 bucks says you chicken out. Another 50 says if you stay, you'll charm your way through without saying anything real."

Luke smirks, types back: "You're on."

EXT. CITY STREETS - EVENING

Juliet walks purposefully toward The Wren Room, then slows. Hesitates.

She watches other COUPLES entering, laughing. Her face a mask of skepticism.

Her phone RINGS. She answers.

JULIET
No, I haven't bailed. Yet.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. MIA'S APARTMENT - SAME TIME

MIA (late 20s) - loyal, persistent, Juliet's emotional translator to the world - paces her colorful apartment.

MIA
If you turn around, I swear I'll
post
that karaoke video from Cancun.

JULIET
That's emotional blackmail.

MIA
It's friendship. There's a
difference.
(beat)
Jules, you promised. What's the
worst
that could happen?

JULIET
I could meet someone.

MIA
That's... literally the goal.

JULIET
Exactly.

MIA
(softly)
Not everyone leaves, Jules.

A beat as this lands harder than Juliet expected.

MIA
Just try. Actually try this time.
You
deserve more than your apartment
and
those sketches you hide.

JULIET
I don't hide them--

MIA
Under your bed, behind your books,
in
your locked drawer. That's hiding.
(beat)
When was the last time you showed
someone your designs?

Juliet has no answer.

JULIET
I'm hanging up now.

MIA
Love you too. Text me every
detail.

Juliet hangs up. Takes a deep breath. Steels herself.

EXT. THE WREN ROOM - NIGHT

The glow of fairy lights. Cobblestone sidewalk.
A brass plaque shines under soft golden lamps:

THE WREN ROOM: Moments Worth Remembering.

Tonight's event is chalked onto a blackboard easel:

"THE 36 QUESTIONS CHALLENGE: FIND LOVE... OR FIND ONE MILLION DOLLARS."

Small photographs of smiling couples surround the sign - past successes. Twinkling lights create an atmosphere of magic and possibility.

The door swings open. A small, hopeful crowd drifts inside.

Across the street, Juliet watches grimly from her car.

Sharp eyes. Sharp wit. Her armor fully assembled.

Her phone buzzes.
A text from MIA:

MIA:
"Just TRY. You promised. You deserve more."

Juliet stares at the message.
Her thumb hovers over LEAVE.

Instead, she sighs, locks her car, and crosses the street.

FADE TO:

INT. THE WREN ROOM - CHECK-IN DESK - MOMENTS LATER

The door jingles as Juliet steps inside.

Warm brick walls. Velvet booths. Edison bulbs casting honey-gold light. A soft hum of possibility.

The Wren Room is unlike anything Juliet expected - not sleek and commercial, but worn and authentic. Vintage photographs line the walls - couples from different eras, all with the same glow of connection. Some yellowed with age, others more recent.

Beneath each photo, a small brass plate: names and a date. Some with tiny stars beside them.

Juliet studies one photograph - an elderly couple, their plate showing "MARRIED 47 YEARS."

THE HOST (40s, cheery, slightly deranged enthusiasm) arranges heart-shaped place cards at the check-in desk. They look up, spotting Juliet.

HOST
First timer? I can always tell!
(leaning in, conspiratorial)
The terrified ones have a special glow.

JULIET
(dry)
That's probably an allergic reaction.

The Host laughs too loudly, undeterred.

HOST
The Wren Room has a ninety-three percent success rate for matches.
(MORE)

HOST (CONT'D)
Higher if you count the ones who
don't make it official.

JULIET
And how many make it past three
months?

HOST
(proudly)
Seventy-one percent! Better odds
than Vegas.
(whispering)
My grandparents met right over
there. Table 8. Married sixty-two
years.

The Host points to a prominent photo of an elderly couple.

Juliet studies the Host with new curiosity.

JULIET
So you actually believe in this?
It's not just... a gimmick?

HOST
(serious for once)
The questions work because they're
a permission slip to be honest.
Most people never get past the
weather and work conversations.

This lands with Juliet. A moment of unexpected sincerity.

Then the Host brightens again, back to manic enthusiasm.

HOST
Plus the million dollars doesn't
hurt!
(whispers)
Our mysterious benefactor is very
invested in true love. Or social
experiments. One of those.

The Host hands Juliet a glass of champagne and a card with "17"
written in ornate script.

Across the room, LUKE CARTER (early 30s) leans casually against
the check-in desk.

Leather jacket. Cocky smile. Casual arrogance barely masking
fatigue.

The cute BARISTA hands him a glass of champagne and a table
number.

BARISTA
(professionally polite)
Your table is near the window.

LUKE
(grinning)
Guess I'm luckier than most
already.

The Barista smiles politely, clearly used to men like Luke.
She's heard this line before.

BARISTA
(to herself, as she turns
away)
Table 17 again. Poor guy doesn't
know what's coming.

At the bar nearby, two other Baristas exchange knowing looks.

BARISTA #2
(whispers)
The Host always puts the tough
cases at 17.

BARISTA #3
Either they kill each other or
fall madly in love. No in-between.

Luke's phone buzzes – a text from MASON (Friend):

MASON:
"Win the mil. Marry a stranger. Drinks on me forever."

Luke chuckles, pockets the phone, and strolls toward his table.
He scans the room, taking mental inventory of the women
present. A practiced routine.

His eyes land momentarily on Juliet, who's still talking with
the Host. Something flickers across his face – a momentary
break in his performance. Something real.

He quickly masks it, resuming his casual swagger.

JULIET
(to Host, checking her card)
Table 17?

HOST
(too enthusiastic)
Oh, seventeen! My lucky number!
Something tells me this is going
to be special!

JULIET
(deadpan)
Is that something the voices in
your head?

The Host laughs delightedly, leaning closer.

HOST
(confidential)
Between us, I seated you
deliberately. I have a sense about
these things.
(tapping temple)
Table 17 has the highest success
rate in the room. And the most
spectacular failures.

JULIET
That's... not reassuring.

HOST
The best stories never start with
"everything went exactly as
planned."

Juliet looks skeptical but takes her champagne.

Luke, now at his table, watches her approach.

Other COUPLES mill about the room, some nervous, some excited.
A few veterans with the easy confidence of those who've done
this before.

One NERVOUS MAN repeatedly wipes his palms on his pants.
One CONFIDENT WOMAN applies fresh lipstick without a mirror.
One ELDERLY COUPLE exchanges knowing smiles, clearly here for
fun rather than necessity.

This is not just speed dating. This is a ritual with history.

Juliet steps further inside, clutching her table number: 17.
She scans the room, expression tightening.

Her eyes land on Table 17.

LUKE, lounging like he owns the place. Grinning like he just
found dessert.

Their eyes meet.
Immediate, mutual disgust.

JULIET
(muttering)
Of course.

She marches to the table, stiffly.

LUKE
(fake warm)
Awww. You look thrilled to see me.

JULIET
Dead inside. Just for you.

She slams her purse down and sits.

Behind them, the Host watches, smiling knowingly.

HOST
(to self)
Table 17 never disappoints.

The Baristas all share a look. The show is about to begin.

INT. THE WREN ROOM - EVENT FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

A sea of small candlelit tables arranged in a loose circle. Each couple awkwardly settling in, some leaning forward with eager anticipation, others maintaining careful distance.

The soft murmur of introductions fills the room. Nervous laughter. The clink of champagne glasses.

Through the center of the room winds a small stream - actual running water in a copper-lined channel - splitting the space before reuniting at the far end. Some tables sit closer to where the streams join.

BARISTA #2
(to a new arrival)
The streams symbolize separate
lives coming together. The Host
is... committed to metaphors.

In one corner, LIVE MUSICIANS tune string instruments. The lighting shifts subtly - warmer, more intimate.

Juliet steps inside, glancing at her table number again. Her eyes narrow as she scans the room.

Her gaze falls on a wall of polaroid photos - successful couples from past events. Some holding hands. Some kissing. All looking genuinely happy.

At the bottom of the wall: a small stack of instant cameras with a sign reading "CAPTURE YOUR BEGINNING."

Juliet's expression softens, just for a moment. Then hardens as her eyes land on Table 17.

LUKE, lounging like he owns the place. Grinning like he just found dessert.

ANGLE ON: LUKE

Luke observes the room with practiced casualness. He catalogs exits, attractive women, potential competition.

But something's off tonight. He keeps glancing at his phone:

MASON (text thread):
 "Double or nothing says you bail
 within 20 minutes."
 "Triple if you make it through all
 36 without getting slapped."

Luke replies:
 "You underestimate my charm."

Mason:
 "I estimate your bullshit perfectly. That's why we're friends."

Luke pockets his phone, takes a deeper sip of champagne.

His eyes track Juliet's entrance. The moment she spots him. The flash of resignation.

His smile widens. A challenge, finally.

Their eyes meet.
 Immediate, mutual disgust.

JULIET
 (muttering)
 Of course.

She marches to the table, stiffly.

LUKE
 (fake warm)
 Awww. You look thrilled to see me.

JULIET
 Dead inside. Just for you.

She slams her purse down and sits.

Around them, other pairs engage in awkward small talk:

TABLE 8: NERVOUS MAN & CONFIDENT WOMAN

NERVOUS MAN
...and that's why I have three
guinea pigs named after climate
scientists.

CONFIDENT WOMAN
(genuinely interested)
Which scientists?

TABLE 12: ELDERLY COUPLE

ELDERLY WOMAN
(whispering)
We've been married forty years.
We're just here to remember how it
all begins.

ELDERLY MAN
(winking)
And for the free champagne.

TABLE 3: TWO UNCOMFORTABLE PEOPLE

PERSON 1
So...weather, huh?

PERSON 2
Yep. It's... doing weather things.

At Table 17, Juliet and Luke sit in charged silence, neither
willing to break first.

INT. THE WREN ROOM - STAGE AREA - MOMENTS LATER

The musicians strike a dramatic chord.

The EVENT HOST — cheery, slightly deranged — steps onto a small
elevated platform. They tap a glass with a silver spoon. The
room quiets.

HOST
Welcome, welcome, all you brave
souls!

The Host spreads their arms wide, revealing sleeve cuffs with
actual beating heart cufflinks. They pulse with red light.

HOST
I'm so delighted you've chosen to
embark on this journey of
discovery. Before we begin,
(MORE)

HOST (CONT'D)
 a bit of history...
 (lowering voice dramatically)
 The 36 Questions were developed by
 psychologist, Arthur Aron in 1997.
 His study found that these
 specific questions could create
 closeness between complete
 strangers in just 45 minutes. Just
 so you know, the Wren Room has
 been bringing people together way
 before 1997.
 (excited whisper)
 Two of his subjects actually got
 married from this same event.

Juliet rolls her eyes. Luke smirks.

HOST
 Tonight, you'll answer these 36
 questions — scientifically
 designed to make strangers fall in
 love!

A ripple of nervous laughter through the room.

HOST
 The questions begin simply, then
 deepen. They're designed to
 gradually break down barriers.
 To create vulnerability. To foster
 intimacy.

The Host moves around the room, touching shoulders, making
 intense eye contact with startled participants.

HOST
 Many of you come skeptical. Many
 come hopeful. All of you come
 seeking connection.
 (pausing dramatically at
 Table 17)
 And some of you... don't even know
 what you're
 seeking yet.

Juliet and Luke shift uncomfortably under the Host's knowing
 gaze.

HOST
 Now, a few practical matters! The
 stream you see is our Timer. When
 the water completes its circuit,
 we move to the next question.
 (MORE)

HOST (CONT'D)
(theatrical pause)
And — minor detail — If you marry
your partner within one year...
(drums table dramatically)
One. Million. Dollars.

Real gasps. A few stunned laughs.

NERVOUS MAN
(too loudly)
That would cover my student loans!

Scattered laughter.

HOST
Our anonymous benefactor believes
so strongly in love that they're
willing to bet on it. Literally.
(conspiratorial)
Between us, they found their
soulmate at Table 17 five years
ago. They're watching
tonight!

Luke perks up, glancing around the room. Juliet stiffens.

Juliet stares at the Host, horrified.

Luke just grins wider.

JULIET
(under her breath)
One million dollars couldn't make
you tolerable.

LUKE
(cheerful)
Lucky for you, I'm a bargain at
any price.

The Host claps again, flipping a giant hourglass. The sand
begins its slow descent.

A battered kitchen timer starts its slow, relentless TICK-TICK-
TICK.

The musicians begin a gentle melody.

HOST
Question One begins... now!

Around the room, couples lean forward. Paper rustles as
question cards are turned over.

The journey begins.

INT. TABLE 17 - MOMENTS LATER

Between them: a laminated card titled "36 QUESTIONS." Beside it, a small hourglass and two leather-bound journals with blank pages.

Around the room, other couples lean forward in various states of nervous anticipation. Some laugh easily, others maintain careful distance.

Juliet and Luke sit in charged silence, neither willing to break first.

Luke gestures to the card. Juliet snatches it before he can touch it.

JULIET
(reading, deadpan)
"Given the choice of anyone in
the world, who would you want as a
dinner guest?"

She stares at Luke. Smirks coldly.

JULIET
Besides a hitman?

A beat. Something flares in Luke's eyes - surprise, amusement, something unexpected.

LUKE
(defensive)
I'm not that bad. Ask anyone.
(beat)
Actually, don't ask my ex,
Vanessa. Or the one before that.
Definitely not the girl from the
coffee shop incident.

JULIET
(almost curious)
Coffee shop incident?

LUKE
(leaning in, confiding)
I may have accidentally set a
small fire trying to impress her
with latte art.
(MORE)

LUKE (CONT'D)
(off her look)
In my defense, who puts that much
alcohol in a coffee drink?

A ghost of a smile crosses Juliet's face before she suppresses it.

JULIET
(back to deadpan)
Stephen King.

Luke looks confused.

JULIET
My dinner guest. Stephen King.
So he could write your tragic,
painfully slow death.

Luke laughs, genuine – he didn't expect that.

LUKE
(dramatic)
I would make an excellent tragic
antihero. Fans would root for me.

JULIET
(flat)
Only out of pity.

First flicker of real chemistry hidden under insults.

LUKE
(genuinely curious)
Why Stephen King?

JULIET
(guard slipping slightly)
His books... they've always been
there. When real monsters were too
much, fictional ones were...
manageable.

She catches herself, realizing she's revealed something real.

JULIET
(closing off again)
Plus, he seems like he'd
appreciate dark humor about
killing annoying dinner
companions.

LUKE
 (playing along)
 I'd be honored to be killed off by
 Stephen King. Maybe page 217. Not
 too early, not too late. Just
 enough time for readers to get
 attached.

Something in Juliet's expression shifts - the smallest
 acknowledgment that he might be more than first appeared.

FLASHBACK: YOUNG JULIET (15) - curled up in a messy room,
 reading Stephen King, while the sound of her parents' brutal
 shouting filters through the thin walls.

FATHER (O.S.)
 (muffled)
 --just like your mother! Always
 running away--

MOTHER (O.S.)
 (muffled)
 --can't even hold a job for six
 months--

Young Juliet turns the page calmly, tuning it all out. The
 book's cover reads "IT." She mouths the words as she reads,
 completely immersed, disappearing into fiction.

BACK TO PRESENT:

A flicker of sadness crosses Juliet's eyes - so fast Luke
 misses it.

The water in the copper channel flows gently past their table.
 The Host circulates, listening to snippets of conversation.

HOST
 (passing Table 17,
 whispering)
 Ooh, book talk! Intellectual
 connection!
 Very promising!

Juliet gives the Host a withering look. They float away,
 undeterred.

Luke grabs the next card, turning it over with unnecessary
 flourish.

LUKE
(grinning, reading)
"Would you like to be famous? In
what way?"

He leans back, cocky.

LUKE
Come on, Ice Queen. Tell me you
want your own Netflix docuseries.

JULIET
If I could be famous for vanishing
forever, sign me up.

Luke's smile falters for a microsecond.

FLASHBACK: YOUNG LUKE (10) watching TV in a small apartment. On
screen: a news report shows his father being led away in
handcuffs.

NEWS ANCHOR
--local businessman charged with
fraud in a scheme that bankrupted
dozens of families--

Young Luke quickly changes the channel, but a neighbor KNOCKS
on the wall.

NEIGHBOR (O.S.)
We saw your dad on TV, Carter!
Apple doesn't fall far!

Young Luke shrinks into himself.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Luke smirks, then — surprisingly — answers sincerely:

LUKE
I'd want to be famous for
something good. Something no one
ever knew I did.

Juliet blinks. The table quiets for a beat longer than it
should.

FLASHBACK: YOUNG LUKE (7) – sitting on a stoop as a police car drives away. Inside the car: his father, handcuffed. Luke watches, small and still.

A NEIGHBOR watches from a window, whispering to someone inside. Children on bicycles stop to stare.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Luke sips his champagne casually – but Juliet studies him, curious.

The stream flows a little faster between their tables. The hourglass sand continues its journey.

Around them, other tables engage in varying levels of connection:

TABLE 12: The elderly couple laughs easily.

TABLE 8: The nervous man drops his glass; confident woman helps clean up.

TABLE 3: Two people stare at their phones under the table.

Juliet grabs the next card, trying to reset the unexpected moment of vulnerability.

JULIET

(reading)

“Before making a telephone call,
do you rehearse what you’re going
to say? Why?”

Both immediately answer at the same time:

JULIET & LUKE

Yes.

They share a startled laugh – genuine, involuntary.

Something warm flickers – both feel it – both immediately slam the emotional doors shut.

LUKE

(covering discomfort)

I run through scenarios.
Occupational hazard.

JULIET

(raising an eyebrow)

What occupation requires
rehearsing phone calls?

LUKE
(hesitant)
I work in crisis management. PR.
Saying the wrong thing can cost
clients millions.

JULIET
(actually interested)
So you're professionally charming?

LUKE
(with surprising honesty)
Professionally convincing. There's
a difference.
(beat)
What's your excuse?

FLASHBACK: JULIET (early 20s) – practicing a phone breakup in a mirror. Voice shaking. Tears she refuses to let fall.
Rehearsing how to pretend she's fine.

JULIET (in flashback)
(rehearsing, voice breaking)
It's not you, it's... No.
(stronger)
This isn't working. I need space.
No.
(coldest tone)
I think we should end this. It's
not working.

She practices the cold tone repeatedly, building her walls higher.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Juliet clears her throat, tossing the card aside like it's nothing.

JULIET
(defensive)
Control. If I know exactly what
I'm going to say, no one can catch
me
off guard.

Something shifts in Luke's expression – recognition.

LUKE
(softly)
Armor.

JULIET
(startled)
What?

LUKE
Nothing.
(normal charming tone)
So what do you do? When you're not
verbally eviscerating strangers?

Juliet hesitates, then gives the safe answer.

JULIET
Marketing. Corporate. It pays the
bills.

LUKE
But?

JULIET
(surprised)
What makes you think there's a
"but"?

LUKE
There's always a "but." Nobody
dreams of corporate marketing when
they're eight.

Juliet studies him more carefully, reevaluating.

The Host floats by again, observing their interaction with
growing interest.

HOST
(to another staff member, not
quite quietly enough)
Table 17 is already at subtext!
We're ahead of schedule!

Juliet rolls her eyes. Luke suppresses a genuine laugh.

Their eyes meet briefly - mutual exasperation at the Host
creates a momentary alliance.

The water flows steadily in its copper channel. The sand falls
grain by grain. The questions continue.

EXT. THE WREN ROOM - TABLE 17 - NIGHT

The candle between them flickers. The room hums with conversation.

Both Juliet and Luke are quieter now – wary of whatever just cracked open between them.

Around the room, the dynamics shift visibly:

TABLE 8: The Nervous Man and Confident Woman lean closer, laughing

TABLE 12: The Elderly Couple holds hands across the table, comfortable

TABLE 3: The Uncomfortable Pair still maintain careful distance

The water in the copper channel flows steadily, marking time. The small hourglass on their table has completed its first turn.

Luke reaches for the next card, masking his discomfort with theatrical flourish. His fingers brush against Juliet's accidentally. Both pull back too quickly.

LUKE

"What would constitute a perfect day for you?"

He hesitates, then falls back on his defensive charm.

LUKE

(smirking)

Easy. Beach. Beer. Zero phone calls.

He stops, remembering his earlier slip into sincerity. Then deliberately adds:

LUKE

(pause)

Maybe not getting dumped via text this time.

He says it too lightly. Tries to make it a joke. Juliet catches it – the flicker of genuine hurt beneath the cavalier delivery.

FLASHBACK: LUKE (late 20s) at a beach bar, checking his phone repeatedly. Three beers in front of him. His phone buzzes with a text. His expression collapses as he reads:

ON SCREEN:

"This isn't working. Sorry to do this by text, but I think it's better this way. You never really let anyone in anyway."

Luke stares at the message, then orders another drink. A practiced smile slides back into place when the bartender arrives, but his eyes remain hollow.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Luke watches Juliet carefully, waiting for her to mock his vulnerability. Preparing his defense.

Instead:

JULIET
(softly)
A day where nothing hurts.

The simple honesty catches both of them off guard.

FLASHBACK: JULIET (mid 20s) sitting on a bench in a hospital corridor. A DOCTOR approaches.

DOCTOR
I'm sorry, Ms. Hart. There was
nothing more we could do for your
grandmother.

Juliet nods, expression carefully controlled.

DOCTOR
Do you have someone who can drive
you home? Family? A boyfriend?

JULIET
(tightly)
I'm fine on my own.

Later: Juliet in her apartment, methodically removing her grandmother's sketches from the walls, placing them in a box with trembling hands. She closes the box, writes "DESIGNS" on it, and pushes it deep under her bed. Each movement precise, contained, refusing to break.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Luke freezes for half a second, unprepared for her honesty. Something real opens between them.

The candle on the table flickers.

Luke's practiced charm falters. For just a moment, his expression is completely unguarded - recognition, empathy, understanding.

LUKE
(quietly)
Yeah. That would be... perfect.

They sit, unexpectedly vulnerable, in the growing silence.

Host drifts past, notices their expressions, and gives an exaggerated thumbs-up to a Barista, who nods knowingly.

BARISTA #3
(to Barista #2)
Table 17 is ahead of schedule.
They're already at the vulnerable
staring phase.

BARISTA #2
Ten bucks says she makes him cry
before question twenty.

BARISTA #3
Twenty says he makes her laugh
again before question ten.

At Table 17, neither Juliet nor Luke notices this exchange. They're locked in a moment of unexpected connection.

Juliet is the first to break, uncomfortable with how much she's revealed.

JULIET
(deflecting)
So. Dumped by text. Recently?

LUKE
(guard returning)
Six months ago. Not my finest
moment.
(with forced lightness)
I consider it cosmic justice for
all the times I was the one to
leave first.

JULIET
(recognizing the pattern)
It's always safer to leave first.

Their eyes meet - another moment of recognition.

LUKE
(trying to regain footing)
Look at us, getting all deep five
questions in. This is not part of
my carefully crafted dating
persona.

JULIET
(dryly)
I'm sure your carefully crafted
persona is very impressive.

LUKE
(with mock seriousness)
It's taken years to perfect. I'm
particularly proud of the
"charming but slightly damaged"
routine. Works every time.

JULIET
(with surprising insight)
Except when it doesn't. That's
when you disappear.

Luke stares at her, startled by her accuracy.

LUKE
(evading)
You seem to know an awful lot
about leaving.

JULIET
(simply)
Professional experience.

A heavy beat between them.

The water flows a little faster in its copper channel. The
hourglass sand continues falling, inexorable.

MONTAGE - QUICK CUTS:

Luke sitting alone at a restaurant, checking his watch, then
signing the check for two untouched meals

Juliet packing her belongings from a man's apartment while he's
clearly away

Luke deleting contact after contact from his phone, expression empty

Juliet changing her phone number, methodically informing only professional contacts

BACK TO PRESENT:

The Host returns to the center of the room, tapping a glass for attention.

HOST

Loving the connections forming!
Remember, the stream flows faster
as we progress! The deeper
questions await!

(dramatic whisper)

Just like love itself, there's no
turning back!

Juliet rolls her eyes. Luke tries to maintain his smirk, but it doesn't quite reach his eyes.

They both glance at the next card with trepidation.

The candle between them flickers. The room continues to hum with conversation, but at Table 17, something has shifted. The armor has cracked, just slightly.

Neither knows how to proceed now that the script of superficial dating banter has been disrupted.

LUKE

(quietly, breaking protocol)
For what it's worth, I hope you
get that day. The one where
nothing hurts.

JULIET

(surprised by his sincerity)
I... thank you.

Luke nods, equally uncomfortable with the genuine moment. They both reach for their champagne at the same time.

ANGLE ON: The Host watching from across the room, giving an exaggerated fist pump to the Baristas.

HOST
 (to self, excited)
 Table 17 is breaking pattern!
 They're going off-script!

The candle flickers again, casting warm light on their faces.
 The next question waits, unread.

INT. THE WREN ROOM - TABLE 17 - NIGHT

The candle flickers lower as the evening progresses. The room feels different now - charged with various stages of connection and disconnect at different tables.

Couples at some tables lean in, fascinated. Others maintain careful distance. A few look like they're counting the minutes until they can leave.

At Table 17, something has shifted. The initial hostility has evolved into wary curiosity.

QUESTION 5:
 "When did you last sing to yourself? To someone else?"

Luke reads the question with less performative flair than before. The armor is still there, but thinner.

LUKE
 (grinning, but gentler)
 This morning. Car karaoke. You're
 welcome, world.

Juliet pretends to gag. Luke winks - but there's something almost... shy underneath.

JULIET
 (flat)
 Sang? Probably a lifetime ago.
 (MORE)
 To someone? Before they proved
 they didn't deserve a soundtrack.

Luke leans back, studying her - but doesn't push. Something in his expression suggests he recognizes the pain beneath her flippancy.

LUKE
 (genuinely curious)
 What kind of music?

JULIET
(surprised by the question)
I... what?

LUKE
When you did sing. What was your
soundtrack?

Juliet hesitates, caught off-guard by his interest.

JULIET
(reluctantly)
90s alternative. Some classic
rock.
(with the faintest smile)
My grandmother got me into
Fleetwood Mac.

FLASHBACK: JULIET (15) - In a kitchen with GRANDMOTHER (70s, artistic, vibrant despite age). They're baking, flour on both their faces, singing "Landslide" terribly but joyfully. It's a private ritual, a moment of pure connection.

GRANDMOTHER
(mid-song, laughing)
Darling, we're both awful, but
that's the joy of it! Nobody sings
because they're good at it. They
sing because they must.

YOUNG JULIET
But what if people hear?

GRANDMOTHER
(gently)
Then let them hear. The ones worth
keeping won't mind. The rest don't
matter.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Luke watches her, sensing the memory.

LUKE
(softly)
Fleetwood Mac. Good choice.
(beat)
What was your go-to? For karaoke
or whatever.

FLASHBACK: JULIET (late teens) drunkenly serenading her first boyfriend at a bonfire party. Laughing, free, happy. She's singing "Dreams" with passion if not talent, and he's watching her with genuine affection. Friends cheer her on.

Later that night: The same boyfriend, talking to ANOTHER GIRL, both laughing. Juliet overhears:

BOYFRIEND

Yeah, she's cute but so intense.
Acts like everything's forever.
Not really my speed, you know?

Juliet slips away, unseen. Her expression hardens as she walks home alone, vowing never to be that vulnerable again.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Juliet clears her throat, blinking away the memory.

JULIET

(deflecting)

I don't do karaoke. Public
humiliation isn't my idea of
entertainment.

Luke watches her – curious – then wisely lets it pass.

LUKE

(lightly)

Your loss. Nothing quite like
watching me massacre "Sweet
Caroline" after four beers.

This draws a small, reluctant smile from Juliet.

The Host swoops past their table, beaming.

HOST

(excitedly)

Music preferences! Emotional
connection through sound! Table 17
is progressing beautifully!

Juliet's smile vanishes. Luke rolls his eyes.

LUKE

(to Host)

Does the stalking come with the
job, or is it a personal passion?

HOST
(unfazed, delighted)
Both! Connections are my
specialty!
(leaning in,
conspiratorially)
And you two are displaying classic
opposition chemistry. Textbook.

JULIET
(deadpan)
Is there a chapter on justifiable
homicide?

The Host laughs too loudly and floats away to another table.

LUKE
(genuinely amused)
I think they might be more
invested in this than we are.

JULIET
(surprising herself with
honesty)
I don't know why I'm even staying.

LUKE
(equally honest)
The million dollars?

JULIET
Not worth enduring this circus.

LUKE
(with unexpected
vulnerability)
Maybe we're both just tired of
running.

The comment lands heavily between them. Neither knows how to respond.

The water in the copper channel flows steadily past. The hourglass sand continues its journey.

QUESTION 6:
"Name five things you're grateful for."

Juliet scoffs, relieved to move past the moment.

JULIET
Coffee. Sweatpants. Dogs that
aren't yappy.
(beat)
...And silent exits.

Luke tilts his head, studying her with new interest. His usual smirk softens into something more genuine.

LUKE
(quiet)
I'm grateful my mom never gave up.
(softer)
Grateful she worked three jobs so
I could screw up in peace.

FLASHBACK: LUKE (16) waiting up late. His MOTHER (40s, exhausted but determined) comes home still wearing a waitress uniform, immediately changing into a cleaning service outfit.

MOTHER
Honey, you should be asleep.

LUKE
I waited up. Made you dinner.

He gestures to a clumsily made sandwich. She looks at it, then at him - eyes filling with tears.

MOTHER
(touching his face)
You're a good boy, Luke. No matter
what anyone says. You're nothing
like him.

LUKE
(uncertain)
How do you know?

MOTHER
Because you wait up. Because you
care.
(kissing his forehead)
Now go to bed. I've got one more
shift.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Juliet blinks, caught off guard by his sincerity.

LUKE
(grinning again, retreating
to safety)
Oh, and beer. Can't forget beer.

She smiles - tiny, real. A moment of connection before both retreat to safer ground.

Juliet adds something to her list, surprising herself:

JULIET
(quietly)
And... color. I'm grateful for
color.

Luke raises an eyebrow, intrigued.

JULIET
(explaining reluctantly)
I used to... I draw sometimes.
Used to draw. The way colors
blend. How they change each other.
It's... something.

LUKE
(genuinely)
You're an artist?

JULIET
(immediately defensive)
I'm in marketing. It pays the
bills.

LUKE
(not letting it go)
That's not what I asked.

FLASHBACK: JULIET (early 20s) in a college art studio,
surrounded by designs. A PROFESSOR examines her work.

PROFESSOR
These are exceptional, Juliet. You
have a real future in design if
you're willing to take risks.

JULIET
I've applied for that internship
in Paris.

PROFESSOR
Good. Don't let anything hold you
back.

Later: Juliet on the phone, expression crumbling.

JULIET
(into phone)
What do you mean she's worse?
(MORE)

JULIET (CONT'D)
 The treatment was supposed to... I
 understand. Yes. No, of course
 I'll be there. The internship
 doesn't matter.

She hangs up, looks at her acceptance letter to Paris, then
 slowly tears it up.

BACK TO PRESENT:

JULIET
 (firmly)
 I was. Past tense.

LUKE
 (curious)
 What happened?

JULIET
 (closing off)
 Life happened. Next question.

Luke recognizes the wall going up but doesn't push. Instead, he
 surprises her:

LUKE
 (casually)
 I wanted to be a writer.
 (shrugging)
 Life happened.

Juliet looks at him, really looks, suddenly seeing him
 differently.

The candle flickers between them. Around the room, the other
 couples progress through their questions at different rates.
 The water flows a little faster now.

QUESTION 7: "If you could have dinner with anyone, living or
 dead, who would it be?"

Luke chuckles, back to lighter tones.

LUKE
 Lenny Bruce. Dude was nuts.

JULIET
 Amelia Earhart.
 (beat)
 Maybe she could teach me how to
 disappear properly.

Luke laughs – but it's tinged with sadness now. There's a lingering silence between them again.

JULIET
(surprising herself)
What would you ask Bruce?

LUKE
(caught off guard)
I... huh. Never thought about it.
(thinking)
Maybe how he kept going when
everyone wanted him to shut up.
How he kept being honest when
it cost him everything.

JULIET
(studying him)
You admire honesty.

LUKE
(with unexpected sincerity)
When it's real. Yes.

JULIET
(quietly)
But you make your living selling
stories. Crisis management, you
said.

LUKE
(defensive)
I shape narratives. I don't lie.
(quieter)
There's a difference.

JULIET
(not unkindly)
Is there?

Their eyes meet – a challenge, but not a hostile one. Both recognize something in the other – the contradiction between what they value and how they live.

They're starting to listen beyond the words.

INT. THE WREN ROOM - TABLE 17 - NIGHT

The candle burns lower. The room hums with different energies now – some tables buzzing with excitement, others sitting in uncomfortable silence, a few abandoned entirely.

Juliet and Luke have settled into a rhythm - neither fully open nor completely closed. A tentative dance of approach and retreat.

QUESTION 8:

"Is there something you've dreamed of doing for a long time? Why haven't you done it?"

Juliet swallows hard. For the first time, her sarcasm falters completely. She stares at the card, jaw tight.

LUKE
(noticing her tension)
We could skip this one.

JULIET
(surprised)
Is that allowed?

LUKE
(shrugging)
Who's going to stop us? The heart
police?

He gestures to the Host, who's currently taking selfies with the elderly couple at Table 12.

Juliet almost smiles, then straightens her shoulders - a decision made.

JULIET
(quiet, honest)
I used to want to design clothes.
Before... life reminded me dreams
cost money.

FLASHBACK: JULIET (22) in a small apartment, sketches covering every surface. Fabric swatches pinned to a corkboard. A makeshift mannequin draped with a half-finished dress. Her phone RINGS.

JULIET
(into phone)
Yes, this is Juliet Hart... What?
When?
(pause)
I understand. I'll be right there.

She hangs up, face pale. She glances at an open laptop showing an email: "PARIS DESIGN INSTITUTE - ACCEPTANCE LETTER."

Later: Hospital corridor. A DOCTOR speaks to Juliet outside a room.

DOCTOR
Your grandmother's condition has
deteriorated. The cancer has
spread. I'm sorry, but we're
talking months, not years.

JULIET
(voice tight)
What about the treatment options
you mentioned?

DOCTOR
Without insurance, the costs would
be...substantial.

Juliet nods, decision already made.

Later: Juliet in the same apartment, methodically taking down
every sketch. Packing away fabric. Closing her laptop on the
acceptance email.

She picks up her phone, dials.

JULIET
(into phone)
Mr. Brennan? About that marketing
position... Yes, I can start
Monday.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Luke looks at her – really looks.

LUKE
(sincere)
You could still do it, you know.

Juliet shrugs – that tiny, helpless kind of shrug that speaks
volumes.

LUKE
(careful)
What kind of designs?

JULIET
(hesitant)
Evening wear, mostly. Things
that... transform.
(warming to the subject)
Pieces that could change with the
wearer. Adapt.

LUKE
(genuinely interested)
Like what?

JULIET
(guard slipping)
There was this one design - a gown
with removable layers. It could go
from formal to casual. Business
to evening. You wouldn't need
multiple outfits, just... options
within one piece.

Her eyes light up briefly, then fade as she catches herself
revealing too much.

LUKE
(softly)
That sounds amazing.

JULIET
(defensive)
It was impractical. Manufacturing
costs alone would-

LUKE
(interrupting)
No, it wasn't. It sounds
brilliant.

Their eyes meet. Juliet looks away first.

LUKE
(after a beat)
I wanted to write.
(straight-faced)
Tried it once.
(half smile)
Turns out, telling the truth on
paper is terrifying.

FLASHBACK: LUKE (17) in a high school classroom. A TEACHER
holds up his essay.

TEACHER
This is extraordinary work, Luke.
You have a genuine talent.

Later: Awards ceremony. Luke receives a writing prize. He scans
the audience - no one there for him. One empty seat in the
front row.

Later: Luke by a hospital bed, his mother asleep, IV drips connected. He's writing in a journal, face intense.

Later: Luke's apartment. He stares at a rejection letter from a publisher. Behind him, stacks of hospital bills. He picks up his phone, dials.

LUKE
(into phone)
Mr. Davidson? About that PR
position... Yes, I can start
immediately.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Juliet stares at him, blinking faster than necessary.

JULIET
(hesitant)
What did you write about?

LUKE
(uncomfortable)
Truth. Life. People who...
(pause)
People who stay when they should
run.

Something passes between them - recognition of shared sacrifice.

JULIET
(softly)
Your mother?

LUKE
(surprised she remembered)
Yeah.
(pause)
She died anyway. All that
practical money-making
didn't change a thing.

JULIET
(with unexpected gentleness)
It changed something. She wasn't
alone.

Luke looks stunned by her insight.

The candle flickers. The hourglass sand falls steadily.

At the next table, a couple argues in harsh whispers. At another, two people sit in stone silence. Around the room, the 36 Questions experiment produces widely varying results.

QUESTION 9:

"What's your most treasured memory?"

Neither rushes to answer. The question feels heavier now that they've revealed more of themselves.

JULIET
(hushed, honest)
There was a night – warm –
fireworks –
(soft smile)
I thought I'd never be lonely
again.

FLASHBACK: JULIET (20) on a rooftop with GRANDMOTHER. Fireworks explode overhead. They're wrapped in blankets, drinking hot chocolate despite the summer heat.

GRANDMOTHER
Tell me about your designs,
sweetheart.

JULIET
(excitedly showing sketches)
This one transforms from day to
evening with just a few
adjustments. And this one...

GRANDMOTHER
(examining them carefully)
These are extraordinary, Juliet.
Promise me something?

JULIET
Anything.

GRANDMOTHER
Promise you won't let fear win.
Promise you'll create, no matter
what.

JULIET
I promise.

GRANDMOTHER

(smiling)

Good. Because the world needs what
only you can make.

The fireworks reflect in their eyes as they watch the sky
together, connected in a moment of perfect understanding.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Juliet stops herself, realizing she's revealed too much.

Luke's gaze softens, watching her drift through the memory.

LUKE

Mine's easy.

(quiet)

Riding bikes with my mom at
sunset.

For once, she wasn't working.

She was just... laughing.

FLASHBACK: YOUNG LUKE (10) racing an older bicycle alongside
his MOTHER (30s). She's laughing, carefree for once, hair
streaming behind her. The sunset bathes everything in gold.

They stop at an ice cream stand. She counts coins carefully
from a small purse.

MOTHER

One scoop each. Special occasion.

YOUNG LUKE

What's the special occasion?

MOTHER

(smiling, touching his cheek)

Just us. Just being alive. Some
days that's enough of a miracle.

They sit on a park bench, eating ice cream, watching the
sunset. A rare moment of peace in their complicated lives.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Juliet's throat works, but no words come out. The moment hangs
between them - raw, authentic.

HOST (passing by)
(whispering loudly)
Memories! Emotional core
unlocking! Table 17 is ahead of
schedule!

For once, neither Juliet nor Luke rolls their eyes. The Host's intrusion barely registers.

LUKE
(quietly)
Did you keep your promise? To your
grandmother?

JULIET
(startled)
How did you—?

LUKE
(gentle)
The way you talked about her. The
fireworks. It felt like a promise
kind of night.

JULIET
(guarded again)
No. I didn't.
(more to herself than him)
Some promises cost too much.

LUKE
(after a moment)
I think my mom would have liked
you.

JULIET
(disbelieving)
You don't know anything about me.

LUKE
(with surprising certainty)
I know more than I did an hour
ago.
(beat)
You keep your word, even when it
hurts you. She would have
respected that.

Juliet looks away, uncomfortable with his perception.

The candle flickers. The water flows steadily in its copper
channel.

QUESTION 10:

"What's your most embarrassing memory?"

Luke smirks, jumping to save them from drowning in honesty.

LUKE
Freshman year. Tried to kiss a
girl. Walked face-first into a
screen
door.

Juliet snorts – a real laugh.

JULIET
(poking)
Screen doors – nature's way of
thinning the herd.

LUKE
(defensive)
It was invisible! Ninja
engineering!

Juliet laughs again – freer this time. The sound surprises her.

LUKE
(mock solemn)
It was tragic. Nosebleed. Bruised
pride. Emotional scarring.
(pause)
Totally worth it.

Juliet's smile lingers – surprising herself.

JULIET
(offering something in
return)
My first design show. College. I
tripped on stage and pulled down
the backdrop. My model kept
walking like nothing happened
while I crawled offstage.

LUKE
(delighted)
No way. Please tell me someone
filmed it.

JULIET
(small smile)
My grandmother. She had it framed
– a blurry shot of me mid-crawl.
Caption: "The only true failure
is failing to get back up."

LUKE
(sincerely)
Smart woman.

JULIET
 (softly)
 The smartest.

FLASHBACK: TEENAGE JULIET, overhearing so-called "friends" laughing about her behind her back at a party. "Did you see her designs? So basic. Who does she think she is, Vera Wang?" Loneliness setting in like cold rain.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Their candle flickers low. The room buzzes around them – but at Table 17, something fragile and real is growing.

The copper stream flows faster now, carrying the water past them at a steadier pace. The hourglass has been turned once more.

They don't move.
 They don't rush.

They just exist – seeing each other a little more clearly with every beat.

Around them:

TABLE 8: The Nervous Man and Confident Woman hold hands across the table

TABLE 3: The Uncomfortable Pair has left entirely

TABLE 12: The Elderly Couple watches Juliet and Luke with knowing smiles

HOST (to the room)
 Questions eleven through twenty!
 The waters are flowing faster now!
 The journey deepens!

But at Table 17, time seems to slow as they study each other with new eyes.

EXT. THE WREN ROOM - TABLE 17 - NIGHT

The sand keeps dripping in the hourglass.
 The candle burns lower, casting longer shadows.

The copper stream flows faster now, water rushing with more purpose.

Around the room, the dynamic has shifted noticeably:

Some tables are now empty, couples having decided to leave

Others have moved closer, chairs now side by side instead of across from each other.

A few sit in uncomfortable silence, counting minutes

Juliet and Luke occupy a unique middle ground - neither completely open nor closed off, having established an unspoken understanding.

The Host circulates with renewed energy, refilling champagne glasses, whispering encouragement to struggling pairs.

HOST

(announcing cheerfully)

We're entering the second phase,
brave souls! The waters run deeper
here!

LUKE

(murmuring to Juliet)

Is it just me, or is the nautical
metaphor getting out of hand?

JULIET

(surprising herself with a
genuine smile)

Next he'll hand out life jackets.

LUKE

(delighted by her joke)

Or start playing the Titanic
theme.

This shared moment of levity creates a brief, comfortable silence between them. The mutual mockery of the Host has become their private connection.

QUESTION 11:

"When was the last time you cried?"

Juliet grabs the card like a weapon, her body language shifting immediately to defensive.

JULIET

(smirking)

During this conversation.

LUKE
(grinning)
Tragic. Write a ballad.

But something shifts – he doesn't let the sarcasm win. Their eyes meet, and an unspoken challenge passes between them: truth or retreat?

LUKE
For real? Mine was...
(pause)
When I missed my mom's birthday.
First one after she was gone.

FLASHBACK: LUKE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Luke sits alone at his kitchen table. A small store-bought cake with a single candle. A framed photo of his mother propped against a vase.

On the wall calendar: the date circled in red.

He tries to light the candle, but his hands shake too much. The match goes out. He tries again. And again.

Finally he gives up, puts his head in his hands. His shoulders shake silently.

His phone buzzes with texts from friends inviting him out, but he ignores them.

Later: Luke washing his face in the bathroom, carefully erasing all evidence of emotion. Practicing his carefree smile in the mirror until it looks convincing.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Juliet blinks.
The armor slips.
Just for a second.

JULIET
(quietly)
Two months ago. My grandmother's
birthday.

Luke waits, not pushing.

JULIET
(voice controlled)
I visited her grave. Brought her
sketch pencils.
(beat)
Stupid, right? Not like she can
use them.

LUKE
(gently)
Not stupid.

Juliet looks away, uncomfortable with his kindness.

FLASHBACK: CEMETERY - DAY

Juliet kneels by a simple headstone. She places a bouquet of
wildflowers and a set of expensive drawing pencils.

JULIET
(whispering)
I'm sorry I stopped drawing, Gran.
I just... I don't see the point
anymore.

She traces the name on the stone: "ELEANOR HART - ARTIST,
DREAMER, BELOVED."

JULIET
The marketing job got promoted.
Director level.
(hollow laugh)
Great benefits. Pension.
Everything you said didn't matter.

Wind rustles the trees. A leaf falls on the grave.

JULIET
(voice breaking)
I miss you. I miss who I was when
you were here.

She finally allows tears, alone where no one can see her
vulnerability.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Juliet presses her lips together, emotion flickering in her
throat.

The Host INTERRUPTS — BELL DINGS CHEERFULLY from a small silver bell at the front of the room.

HOST
(grinning wide)
Tears already? That's ahead of
schedule! Soulmates, I can smell
it!

JULIET
Might be the plumbing.

LUKE
Romance smells a lot like mildew.

The Host beams and moves on, oblivious to the genuine moment he's disrupted.

The spell is broken.
Walls snap back into place.

But both feel the loss of the connection, a subtle shift in posture showing their disappointment at the interruption.

QUESTION 12:

"If you could instantly gain any quality or ability, what would it be?"

Luke considers, playful again but with less performance than before.

LUKE
Teleportation. No small talk.
(beat)
No goodbyes.

His voice drops slightly on "goodbyes," revealing more than he intends.

FLASHBACK: HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Luke sits beside his mother's bed. She's clearly in her final days, thin and fragile. Medical equipment beeps softly.

MOTHER
(weakly)
Promise me something?

LUKE
Anything.

MOTHER

No grand goodbyes. When it's time,
just let me go.

(squeezing his hand)

I've always hated goodbyes.

LUKE

(throat tight)

Me too.

MOTHER

(smiling faintly)

That's my boy. Always running.

(serious)

Someday, find someone worth
staying for.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Juliet catches the shadow under his words. She studies him more
carefully.

JULIET

(small smile, gentler than
before)

I'd pick patience.

(beat)

Specifically...

(gesturing between them)

For this conversation.

Luke fake-clutches his heart, wounded, but his eyes are
smiling.

LUKE

Brutal. I like it.

JULIET

(cautiously honest)

Or maybe... the ability to show my
designs without feeling like I'm
going to throw up.

LUKE

(surprised by her admission)

Fear of judgment?

JULIET

(defensive)

It's not fear. It's...
practicality.

LUKE
(not buying it)
Right. Very practical to hide your talent.

JULIET
(bristling)
What about you? Very practical to bury your writing.

Tension crackles, both feeling exposed.

The Host passes by, observing with interest.

HOST
(whispering to a staff member)
Table 17 in the conflict phase!
Right on schedule!

LUKE
(after a beat, deflecting)
Ever think about trying again? The design thing?

JULIET
(too quickly)
No.
(less certain)
Maybe.
(honestly)
I don't know.

LUKE
I'd read it. If you ever write again.

They lock eyes, challenge and understanding mingling.

But their smiles are softer now. Less armor, more curiosity.

They're seeing each other more clearly with each question.

QUESTION 13: "What is your biggest accomplishment?"

Juliet shrugs, falling back on sarcasm as protection.

JULIET
Surviving without a lobotomy.

LUKE
(with a small laugh)
The night's still young.

But he senses the evasion, and his own answer comes from somewhere more honest:

LUKE
Taking care of my mom at the end.
(quiet)
Making sure she wasn't alone.

The words land heavily between them.

JULIET
(softly)
That's a real answer.

LUKE
(surprised)
As opposed to?

JULIET
(gesturing vaguely)
The usual first-date bullshit.
Career accomplishments. Marathon
running. Saving orphaned puppies.

LUKE
(with unexpected directness)
Is that what this is? A first
date?

JULIET
(flustered)
No. God no. I just meant—

LUKE
(smiling gently)
I know what you meant.
(beat)
Your turn. Real answer.

Juliet hesitates, then surprises herself with honesty:

JULIET
Letting my grandmother go when she
asked me to.
(painful memory)
She was in pain. The treatments
weren't working. She wanted...
peace.
(swallowing hard)
I fought it. Then I accepted it.
Hardest thing I've ever done.

LUKE
(deeply moved)
That's... real love. Letting go
when you want to hold on.

JULIET
(quietly)
Yes. It is.

Their eyes meet in shared understanding of loss. The connection deepens beyond attraction or curiosity into something more profound.

FLASHBACK: HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Juliet sits beside her grandmother's bed, holding her frail hand. The room is dim, peaceful.

GRANDMOTHER
(weakly)
It's time to let me go,
sweetheart.

JULIET
(tearful)
I can't. We can try another
treatment. I have money saved—

GRANDMOTHER
(interrupting gently)
And waste what could fund your
first collection? Absolutely not.
(squeezing her hand)
I've had my time. You're just
beginning.

JULIET
(breaking)
I don't know how to do this
without you.

GRANDMOTHER
You do. You're stronger than you
know.
(looking into her eyes)
Promise me you'll create again.
After.

Juliet nods, unable to speak.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Luke watches her, seeing the memory play across her face.

LUKE
(gently)
Did you keep that promise?

JULIET
(startled)
How did you—?

LUKE
(simply)
The way you said it. Sounded like
a promise.

JULIET
(throat tight)
Not yet.
(stronger)
But maybe I will.

Something shifts between them - a new understanding, a
recognition of parallel journeys.

The candle flickers lower, shadows dancing across their faces.

Around them, conversations at other tables flow in varying
degrees of connection and disconnection. The water in the
copper channel flows steadily toward reunion.

HOST
(circulating with champagne
refills)
Half-time, everyone! How are our
connections developing?

He approaches Table 17 with particular interest, but stops
short at the intensity of their conversation.

For once, he retreats without comment, recognizing something
genuine unfolding.

QUESTION 14:

"What do you value most in a friendship?"

Juliet leans forward, eyes narrowing thoughtfully. The question
resonates deeper than expected.

JULIET
(quiet)
Someone who stays. When it's ugly.
When it's messy.

The candor surprises both of them.

FLASHBACK: JULIET'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Juliet sits on her bathroom floor, surrounded by tissues. A positive pregnancy test on the counter. She's sobbing into her phone.

JULIET
(into phone)
Mia? I need you. Please.

Twenty minutes later: MIA arrives, no questions asked. Sits on the floor beside Juliet, arms around her.

MIA
Whatever you need. Whatever you
decide. I'm here.

Later: Juliet in a hospital gown. Mia holding her hand as a doctor explains the procedure. Juliet's boyfriend nowhere to be seen.

Later still: Mia helping Juliet into her apartment, setting up medications, preparing tea, staying the night on the couch.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Luke's smirk fades. They lock eyes.

LUKE
(quietly)
Honesty. Even when it hurts.
(beat)
Especially when it hurts.

Something unspoken passes between them - recognition, understanding deeper than words.

JULIET
(hesitant)
Have you... found that? People who
stay?

LUKE
(with sad honesty)
Not often. You?

JULIET
(matching his honesty)
My friend Mia. That's about it.

LUKE
(thoughtful)
One good one might be enough.

JULIET
(startled by the insight)
Yes. Maybe it is.

Their guards have lowered noticeably. The connection between them palpable.

HOST (INTERRUPTS AGAIN — WAVING HEART-SHAPED NOTEPAD)

HOST
(gleeful)
Look at that! Eye contact!
Connection! Sparks flying!

LUKE
(grinning at Juliet)
Must be allergies.

JULIET
(flat)
Or nausea.

They both laugh, but it's covering how deeply they just connected.

The Host moves away, beaming with satisfaction.

JULIET
(surprising herself)
This is weird, right? I feel like
I've told you more in an hour than
I've told people I've known for
years.

LUKE
(equally surprised)
It's the questions. They're...
cheating somehow.

JULIET
(with unexpected honesty)
Or maybe we're both tired of
pretending.

The statement hangs between them, startlingly accurate.

The candle flickers. The last grains of sand fall through the hourglass again.

The journey continues, deeper with each question.

QUESTION 15:

"What is your most treasured memory of a loved one?"

Juliet hesitates longer this time. The question feels more invasive after their growing vulnerability.

Around the room, the energy has shifted. Several couples have left. Others sit closer, lost in conversation. The Host moves more quietly now, respecting the deepening atmosphere.

The candle flickers, casting long shadows. The copper stream flows steadily, its sound a gentle backdrop to their conversation.

JULIET

(softly, after a long pause)

My grandmother's hands.
They smelled like bread dough and
soap. She used to hold my whole
face when I cried.

FLASHBACK: JULIET (8) sitting at a kitchen table, tears streaming down her face. A childish drawing crumpled before her.

YOUNG JULIET

It's not right! Nothing looks like
I see it!

Her GRANDMOTHER kneels before her, takes Juliet's small face in her flour-dusted hands. The hands are weathered, wrinkled, but incredibly gentle.

GRANDMOTHER

(gently)

Look at me, little bird.

Young Juliet raises tear-filled eyes.

GRANDMOTHER

Creation isn't about perfection.
It's about seeing what others
don't see, and having the courage
to show them.

She smooths the crumpled drawing - a dress design, primitive but imaginative.

GRANDMOTHER

This is beautiful because it came
from you.

(tapping Juliet's chest)

From in here. That's what makes it
precious.

She places her hands on either side of Juliet's face again,
thumbs gently wiping away tears.

GRANDMOTHER

These hands have made a thousand
mistakes.

(showing her calloused palms)

Each one taught me something. So
will yours.

Young Juliet nods, comforted by the warm, flour-scented hands
that cradle her face so tenderly.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Luke's throat works. Something gentle moves across his face -
recognition of the rare gift of unconditional love.

LUKE

Mine was...

(quiet)

Sunday mornings. When my mom would
sing Motown while making pancakes.

FLASHBACK: LUKE (9) in a small, worn kitchen. Morning light
streams through faded curtains. His MOTHER, younger and less
careworn, flips pancakes while dancing to "Ain't No Mountain
High Enough."

She's a terrible dancer, exaggerated movements making young
Luke laugh uncontrollably. The kitchen is humble but filled
with joy.

MOTHER

(singing badly, using spatula
as microphone)

"'Cause baby, there ain't no
mountain high enough!"

YOUNG LUKE

Mom! The neighbors!

MOTHER
(laughing, pulling him up to
dance)
Let them hear! A little joy never
hurt anyone!

She twirls him around the small kitchen, pancakes momentarily forgotten. For this brief moment, there are no bills piled on the counter, no extra shifts, no absent father - just mother and son dancing in morning light.

MOTHER
(kneeling to his level)
Sunday mornings are sacred, Luke.
No matter what happens the rest of
the week, we always have this.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Luke's expression softens as he returns from the memory.

LUKE
(continuing softly)
She worked six days a week.
Sometimes nights too. But
Sundays... those were ours.
(smiling faintly)
She made terrible pancakes. Burned
every time. But the singing...
that was perfect.

Juliet's eyes meet his, both recognizing the similar shape of their treasured memories - small moments of connection that defined them.

JULIET
(hesitantly)
What was her favorite song?

LUKE
(surprised by the question)
"Ain't No Mountain High Enough."
Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell.
(with a small smile)
She said it was about overcoming
obstacles, but I think she just
liked shouting the chorus.

JULIET
(with unexpected tenderness)
She sounds wonderful.

LUKE
 (throat tight)
 She was.

They sit in the weight of those memories, breathing carefully. The connection between them deepens - not just attraction, but understanding.

At a nearby table, the Elderly Couple watches them with knowing smiles.

ELDERLY WOMAN
 (whispering to her husband)
 Table 17. Look at them. Just like
 us, all those years ago.

ELDERLY MAN
 (squeezing her hand)
 Terrified and thrilled all at
 once.

ELDERLY WOMAN
 (nostalgic)
 Question fifteen. That's when I
 knew I could love you.

Back at Table 17, the silence stretches, neither wanting to break the moment.

Finally, the Host approaches, unusually subdued, as if respecting the atmosphere they've created.

HOST
 (gently)
 I need to turn the hourglass. May
 I?

Luke nods, wordlessly. The Host carefully turns their hourglass, the sand beginning its journey anew. For once, he offers no commentary, simply moving on.

QUESTION 16:
 "How close and warm is your family?"

Both snort at the same time, the unexpected synchronicity breaking the emotional tension.

JULIET & LUKE
 (not even thinking)
 Nonexistent.

They freeze - and then burst out laughing.

Real, messy, human laughter that attracts glances from nearby tables.

FLASHBACK MONTAGE - QUICK CUTS:

Young Juliet sitting alone at a school concert, empty seats beside her where parents should be

Young Luke opening Christmas presents alone while his mother works a holiday shift

Teenage Juliet making her own dinner while arguments rage in another room

Teenage Luke forging his father's signature on school documents

BACK TO PRESENT:

Juliet wipes tears from the corners of her eyes, still laughing.

LUKE
(smiling warmly)
Finally. You admit we have something in common.

JULIET
(flat, but with a hint of playfulness)
Mutual trauma doesn't count.

LUKE
(grinning)
Sure it does. It's half of dating in your thirties.

JULIET
(with surprising candor)
Is that what this is? Dating?

LUKE
(caught off guard)
I... well...
(regaining composure)
Would that be so terrible?

JULIET
(considering)
I don't know yet.
(with honesty)
But I'm still here. That's something.

LUKE
(genuinely)
Yes. It is.

A moment passes between them - acknowledgment that whatever this is, it's becoming meaningful.

JULIET
(curious)
You said nonexistent. Your family?

LUKE
(sighing)
Mom died three years ago. Dad...
might as well be dead.
(explaining)
Left when I was seven. Financial
fraud. Prison.
(with practiced casualness)
The usual heartwarming American
story.

JULIET
(not buying the casual act)
I'm sorry.

LUKE
(deflecting)
Ancient history.
(turning it back to her)
Your family?

JULIET
(matching his honesty)
Parents technically alive.
Emotionally extinct.
(clinical)
Father was controlling. Mother was
weak. They used me as a
battleground until I refused to be
their war.

FLASHBACK: JULIET (16) sitting at a dinner table between
arguing parents.

FATHER
(coldly)
Tell your mother her taste in art
is as pathetic as her parenting.

MOTHER
(bitterly)
Tell your father his opinion
matters about as much as he does.

Young Juliet abruptly stands, dropping her fork with a clatter.

YOUNG JULIET
Tell each other. I'm done being
your translator.

She walks out as they stare, shocked by her rebellion.

BACK TO PRESENT:

LUKE
(impressed)
How old were you?

JULIET
Sixteen. Moved in with my
grandmother the next day.
(with quiet pride)
Never went back.

LUKE
(with genuine admiration)
Brave.

JULIET
(dismissive)
Desperate. Different thing.

LUKE
(shaking his head)
No. It's brave to walk away from
what hurts you. Even when it's
family.
(looking at her directly)
Especially then.

Something shifts in Juliet's expression - surprise at being
truly seen.

HOST
(approaching with two fresh
glasses of champagne)
Halfway point, courageous souls!
How are we feeling?

For once, neither responds with sarcasm. They accept the
glasses with slight nods, too engaged with each other to bother
with their usual mockery.

The Host beams, backing away.

HOST
(to himself, delighted)
The sarcasm is gone! Phase two
complete!

QUESTION 17:

"What role does love and affection play in your life?"

A heavier silence falls.
Luke reads the card again, slower.
Neither jokes immediately.

The question hangs between them, suddenly weighty after their
revelations about family.

JULIET
(quiet, honest, eyes on her
glass)
...It used to be everything.
(beat)
Now? I guess it's like air.
You don't notice it... Until it's
gone.

Luke looks at her — stunned.
Not by her words.
By her honesty.

FLASHBACK: JULIET (25) watching her last serious boyfriend pack
his things.

BOYFRIEND
You want to know why I'm leaving?
Because loving you is like loving
a fortress. I can circle the
walls all day, but I'll never get
inside.

JULIET
(cold, controlled)
I never asked you to stay.

BOYFRIEND
(sad)
That's the problem, Jules. You
never ask anyone to stay. You're
too busy planning your exit before
they find one.

Later: Juliet alone in her apartment, methodically removing all traces of the relationship. Erasing him from her space with practiced efficiency. Her face remains impassive until, putting away the last photo, she catches her reflection in the glass.

For just a moment, her expression crumples - grief, loneliness, fear - before she rebuilds her composure, brick by brick.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Luke watches her, recognizing the courage her answer required.

LUKE (V.O.)
 I think I tried to outrun it.
 Make everything a joke. Keep it
 light.
 (beat)
 Turns out... You can laugh
 yourself right into being lonely.

FLASHBACK: LUKE (30) at a bar with MASON and other friends. Luke is the life of the party, everyone laughing at his stories. A WOMAN approaches, clearly interested.

Later: Luke and the Woman in her apartment. Intimate moment interrupted by his phone.

WOMAN
 (seeing his expression)
 Everything okay?

LUKE
 (already pulling away
 emotionally)
 Work emergency. Rain check?

Later: Luke alone in his car, parked outside his building. Not a work emergency. Just fear. He puts his head against the steering wheel, the emptiness catching up with him despite his escape.

BACK TO PRESENT:

A long, real silence between them.
 The hourglass draining steadily.

JULIET
(softly)
Why do we do that? Run?

LUKE
(equally quiet)
Because it hurts less to leave
than to be left.

The truth of this settles between them.

HOST (FLOATS BY WITH A GRIN)

HOST
(whisper-shouting)
I smell a proposal coming!!

JULIET
(sourly, without looking at
Luke)
That's the garlic bread.

Luke chuckles, but his eyes stay on her – searching, seeing
beyond her deflection.

The Host moves on, blissfully unaware of the depth he's
interrupted.

Juliet and Luke don't recover into banter this time. They sit
in the weight of their revelations, both wondering if they've
revealed too much, both afraid to retreat now that they've come
this far.

LUKE
(breaking the silence)
Do you think it's possible?

JULIET
(cautious)
What?

LUKE
(vulnerable)
To stop running. To stay, even
when it's terrifying.

JULIET
(equally vulnerable)
I don't know.
(meeting his eyes)
Do you?

LUKE
(honestly)
I'd like to find out.

The candle flickers between them, throwing their shadows against the wall. In this moment, they're not two strangers playing a game. They're two people recognizing themselves in each other, seeing both their wounds and their potential for healing.

The question of love hangs between them, unanswered but present. Not as a romantic fantasy, but as a terrifying possibility - the chance to be truly known.

Around them, the Wren Room continues its experiment in connection, but at Table 17, something rare and fragile grows - the first tendrils of trust between two people accustomed to its absence.

QUESTION 18:

"How close and warm is your relationship with your family?"

A hollow laugh from Juliet echoes softly in the now half-empty room.

The Wren Room has transformed as the evening progressed. Where once the space buzzed with nervous energy and hopeful anticipation, now a more intimate atmosphere has settled. The musicians have shifted to softer, more contemplative melodies. The lighting has dimmed further, candles now providing most of the illumination.

Only eight tables remain occupied, each pair locked in their own private world. Some lean close, hands intertwined. Others sit in tense silence. All are changed by the journey of questions.

JULIET

About as warm as a tax audit.

She traces a pattern on the tablecloth, a habit when discussing difficult topics.

LUKE

(with genuine curiosity)

When did you last speak to them?

JULIET

(surprised by the direct question)

Three years ago. My grandmother's funeral.

(bitter smile)

They showed up late. Left early. Classic.

FLASHBACK: FUNERAL HOME - DAY

Juliet stands alone by a casket covered in wildflowers. She wears black, her face composed but eyes hollow with grief.

Her PARENTS enter - father stiff in an expensive suit, mother fidgeting with jewelry. They stand awkwardly at a distance, more like acquaintances than family.

FATHER

(checking watch)

The service is running behind. I have a meeting at four.

MOTHER

(nervous)

Eleanor always did things her own way. Even dying.

Juliet's head snaps up, eyes flashing with anger.

JULIET

Don't. Don't pretend you knew her. You visited twice in fifteen years.

FATHER

(coldly)

She made her choices. As did you.

JULIET

Yes. We chose to actually live. To create. To feel something real.

(voice breaking slightly)

While you two just... existed. Perfectly miserable together.

Her parents exchange uncomfortable glances.

MOTHER

(attempting connection)

Juliet, perhaps after this we could-

JULIET

(cutting her off)

No. There is no "after this" for us.

(gesturing to the casket)

She was my family. My real family. And now she's gone.

Her parents retreat, neither knowing how to breach the chasm of years.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Luke chuckles too – but his eyes are heavy with understanding.

LUKE
My mom was everything. My dad
was...
(pause)
A disappearing act.

FLASHBACK: COURTROOM - DAY

Young Luke (7) sits on a hard bench beside his mother. The courtroom is intimidating, all dark wood and stern faces.

A JUDGE delivers a sentence. Luke's FATHER stands in handcuffs, never turning to look at his wife and son.

BAILIFF
Mr. Carter, you are hereby
sentenced to eight years for
securities fraud...

Later: Outside the courthouse. REPORTERS swarm around them.

REPORTER
Mrs. Carter! How does it feel
knowing your husband stole from
your friends and neighbors?

Luke's mother shields him, pushing through the crowd.

MOTHER
(fierce whisper)
Don't look at them, Luke. Don't
listen. That man is not your
father anymore. We don't need him.

Luke looks back once as his father is led to a police van. Their eyes meet briefly before his father looks away, ashamed.

BACK TO PRESENT:

LUKE
(continuing)
You know what's weird? I keep his
letters.
(off her look)
Prison letters. Birthday cards.
Apologies.
(shaking his head)
Never opened a single one.

JULIET
(genuinely curious)
Why keep them?

LUKE
(contemplative)
I tell myself it's to remember why
I don't need family.
(more honestly)
Maybe it's to prove someone tried
to reach me, even if I wouldn't
let them.

They sit in that shared sadness.
Two broken maps trying to find home.

JULIET
(softly)
Do you think you'll ever read
them?

LUKE
(vulnerable)
I don't know. Maybe when I'm ready
to forgive him.
(beat)
Or maybe when I'm ready to forgive
myself.

JULIET
(puzzled)
Forgive yourself for what?

LUKE
(with difficulty)
For being his son. For having his
blood.
(meeting her eyes)
For wondering if I'm just like
him, when the chips are down.

The candlelight flickers across his face, revealing more than
his words.

JULIET
(with unexpected certainty)
You're not.

LUKE
(surprised)
How can you know that?

JULIET
(simply)
Because you worry about it. He
probably never did.

Luke looks at her with genuine gratitude for this insight.

Around them, the space feels increasingly intimate, as if the room itself is contracting to hold only their table.

QUESTION 19:

"Do you feel your childhood was happier than most people's?"

Luke tosses the card onto the table with a hollow laugh.

LUKE
Define "happy." We had lights.
Sometimes dinner.
(beat)
She sang. That was enough.

FLASHBACK: APARTMENT HALLWAY - NIGHT

Young Luke (9) sits outside an apartment door, schoolbooks on his lap, doing homework by hallway light. The electricity in their apartment has been shut off again.

A NEIGHBOR passes by, giving him a pitying look. Luke straightens his spine, pretends this is normal.

Later: His mother arrives home, exhausted, carrying groceries.

MOTHER
(seeing him)
Oh, Luke...

LUKE
(quickly)
It's okay, Mom. I finished my
math. And look!
(holding up bag)
Mrs. Diaz brought us dinner. She
said she made too much.

His mother's eyes fill with tears of both gratitude and shame.

MOTHER
(kneeling beside him)
I'm so sorry, baby.

LUKE
(with child's wisdom)
But we're together. That's the
important part, right?

She hugs him tight, both of them silhouetted in the hallway light.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Juliet's fingers trace the rim of her glass thoughtfully.

JULIET
I used to think noise meant love.
Now...
(pause)
Now I know better.

FLASHBACK: JULIET'S CHILDHOOD HOME - NIGHT

Young Juliet (10) sits on her bed, pillow pressed against her ears as her parents' voices rise from downstairs.

FATHER (O.S.)
(shouting)
You're suffocating me! Always
watching, always judging!

MOTHER (O.S.)
(screaming back)
You think I don't know about her?
About all of them?

A crash of something breaking. Juliet flinches but doesn't cry. Instead, she reaches under her bed, pulls out a sketchbook, and begins to draw - creating a world where voices don't shatter the night.

Later: Breakfast table. Her parents act as if nothing happened, passing jam with cold politeness.

FATHER
(noticing her sketchbook)
What's that nonsense?

JULIET
(guarded)
Just drawings.

MOTHER
(dismissive)
She gets that from your side.
Always daydreaming instead of
focusing on what matters.

Young Juliet slowly closes her sketchbook, tucks it away.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Luke watches her – and sees it all without her saying more.

LUKE
(understanding)
You learned to create your own
quiet.

JULIET
(surprised by his perception)
Yes. Exactly.
(reflective)
My grandmother's house was the
first place I remember... silence.
Good silence.
(smiling faintly)
She would sit beside me for hours
while I drew. Not talking. Just...
present.

LUKE
(sharing in return)
My mom used to sit on the fire
escape with me on summer nights.
We'd make up stories about the
people in other buildings.
(with sudden realization)
I think that's when I started
writing. Making sense of other
lives when mine felt so chaotic.

They exchange looks of mutual recognition – two people who
found similar refuges from different storms.

QUESTION 20:

"How do you feel about your relationship with your mother?"

Luke's smile falters – real pain bleeding through the carefully
constructed facade he's maintained.

LUKE
Best thing I ever had.
(pause)
And the thing I miss most.

FLASHBACK: HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Luke (late 20s) sits beside his mother's bed. She's thin, frail, cancer having taken its toll. Medical equipment surrounds them.

MOTHER
(weakly)
Tell me a story, Luke. Like when
you were little.

LUKE
(fighting tears)
Once there was a queen who worked
too hard...

MOTHER
(smiling faintly)
No sad stories.

LUKE
(changing course)
Once there was a queen who danced
in kitchens and sang off-key and
loved her son enough for two
parents.

He continues the story as she drifts to sleep, his hand never leaving hers.

Later: Luke asleep in the chair. A monitor flatlining. Medical staff rushing in.

Later still: Luke packing her few belongings. Finding a journal filled with her handwriting. Inside the cover: "For Luke - The stories I couldn't tell you."

BACK TO PRESENT:

Juliet swallows, moved by the pain he doesn't bother to hide.

JULIET
(flat, but with undercurrent
of pain)
Mine taught me to leave first.

A heavy silence falls between them.

JULIET
(elaborating)
Every time she should have left my
father, she stayed. Every time she
should have stood her ground, she
crumbled.
(with quiet intensity)
I promised myself I'd never be
trapped like that.

LUKE
(gently)
So instead you leave before anyone
can trap you.

JULIET
(defensive)
It's worked so far.

LUKE
(carefully)
Has it?

The question hangs between them, neither ready to answer fully.

For once, neither one cracks a joke to break the tension. They
sit with the truth of their patterns, seeing them reflected in
each other.

HOST (SNEAKS BY — SOFTLY TAP-TAP-TAPPING HEART NOTEPAD)

HOST
(whispering conspiratorially)
Tension's good! Means you're
falling hard!

This time, Juliet doesn't snort or snipe. Luke merely offers a
distracted half-smile.

Neither performs for the Host anymore.
Their eyes drift back to each other.
Too much honesty now to fake it.

LUKE
(after the Host leaves)
I think I understand you better
now.

JULIET
 (guarded)
 Is that a good thing?

LUKE
 (honestly)
 I don't know yet.
 (with a small smile)
 But I'm still here. That's
 something.

JULIET
 (echoing his earlier words
 with a hint of warmth)
 Yes. It is.

The Host returns to the center of the room, voice gentler than earlier.

HOST
 We're entering the final phase of
 our journey, brave souls. The most
 challenging questions await.
 (glancing meaningfully at
 Table 17)
 Remember, vulnerability isn't
 weakness. It's the path to true
 connection.

For once, Luke and Juliet don't roll their eyes at the Host's theatrics. There's a new gravity to their experience now - a recognition that whatever game they thought they were playing has become something real.

The candle flickers lower between them. Only a few inches remains.

The hourglass sand falls steadily, marking their remaining time together.

The copper stream flows faster now, the water's soft rushing sound growing more urgent.

At Table 17, Juliet and Luke sit poised at the edge of something neither expected to find tonight - the possibility of being truly seen, with all their broken pieces and carefully constructed defenses laid bare.

The final questions await.

QUESTION 21:
 "Make three 'we' statements. 'We are both in this room feeling...'"

Luke reads it aloud, grimacing at the forced intimacy of the exercise.

LUKE

Wow. This one's a killer.

The Wren Room has transformed completely from when they arrived. Most tables now sit empty, abandoned by couples who couldn't navigate the increasingly vulnerable terrain. The remaining pairs have gravitated closer - physically and emotionally. The musicians play something melancholy and delicate.

In one corner, the Elderly Couple from Table 12 slow dances, lost in each other. At Table 8, the once-Nervous Man and Confident Woman sit side by side now, hands intertwined, whispering. Even the Host moves differently - less theatrical, more reverent of the connections forming.

The copper stream flows faster now. The candle between Luke and Juliet has burned dangerously low. Their hourglass reveals precious little sand remaining.

Juliet smirks, but it lacks her earlier edge. Something has shifted between them - the mockery now feels like a private language rather than a defensive wall.

JULIET

Fine.

(leaning in, mock-sincerely)

We are both stuck here. We are both tired of pretending.

(beat, softer)

We are both scared to want something real.

FLASHBACK: JULIET - SERIES OF QUICK CUTS

Juliet ending relationships before they deepen

Juliet moving apartments frequently, boxes never fully unpacked

Juliet deflecting a colleague's attempt at friendship

Juliet sitting alone at a work function, pretending to check emails

BACK TO PRESENT:

Luke doesn't answer right away.
 He just stares at her, breathing unevenly, caught off guard by her accuracy.

LUKE
 (quiet, after gathering himself)
 We are both better at being alone...
 (beat)
 ...Than being vulnerable.

FLASHBACK: LUKE - SERIES OF QUICK CUTS

Luke leaving a woman's apartment before sunrise

Luke changing phone numbers after too many messages from the same person

Luke declining invitations until they stop coming

Luke laughing off serious questions with practiced charm

BACK TO PRESENT:

The candle flickers low between them, casting long shadows. The flame reflects in their eyes as they study each other with new understanding.

JULIET
 (barely audible)
 We are both wondering if this is worth the risk.

It's not on the card. A voluntary addition. Luke's breath catches at her honesty.

HOST (observing from across the room)
 (whispering to a staff member)
 Table 17 is going off-script. It's happening.

BARISTA
 (smiling knowingly)
 It always does at Table 17. Either combustion or connection.

At Table 17, a silence hangs between Juliet and Luke - not uncomfortable, but weighted with possibility.

They've each recognized something in the other that both attracts and terrifies them.

Around them, the room feels increasingly distant, as if they exist in their own pocket of time and space.

QUESTION 22:

"Complete this sentence: 'I wish I had someone with whom I could share...'"

Juliet stares at the card.

Doesn't move.

The question feels like a trap and an opportunity simultaneously.

Finally:

JULIET
(very quietly)
Moments like this.
(pause)
Where... I don't have to pretend.

FLASHBACK: JULIET'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Juliet (27) sits on her couch, sketching a beautiful evening gown. The phone rings - it's a date calling to confirm plans.

JULIET
(into phone)
Actually, I'm not feeling well.
Can we reschedule?

She hangs up, returns to her sketch. No illness, just the overwhelming effort of performing "Juliet" for someone new.

Later: Juliet opens her closet. Inside hang several exquisite dresses - her own designs, secretly created, never shown.

She touches one gently, like greeting an old friend.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Luke's throat tightens visibly.

LUKE
(softly)
Same.

A simple word that bridges the space between them.

LUKE
 (elaborating)
 I wish I had someone to share...
 the quiet moments.
 (struggling to articulate)
 When you're not performing or
 impressing or... running.
 Just... being.

FLASHBACK: LUKE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Luke (29) sits on his balcony, writing in a journal. His phone buzzes repeatedly with invitations, messages from friends, potential dates.

He silences it, returns to his writing. Words flow when no one is watching.

Later: Luke looking at what he's written, closing the journal without sharing it with anyone.

BACK TO PRESENT:

JULIET
 (with unexpected
 vulnerability)
 What are you writing? In those
 quiet moments?

Luke looks startled by her perception.

LUKE
 (hesitant)
 How did you...?

JULIET
 (simply)
 Your hands. The way they move
 sometimes, like you're forming
 words. And you have a callus.
 Right there.
 (gesturing to his middle
 finger)
 Writers have them.

She's been watching him more closely than he realized.

LUKE
(admitting)
Stories, mostly. About people who
find what they're looking for.
Sometimes about people who don't.

JULIET
(softly)
Which are we?

The question hangs between them, electric with possibility.

LUKE
(equally soft)
I don't know yet. The story's
still being written.

Their eyes hold, neither looking away now.

A woman at another table laughs - too loud in the quiet room -
breaking the moment. Both Luke and Juliet shift, remembering
where they are.

QUESTION 23:
"When did you last cry in front of another person?"

Luke chuckles - but it's hollow.

LUKE
Never.
(pause)
Not since I was a kid. Learned
pretty fast nobody wants to see
that.

FLASHBACK: ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY

Young Luke (8) on a playground. Other children taunting him.

BULLY
Crying Carter! His dad's in jail
and his mom cleans toilets!

Young Luke, tears streaming, tries to fight back but is
outnumbered.

Later: At home, his mother tends his scraped knee.

MOTHER
What happened, baby?

YOUNG LUKE
(lying)
I fell.

He holds back tears, jaw clenched with effort.

MOTHER
(knowing)
It's okay to cry, Luke.

YOUNG LUKE
(determined)
Not anymore.

His mother's face falls, understanding all he isn't saying.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Juliet watches him — not with pity but with recognition.

JULIET
You're wrong.

He blinks at her, startled.

JULIET
(continuing softly)
Some people do want to see it. The
real you. All of it. Even the
messy parts.
(vulnerable)
Especially those.

LUKE
(skeptical)
You believe that?

JULIET
(surprised by her own answer)
I'm starting to.

FLASHBACK: JULIET (22) at her grandmother's bedside. The old woman weak but lucid.

GRANDMOTHER
Why don't you let yourself cry,
little bird?

JULIET
(controlling emotions)
It doesn't help anything.

GRANDMOTHER

(gently)

Tears aren't meant to help.

They're meant to be honest.

(taking her hand)

Your strength isn't in hiding how you feel. It's in feeling it all and continuing anyway.

BACK TO PRESENT:

JULIET

(continuing)

My grandmother was the last person who saw me cry. At her hospital bed.

(swallowing hard)

She told me tears were a form of honesty.

LUKE

(thoughtful)

She sounds wise.

JULIET

(with rare warmth)

She was.

(beat)

When did you last cry? Even alone?

It's not on the card. A question she genuinely wants answered.

LUKE

(caught off guard by her interest)

My mom's birthday. Four months ago.

(confessing)

I bought a cake. Sang to an empty room.

(with self-deprecating smile)

Pathetic, right?

JULIET

(fiercely)

No. Beautiful.

Their eyes meet. Something shifts between them - a mutual recognition of what it costs to show these hidden parts of themselves.

QUESTION 24:

"What, if anything, is too serious to be joked about?"

Luke reads it, his smile turning sad.

LUKE

Leaving.

(beat)

Not showing up when it matters.

Juliet grips the table edge, white-knuckled. The question touches something raw.

JULIET

Trust.

(beat)

Betrayal.

(beat)

The quiet moments when you realize
you're alone and nobody's coming
back.

FLASHBACK: HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Juliet (24) sits alone in a waiting room. Her grandmother in surgery. She looks at her phone - multiple unanswered calls to her parents.

A DOCTOR approaches with a grave expression. Juliet stands to face whatever comes next - completely alone.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Luke watches her, stricken by the pain she usually hides so carefully.

LUKE

(softly)

I would have come.

JULIET

(startled)

What?

LUKE

(simply)

If you had called. I would have
come.

JULIET

(cautious)

You don't know that.

LUKE
(with unexpected certainty)
I do. Some things you just know.

Something passes between them - a tentative bridge over their shared fears.

The Host approaches, observing their intensity with unusual reverence.

HOST
(sotto voice)
Wow. You two are like...
marination. Deep, slow-cooked
soulmates!

For once, they barely register his intrusion. Their focus remains on each other.

The Host, sensing the gravity of the moment, backs away slowly, unusually subdued.

QUESTION 25:

"If you were to die tonight without having the chance to communicate with anyone, what would you most regret not having told someone?"

A brutal question that silences them both.

They stare at it as if it might bite.

Around them, the few remaining couples react similarly - some holding hands tighter, others looking away uncomfortably.

The question lays bare what matters most, when everything else falls away.

Juliet swallows hard, the wall around her heart developing hairline fractures.

JULIET
(hoarse)
That I wasn't as strong as I
pretended to be.

FLASHBACK: JULIET'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Juliet (28) alone in her bedroom, sitting on the floor surrounded by her designs. For once, no composed face, no control - just raw grief for dreams abandoned and connections avoided.

She picks up her phone, scrolls to her grandmother's number - still saved years after her death. Types a message she can never send:

"I'm so scared all the time, Gran. Scared of failing. Scared of trying. Scared of letting anyone close enough to matter when they leave."

She deletes it, unread by anyone.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Luke exhales sharply, visibly moved by her confession.

LUKE
That I spent so long running...
(pause)
I missed what mattered.

FLASHBACK: LUKE'S KITCHEN - MORNING

Luke (31) making coffee, radio playing a song his mother loved. He stops suddenly, overcome by a wave of grief.

He opens a drawer, pulls out an unsent letter to his mother. Written before her death but never given to her:

"I'm sorry I keep everyone at a distance. I learned it watching Dad hurt you. I'm afraid I'll do the same to someone else..."

He tucks it away again, unseen, unshared.

BACK TO PRESENT:

TINY FLASHBACKS - QUICK CUTS:

Juliet holding an old love letter she never sent

Luke deleting a voicemail he was too scared to send

Both staring at phones, wanting to reach out, choosing silence instead

They sit, breathing hard, wrecked by the truth.

The candle gutters, nearly exhausted.
The hourglass shows only minutes remaining.
The copper stream flows steadily toward its destination.

JULIET
(nearly whispering)
Do you think it's too late?

LUKE
(equally quiet)
For what?

JULIET
To change. To stop running.

LUKE
(with fragile hope)
I don't know. I hope not.

The admission hangs between them - a shared prayer that their patterns aren't permanent, that new choices remain possible.

Around them, the Wren Room has grown so quiet that the sound of the flowing water seems to fill the space. The world beyond their table has receded entirely, leaving only this moment of raw honesty between two people accustomed to hiding.

HOST
(unusually solemn to Barista,
barely audible)
They're breaking through. You can
almost see it happening.

BARISTA
(equally quiet)
Twenty years running this
experiment, and you still get
emotional every time, don't you?

HOST
(unashamed)
Some connections are worth
witnessing.

At Table 17, Luke and Juliet exist in their own world now, the questions having stripped away their carefully constructed facades, leaving only truth between them.

Their hands rest on the table, inches apart. Not touching, but closer than before.

The final questions await.

QUESTION 26:

"Your house catches fire. After saving your loved ones and pets, you have time to safely make a final dash to save one item. What would it be?"

The candle is a stub now, flickering weakly.
 The hourglass is nearly empty.
 Only a few grains left between them.

The Wren Room has transformed completely. Only four tables remain occupied. The musicians have switched to playing something haunting and spare - a single violin accompanied by subtle piano. Most of the lights have dimmed, leaving the space in a dreamlike glow of candles.

Juliet and Luke sit there, bruised but breathing, both transformed by the journey of questions that has stripped away their defenses.

Juliet reads the card, voice tight with emotion she no longer bothers to hide.

JULIET
 My sketchbook.
 (soft)
 It's the only part of me I never
 threw away.

FLASHBACK: JULIET'S APARTMENT - VARIOUS TIMES

A montage of Juliet hiding her sketchbooks in different places over the years:

Under her mattress as a teenager

Behind books on a shelf in college

In a locked drawer in her current apartment

Each hiding place more secure than the last, protecting not just paper and ink, but the vulnerable parts of herself the designs represent.

JULIET (V.O.)
 I have seventeen of them.
 Different sizes. Different years.
 (pause)
 I've never shown a single one to
 anyone except my grandmother.

Current day: Juliet carefully removing a sketchbook from its hiding place. Opening it to reveal exquisite designs - innovative, unique, beautiful. Her fingers tracing the lines with reverence and regret.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Luke leans forward, voice low and intimate:

LUKE
Why hide them?

JULIET
(vulnerable)
Because they're the real me. The
me that dreams. Wants. Hopes.
(swallowing hard)
The me that can be disappointed.

Luke nods, understanding completely.

LUKE
My mom's wedding ring.
(beat)
She pawned it once to pay rent.
Bought it back when she could.
(pause)
She said...
"Sometimes we lose the wrong
things first."

FLASHBACK: LUKE'S CHILDHOOD HOME - NIGHT

Young Luke (10) sitting at the kitchen table, doing homework.
His mother enters, exhausted but smiling.

MOTHER
Close your eyes and hold out your
hand.

He does. She places a simple gold band in his palm.

YOUNG LUKE
Your wedding ring! You got it
back!

MOTHER
(sitting beside him)
Do you know why this means so much
to me?

YOUNG LUKE
(confused)
Because it's from Dad?

MOTHER

(shaking her head)

Because it reminds me that some things can be recovered.

(taking his hand)

Sometimes we lose the wrong things first, Luke. We think we have to sacrifice what matters to survive.

(looking at the ring)

But the most precious things... those are worth fighting to get back.

BACK TO PRESENT:

LUKE

(continuing)

When she died, she left it to me. Said maybe someday I'd understand its real value.

JULIET

(curious)

Do you?

LUKE

(thoughtful)

I'm starting to. I think it wasn't about the ring itself. It was about what it represented.

(meeting her eyes)

The courage to reclaim what matters.

Juliet bites her lip – hard. The metaphor strikes closer than he realizes.

JULIET

(hesitant)

I started sketching again. Last week.

LUKE

(genuinely pleased)

Really?

JULIET

(nodding)

Nothing serious. Just... allowing myself to try.

(with difficulty)

My grandmother's birthday.

(MORE)

JULIET (CONT'D)
 It felt like... a way to honor
 her.

She doesn't add: And it was after our first accidental meeting
 at the coffee shop.

FLASHBACK: JULIET'S APARTMENT - RECENT

Juliet at her kitchen table, a blank sketchbook open before
 her. Her hand hovers, trembling slightly with the weight of
 beginning again.

On the table: a photo of her grandmother. Beside it, a coffee
 cup from the shop where she ran into Luke.

She takes a deep breath and makes the first stroke. Something
 breaks loose inside her as the pencil moves across the page -
 grief, hope, possibility.

BACK TO PRESENT:

LUKE
 (sincerely)
 I'd like to see them someday. Your
 designs.

JULIET
 (deflecting with a half-
 smile)
 That would require a second date.

The word "date" hangs between them - the first acknowledgment
 that this might be leading somewhere beyond tonight.

LUKE
 (matching her tone)
 I think technically this is still
 our first date.
 (checking imaginary watch)
 Longest one in history.

JULIET
 (with unexpected playfulness)
 Is that what this is? A date?

LUKE
 (smiling)
 Worst one ever? Or most memorable?

JULIET
(considering)
Ask me when it's over.

The candlelight catches the unexpected warmth in her eyes.

QUESTION 27:

"Of all the people in your family, whose death would you find most disturbing?"

Luke snorts lightly – a bitter sound.

LUKE
Already lived it.
(quiet)
Still living it.

FLASHBACK: FUNERAL HOME – DAY

Luke (28) stands alone before a closed casket. The room is nearly empty – just a handful of his mother's co-workers and neighbors.

LUKE (V.O.)
She didn't want a big service.
Said funerals were for the living,
not the dead.

Luke approaches the casket, places his hand on the polished wood.

LUKE
(whispering)
I don't know how to do this
without you.

Later: Luke at the cemetery. Everyone else has gone. He kneels by the fresh grave.

LUKE
(broken whisper)
Who am I supposed to be brave for
now?

BACK TO PRESENT:

Juliet nods, understanding the ongoing nature of grief.

JULIET
(whispered)
Same.

Nothing else needs to be said. Both know what it means to be shaped by absence.

JULIET
(after a moment)
Do you ever talk to her? After?

LUKE
(surprised by the question)
Sometimes. When I'm writing.
(small smile)
She's still my first reader, even
if she can't turn the pages
anymore.

Juliet nods, recognizing the sentiment.

JULIET
My grandmother visits my dreams.
Always with her sketch pad.
(wistful)
She's still designing, wherever
she is.

For the first time, they share a smile untinged by sarcasm or defense - a genuine connection through shared loss.

The Host passes by, noticing the shift. He approaches with unusual gentleness.

HOST
(quietly)
We're nearing the final questions.
I just wanted to say...
(sincere for once)
You two are quite extraordinary,
you know.

For once, neither mocks him. There's something almost tender in the way the Host has been watching their journey.

JULIET
(curious)
You do this often? These events?

HOST
(with unexpected depth)
Every month for twenty years.
(glancing around the room)
Most leave before question
fifteen.
(looking back at them)
The ones who stay... they find
something rare.

LUKE
 (sardonic but gentle)
 Love? Or your million dollars?

HOST
 (smiling knowingly)
 Those who stay for the money never
 make it past question twenty.
 (meaningful look)
 Those who stay for the
 connection... they find something
 worth far more.

He moves away before they can respond, leaving them to
 contemplate his words.

QUESTION 28:

"Share a personal problem and ask your partner's advice on how
 they might handle it."

Luke hesitates.

This one cuts deep.

The question asks not just for vulnerability, but for help -
 something neither of them is accustomed to seeking.

LUKE
 (quiet)
 I don't know how to stop running.
 (beat)
 Even now, sitting here... I keep
 looking for the exit.

He says it simply, without drama, but the confession costs him.

FLASHBACK: MONTAGE OF LUKE'S EXITS

Luke slipping out of a woman's apartment at dawn

Luke changing his phone number after too many calls from the
 same person

Luke making excuses to leave a promising date early

Luke packing a bag, moving to a new apartment

LUKE (V.O.)
 I've left eight apartments in ten
 years. Changed my number twelve
 times. I have a system for leaving
 without a trace.

Final image: Luke standing at his current apartment window, bags half-packed, after their first chance meeting at the coffee shop.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Juliet holds his gaze — firm but kind. Her eyes reflect understanding rather than judgment.

JULIET
 Maybe... Maybe staying isn't about
 fighting the urge. Maybe it's
 just...
 (pause)
 Choosing someone worth staying
 for.

FLASHBACK: JULIET'S APARTMENT - RECENT

Juliet at her kitchen table, scrolling through job listings in other cities. Her apartment semi-packed, as if perpetually ready to flee.

Her phone shows a notification — a reminder of their "accidental" meeting at the park tomorrow.

Her finger hovers over "DELETE."

Instead, she confirms it, then sets the phone down. Something in her expression shifts — not certainty, but willingness to wait before running.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Luke's mouth opens — but no words come.
 He just breathes, absorbing her insight.

LUKE
 (finally)
 When did you get so wise?

JULIET
 (with a small smile)
 About ten questions ago.

Their quiet laughter breaks the tension. Something has shifted between them — a recognition that they share not just wounds, but the possibility of healing.

JULIET
(her turn to be vulnerable)
I have one too. A problem.

LUKE
(encouraging)
I'm all ears.

JULIET
(with difficulty)
I don't know how to want things
anymore.
(explaining)
Big things. Dreams. I got so good
at not being disappointed that I
stopped hoping altogether.

LUKE
(gently)
What's the last thing you really
wanted? Besides not getting hurt.

The question catches her off guard with its perception.

FLASHBACK: JULIET'S APARTMENT - NIGHT BEFORE THE EVENT

Juliet on her couch, refusing Mia's request to attend the 36 Questions event.

MIA (on phone)
Just try, Jules. What's the worst
that could happen?

JULIET
I could meet someone.

MIA
That's... literally the goal.

JULIET
(quieter)
That's what I'm afraid of.

MIA
(understanding)
You're afraid to want someone
because then you'd have something
to lose?

JULIET
(defensive)
It's worked so far.

MIA
 (softly)
 Has it? Has it really?

BACK TO PRESENT:

JULIET
 (answering Luke's question)
 To create something beautiful that
 outlasts me.
 (swallowing hard)
 To design something that matters
 to someone else.

LUKE
 (simply)
 Then start with one sketch. One
 design. Not for the world or for
 success. Just for the joy of
 creating it.
 (leaning closer)
 And when you're ready, I'll be the
 first in line to see it.

JULIET
 (vulnerable)
 And if it's terrible?

LUKE
 (with certainty)
 It won't be. But even if it was,
 it would still be worth doing.
 (meeting her eyes)
 Some things are worth the risk of
 failure.

The unspoken question hangs between them: Are we?

Before they can explore it further, the Host interrupts - this
 time with a genuine apology in his expression.

HOST (INTERRUPTS - FINAL TIME - WITH A FLOURISH OF HIS NOTEPAD)

HOST
 (grinning, but with warmth)
 LAST FIVE QUESTIONS! WHO'S FEELING
 ENGAGED ALREADY?!

Other tables laugh nervously.

At Table 17:
 Juliet and Luke don't laugh.
 They don't even look away from each other.

They're locked in — trapped, exposed, terrified, but unwilling to retreat now that they've come this far.

The night is nearly over.
The questions nearly complete.
The final revelations await.

EXT. BOOKSTORE - EVENING

Rain patters softly against the windows.
The faint hum of traffic and muted footsteps outside.

Juliet browses the poetry section, flipping through worn pages, her finger tracing faded underlines made by strangers before her. Her body is tense, as if bracing against a storm only she can feel.

Across the store — a few rows away —
LUKE stands in the fiction section, thumb idly skimming the pages of a novel he isn't truly reading. His hair is damp from the rain, jacket clinging to him, making him seem more vulnerable than he usually appears.

Their eyes meet.

A beat.

Longer than necessary.

The air between them tightens, like a wire drawn taut.

JULIET
(half-smiling, hesitant)
Okay, seriously. Is the universe
bored?

LUKE
(smiling, softer than usual)
Or drunk.

They both chuckle — low, tentative. A tremor of something almost lost.

Luke steps around the shelf, closing some of the distance, but not too much. He stops a few feet away — far enough to be respectful, close enough that Juliet can smell the faint, rainy scent of him.

LUKE
(awkward)
You look... good.

JULIET
(flat, teasing)
That would be a first.

Luke chuckles, shoving his hands in his pockets to stop himself from fidgeting.

LUKE
(pause)
I almost texted you.

Juliet's face softens for a microsecond before she masks it.

JULIET
(deflecting)
What stopped you?

LUKE
(sincerely)
Cowardice. Habit. You know. The classics.

She smiles – not mocking – but warm, sad.

JULIET
(soft)
I almost texted you too.

Luke blinks, caught off guard by her admission.

LUKE
(quiet)
What did you almost say?

Juliet closes the poetry book she was pretending to read, holds it against her chest.

JULIET
(whisper)
"I miss you."

Luke exhales slowly, a breath he didn't know he was holding.

LUKE
(meeting her gaze)
Same.

Silence, but it's different now. It's full, not empty.

Luke almost steps closer –
His hand almost rises –

But Juliet shifts her weight, a subtle retreat.

Not yet.

LUKE
(gently)
See you around, Hart.

JULIET
(barely a whisper)
See you around, Carter.

He turns first, walking away slowly, not looking back.

Juliet watches him leave, clutching the book a little tighter.

As Luke reaches the door, he hesitates for half a second – but doesn't turn around.

He exits into the soft rain, disappearing into the misty night.

Juliet exhales, a small shaky breath escaping her lips.

She turns back to the shelf, slipping the poetry book back where it belongs.

And for the first time in a long time –

She smiles. A real one.

CUT TO BLACK.

EXT. CITY STREETS - SERIES OF SHOTS - DAY/NIGHT

A haunting montage.

The city hums around Juliet and Luke, indifferent to the small, personal earthquakes rippling through their lives.

INT. JULIET'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Juliet sits at her kitchen table, a blank sketchpad open before her.

She holds a pencil, unmoving, staring at the page as if it might attack her.

VOICEOVER (from The Wren Room)
LUKE (V.O.)
(soft)
"What's your perfect day?"

Juliet clenches the pencil tighter until her knuckles whiten. She finally draws a line – trembling, imperfect, but real.

She closes the sketchpad the second the line is complete, hiding it away.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

Luke walks past a musician playing a familiar tune on a battered guitar.

MUSICIAN
(singing softly)
"Ain't no mountain high enough..."

Luke freezes mid-step. His throat works. He shoves his hands into his pockets, hunching against the memory.

VOICEOVER (from The Wren Room)
JULIET (V.O.)
(whispered)
"Love is like air. You don't
notice it... until it's gone."

Luke turns away, disappearing into the crowd, his face a carefully neutral mask.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Juliet types a message into her phone.

TEXT (drafted):
"I miss you."

Her thumb hovers over "Send" –
a long, aching moment –
before she deletes it.

The screen goes dark.

EXT. PARK - EVENING

Luke sits alone on a bench. His journal open on his lap.

A page filled with half-finished sentences:

"If only I..."

"Maybe if..."

"I'm sorry for..."

He closes the journal without writing anything complete.

VOICEOVER (from The Wren Room)

LUKE (V.O.)

"You can laugh yourself right into
being lonely."

Luke leans back, staring at the empty sky.

INT. JULIET'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Juliet lies in bed staring at the ceiling, the faint glow of streetlights painting shifting patterns above her.

She reaches toward the nightstand and pulls out an old polaroid photo: her grandmother holding one of Juliet's early designs.

Tears prick her eyes – but she doesn't let them fall.

She slips the photo under her pillow.

INT. LUKE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Luke scrolls mindlessly through his phone.

A dating app notification pops up: "Someone new wants to match with you!"

He closes the app without looking.

Instead, he pulls out his mom's wedding ring from a small wooden box.

He holds it, thumb brushing the simple gold band.

VOICEOVER (from The Wren Room)

JULIET (V.O.)

"Some things are worth the risk of
failure."

He closes his hand around the ring, holding it to his chest for a long, silent moment.

EXT. THE WREN ROOM - NIGHT

The fairy lights above the Wren Room glow faintly against the misty night.

Inside, the tables are empty. Silent.

Only the copper stream still runs, whispering secrets to no one.

The battered hourglass on the Host's desk remains flipped over, untouched.

EXT. CITY - VARIOUS

Juliet standing at a crosswalk, the world blurring around her.

Luke staring into a bookstore window, watching couples browsing together.

Juliet sketching furiously, then tearing the page out and crumpling it.

Luke typing the words "Stay." in a document – and finally saving it.

BACK TO:

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

A breeze stirs fallen leaves along the path.

In different parts of the city, Juliet and Luke both look up at the same moment, sensing something unspoken in the air.

Their journeys are unfinished.

But neither of them is running anymore.

FADE OUT.

EXT. THE WREN ROOM - NIGHT

Rain falls in soft, persistent sheets, cloaking the city in a muted hush.

The Wren Room stands quiet and dark, its fairy lights dimmed but still gently glowing. The copper stream outside still flows, the sound of running water blending with the rain.

Across the street, JULIET stands, umbrella forgotten at her side, letting the rain soak through her jacket, her hair clinging to her face.

She stares at the old building, heart pounding, chest tight.

Her hand trembles as she pulls out her phone.

For a long moment, she just stares at it – at the last unsent message to Luke still saved in her drafts.

"I miss you."

She exhales sharply. Tucks the phone away.

Juliet steps forward, crossing the empty street slowly, as if drawn by invisible threads.

She reaches the Wren Room's door. Presses a hand against it. It doesn't open. It's closed for the night.

Still, she stands there, breathing hard, feeling the weight of everything she's tried to bury.

A block away –

LUKE jogs around the corner, breathless, soaked through.

He stops dead when he sees her –

Juliet, framed under the awning, water dripping from her lashes, the faint halo of fairy lights wrapping her in something impossibly fragile.

Luke hesitates.

He could turn away.

He could run.

He doesn't.

He walks toward her.

They meet halfway under the soft drip of rain from the awning.

A breathless beat.

Neither speaks.

Not yet.

Their eyes say everything.

LUKE
(hoarse)
Was hoping I'd find you here.

Juliet swallows, throat tight.

JULIET
(barely above a whisper)
I almost didn't come.

LUKE
(half smile)
Almost didn't either.

Beat.

LUKE
(quiet)
But... then I remembered
something.

JULIET
(soft)
What's that?

LUKE
(meaning it)
Some things are worth the risk of
getting soaked.

A shaky laugh escapes Juliet — wet, broken, real.

LUKE
(gently)
I'm tired of running.
(beat)
Are you?

Juliet blinks rapidly, raindrops streaking down her cheeks,
indistinguishable from tears.

JULIET
(voice trembling)
I'm tired of pretending it doesn't
matter.
(MORE)

JULIET (CONT'D)

(beat)

I'm tired of being alone because
it's safer.

LUKE

(stepping closer)

Me too.

Another breathless beat.

Luke reaches out – slowly, giving her every chance to pull away
– and takes her hand.

Their fingers intertwine – tentative, clumsy, perfect.

No speeches.

No grand declarations.

Just presence.

Just choice.

The rain falls harder around them, but under the awning, it's
as if time itself holds its breath.

LUKE

(whispering)

This isn't about the money.

JULIET

(smiling through tears)

It never was.

A long, shuddering silence between them.

The battered hourglass inside the Wren Room window catches
their eye – forgotten but still standing.

Juliet looks at Luke. Luke looks at Juliet.

Without another word, they step closer – foreheads resting
gently against each other, breathing in the same tentative,
terrified hope.

CUT TO BLACK.

MONTAGE - "BEGINNING AGAIN"

A series of soft, intimate moments – not perfect, but real.

INT. JULIET'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Sunlight spills through the window.

Juliet sits at her kitchen table, sketchpad open, pencil moving freely.

Luke sits across from her, sipping coffee, pretending to read but mostly watching her with quiet amazement.

Juliet notices and blushes, but doesn't hide the sketch. She lets him see it.

Trust, unfolding.

INT. LUKE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Luke types steadily at his laptop, deep in thought.

On the screen:

Chapter One: "Things Worth Staying For."

Juliet lounges nearby, sketching absently, their quiet companionship filling the room.

Luke glances at her, smiling to himself before turning back to his work.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Juliet and Luke walk side by side.

At a crosswalk, Juliet instinctively grabs Luke's sleeve, holding him back from stepping into the street too early.

They share a startled look, then a smile – natural, easy, unspoken care.

INT. JULIET'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - EVENING

Burnt toast smokes from the toaster.

Luke waves a dishtowel dramatically, coughing.
Juliet laughs uncontrollably, tears in her eyes.
He mock-bows as if it was all intentional.
She kisses his cheek mid-laugh, surprising them both.

INT. LUKE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A mild argument.
Juliet pacing, arms crossed.
Luke leaning against the counter, calm.

JULIET
(frustrated)
I'm not good at this.

LUKE
(gently)
Good at what?

JULIET
(quiet)
Not assuming you're going to
leave.

Luke crosses the space between them, slowly.

LUKE
(soft)
Then I'll just have to keep
staying until you believe me.

Juliet's walls crumble a little more.
She nods, tears threatening, but manages a shaky smile.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Luke kneels to retie Juliet's loose shoelace.
She watches him — overwhelmed by the simple, breathtaking
tenderness of it.
She brushes a raindrop off his hair.

He looks up and smiles, sunlight catching in his eyes.
They move forward together, step by step.

EXT. THE WREN ROOM - NIGHT

From across the street, the old Wren Room glows warmly.

Inside the window –

the battered hourglass sits in its place.

But now –
the sand flows upward.

Rising.

Endlessly.

BEGIN AGAIN.

FADE OUT.

EXT. THE WREN ROOM - SIX MONTHS LATER - NIGHT

The Wren Room glows under a halo of fairy lights.
The soft murmur of laughter, clinking glasses, and music spill
out into the warm evening air.

A colorful banner flutters above the entrance:

"36 Questions Anniversary Gala – Celebrate Your Story!"

INT. JULIET'S APARTMENT - EARLIER THAT EVENING

Juliet stands before her mirror, adjusting the simple, elegant
dress she nervously chose.

Luke, behind her, straightens his tie, watching her with a soft
smile.

LUKE
(teasing)
You know you're gonna be the
prettiest one there, right?

JULIET
(rolling her eyes)
Highly doubtful.

LUKE
(stepping closer)
Absolutely certain.

Juliet smiles – small, genuine, a little shy.

She grabs her clutch, turns – he offers his arm.

She takes it.

They leave together.

EXT. THE WREN ROOM - NIGHT

They arrive, pausing just outside the door.

Luke looks at Juliet.

LUKE
(quiet)
Ready?

Juliet takes a breath, steadying herself.

JULIET
Ready as I'll ever be.

They push open the door.

INT. THE WREN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The room is packed with couples, families, and friends.

Some faces familiar from that fateful night six months ago.

A couple who look blissfully happy.

A solo attendee, smiling wistfully.

Another pair, clearly "just friends" now but sharing a laugh.

Life happened.

Some stories bloomed.

Some ended.

All real.

HOST (O.S.)
 (over mic, exuberant)
 Welcome back, you crazy, beautiful
 dreamers!

The EVENT HOST, more endearing and only slightly less manic,
 stands at the front.

HOST
 Tonight's about celebrating the
 risks you took — and the hearts
 you bruised, healed, and maybe
 even kept!

(Crowd laughs and cheers.)

Luke and Juliet weave through the crowd.

The Host's eyes catch them —
 He grins wide, genuinely thrilled.

HOST
 (raising his glass)
 And look who made it!

People turn, clapping.

Juliet flushes pink but smiles, squeezing Luke's hand.

He squeezes back.

MONTAGE - "THE NEWLYWED QUESTIONS"

Host waves heart-shaped cue cards.

"Who hogs the covers?" Juliet raises her hand. Luke nods
 solemnly.

"Who burns breakfast?" Luke raises both hands dramatically.
 Juliet cackles.

"Who fell first?" Luke lifts his hand without hesitation.
 Juliet's eyes widen, softening.

"What's their hidden superpower?" Juliet answers:

JULIET
 (grinning)
 Making me laugh when I least want
 to.

The crowd – awwwws.

“What do they fear most?” Luke answers, voice quieter:

LUKE
Letting someone down.

The crowd quiets too, touched.

A beat of real emotion beneath the laughter.

EXT. THE WREN ROOM - LATER

The Host presents them with a ridiculous, oversized novelty check:

“Another \$1 Million!”

Luke dramatically pretends to faint. Juliet mock-fans him with the check.

They laugh, wrapped up in each other’s smiles.

The crowd claps, but for Luke and Juliet, it’s background noise.

Their focus is entirely on each other.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE WREN ROOM - NIGHT

They step into the warm night, hand in hand, under the shimmering lights.

LUKE
(grinning)
We could buy a house with this.

JULIET
(teasing)
Or therapy. Or bail money.
(beat, then softer)
Or maybe just... more days like this.

Luke slows, pulling her gently to a stop.

LUKE
 (serious)
 Whatever comes next...
 (beat)
 Let's keep asking the questions.

JULIET
 (smiling, emotional)
 Every stupid, terrifying,
 wonderful day.

Luke kisses her forehead – tender, reverent.

They walk off into the night, together.

EXT. THE WREN ROOM - WINDOW - SAME

Through the window, the old battered hourglass sits quietly.

The sand inside rises.

Upward.

Soft.

Endless.

BEGIN AGAIN.

FADE OUT.

EXT. THE WREN ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

The celebration winds down.

The fairy lights sway in the soft night breeze.

Juliet and Luke walk slowly down the cobblestone sidewalk,
 fingers knotted loosely together, swinging slightly as they
 move.

They're quiet.

But it's not the heavy silence of before.

It's peaceful. Full.

JULIET
(half-smiling)
Remember one of the questions?

LUKE
(grinning)
We answered a lot of questions.

JULIET
(soft)
"What's your perfect day?"

LUKE
(stopping, facing her)
Yeah.
(beat)
You.

Juliet's breath catches.

JULIET
(voice trembling)
Mine too.

A quiet beat.

LUKE
(softer)
It's not about having the perfect
answers, is it?

JULIET
(smiling through shimmered
eyes)
It's about showing up. Even when
you're scared.

Luke lifts her hand and presses a kiss to her knuckles.

LUKE
And choosing to stay. Every messy,
terrifying day.

She nods, unable to speak for a moment.

They continue walking, slower now.

EXT. CITY PARK - CONTINUOUS

They pass a small park nearby — benches dappled in lamplight,
trees whispering with the night air.

They pause.

Juliet pulls Luke gently toward one of the benches.

They sit.

No grand gestures.

No desperate clutching.

Just sitting shoulder-to-shoulder, watching the world turn around them.

JULIET
(whispering)
You make it easier to breathe.

LUKE
(smiling)
You make me want to stay.

EXT. THE WREN ROOM - WINDOW - SAME

Inside the Wren Room window —

The battered old hourglass catches the last of the night's glow.

The sand continues to flow upward — slow, steady, deliberate.

Not rushing.

Not falling.

Rising.

Time, love, hope — rebuilding, not slipping away.

BEGIN AGAIN.

FADE OUT.