

Of Storms And Grace

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INT. OFFICE BUILDING, CONFERENCE ROOM, PRAGUE - DAY

Silent Scene: MARIANA PENROSE (50s) is in a conference room, in a business meeting presenting several slides to a group of potential CLIENTS, men and women (various ages). She looks very confident.

**INTERCUT: INT. FIVE STAR HOTEL, LUXURY SUITE, PRAGUE - DAY /
INT. VÁCLAV HAVEL AIRPORT, PRAGUE - DAY**

Mariana is in her hotel room. UGENIA CLARK (60s), MARGARET RUSSO (50s-60s), DEDE GUERRIERO, Latina, with an accent (50s-60s), GLENNIS BOLINSKE (50s-60s), LIBBY GREEN (50s-60s), all successful business women, are walking through the airport with their rolling suitcases. Ugenia calls Mariana.

UGENIA

Hey Girl, Happy birthday. We're here.

MARIANA

How was the flight?

UGENIA

It was smooth sailing. We're grabbing a rental. We'll pick you up at eight.

MARIANA

Sounds good. See you soon.

INT. STREET, RENTAL CAR, PRAGUE - NIGHT

The ladies, minus Libby, are in a luxury SUV. They are upbeat and high spirited. They pull up to a ladies club.

MARIANA

Where's Libby?

DEDE

She prude'd out on us. She's at the spa getting a pedicure.

INT. LADIES CLUB, PRAGUE - NIGHT

The ladies walk into the club, are escorted to an exclusive table by a good looking MAN (over 18) in pants with no shirt and a bow tie.

MAN

How are you doing tonight, ladies?

UGENIA
We are fabulous.

MAN
Someone will be right over to get
your order. Have a wonderful night.

UGENIA
We sure will.

The man walks away. Mariana looks very uncomfortable. An
ANNOUNCER (over 18) walks onto the stage.

ANNOUNCER
Show's just starting, ladies.

MARIANA
Oh my gosh, what is this?

DEDE
It's your birthday surprise.

All the ladies cheer. Mariana is obviously out of her
element. Music starts, MEN (various ages over 18) wearing
pants, no shirts and bow ties, start to dance. ARBEN BAJRAMI
(20), Albanian, good looking, in shape, approaches their
table.

ARBEN
Hello ladies. My name is Arben, I
will be taking care of you this
evening. How are you?

UGENIA
(checking Arben out)
We're better now. Can we get five
house specials, and something
really special for the birthday
girl here.

ARBEN
You got it. I will get your drinks.
(beat, talking to Mariana)
And something very special for you,
beautiful lady.

Arben walks away from the table.

MARGARET
Why doesn't my husband look like
that?

DEDE

There's forty years and a lot of miles between George and that guy.

GLENNIS

All this beefcake is just show. It can't replace a real relationship.

MARGARET

Says the woman who's husband is at the gym five times a week and gets sex on a regular basis.

Mariana is doing her best not to look at the half dressed men.

MARIANA

I can't believe this.

UGENIA

Loosen up, have fun.

DEDE

Maybe you'll get lucky.

Arben returns with a round of drinks and a massive tropical looking drink for Mariana. He also has a slice of cake with a candle on top which he lights.

ARBEN

(to Mariana)

This is on the house. Anything else I can get for you beautiful birthday lady?

UGENIA

Wow, a man that knows how to treat a girl. I might just fall in love with you.

MARIANA

This is wonderful. Thank you, Arben.

LADIES GROUP / PEOPLE

Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you. Happy birthday, Mariana. Happy birthday to you.

EVERYONE (various ages over 18) in the club joins in to sing. Afterwards they clap and whistle. In the distance, Arben looks Mariana over appreciatively, then goes to another table to take an order. Mariana takes a sip of her drink, starts to eat her cake.

Dede waves cash at a MALE DANCER (over 18) that just ended his set. The dancer smiles, heads towards their table.

DEDE

Private dance for the birthday girl.

All the ladies cheer, hoot and holler. Mariana looks terrified. The dancer is heading their way.

MARIANA

I need to go to the restroom.

Mariana makes a hasty exit.

INT. LADIES CLUB, RESTROOM, PRAGUE - NIGHT

Mariana slips into the bathroom, washes her hands, looks at herself in the mirror. A group of LADIES (20s - 30s) rush in, they laugh, talk, check their hair and makeup. After dolling up, the ladies leave. Ugenia enters.

UGENIA

What are you doing in here? It's your birthday.

MARIANA

I'm sorry, it's just not my scene.

UGENIA

It could be your scene. Give it a try.

MARIANA

You know, I'm really tired. Why don't you all stay and have a good time. I'll catch a ride back to the hotel.

UGENIA

You're not jumping in some taxi alone. I'll come with you.

MARIANA

No, this is our girls vacation. We've been planning this since last year. You ladies stay and have fun. I'll see you tomorrow at the pool.

Ugenia pulls the rental car keys from her purse.

UGENIA

You take the car. We'll grab a taxi back to the hotel.

MARIANA

You sure?

UGENIA

Positive. But I wish you would stay. It's your birthday.

MARIANA

You know this trip isn't just a vacation for me. I have an early meeting tomorrow. But I'll definitely catch up with you all tomorrow after my meeting.

UGENIA

Promise.

MARIANA

Promise.

Mariana takes the keys, Ugenia follows her back to the table.

INT. LADIES CLUB, PRAGUE - NIGHT

MARIANA

I'm heading out.

DEDE

Hot guys everywhere. You sure?

MARIANA

Yeah, I'm beat.

The ladies exchange kisses and hugs with Mariana. Arben is walking out of the back of the bar with his street clothes on. His shift is done. He notices Mariana leaving. A MANAGER (40s) hands him some cash which he pockets. Arben quickly runs towards Mariana and Ugenia as they exit the club.

EXT. LADIES CLUB, PRAGUE - NIGHT

Mariana and Ugenia are walking towards the car, Arben approaches.

ARBEN

You are leaving? The party is just starting.

MARIANA

I've got an early meeting tomorrow.

ARBEN

I am leaving too. I can walk you to your car.

Ugenia makes no move to leave.

MARIANA

(to Ugenia)

I'll be fine. Car's right ahead, it's a busy street and there's a security guard over there.

Ugenia's look changes. She thinks Mariana is up to something that involves Arben she doesn't want Ugenia to see.

UGENIA

Ok. Have a good night and text me when you get to the hotel. I mean it.

MARIANA

I will.

Ugenia heads back into the club as Arben walks Mariana to the car. The ladies club is off of a very busy main street. Dance music can be heard coming from other clubs. PEOPLE (various ages) are out enjoying the night. Arben opens the door for Mariana. She climbs in, he leans into the car.

ARBEN

You want some company tonight beautiful? I'll take really good care of you. I will give you a discount for your birthday.

Mariana is shocked that she is being propositioned, realizes Arben is not only a waiter but also a male prostitute.

MARIANA

How old are you?

ARBEN

I'm 20. I have my ID and medical papers. I'll take such good care of you beautiful lady. I'll give you the best night you have ever had.

MARIANA

I...ummm...I...thank you for the offer. But I really just want to get some rest tonight.

ARBEN

Ok, sweetheart. I will give you my card. If you change your mind, I give a great massage too. I will do the massage for free, since you are so beautiful and it's your birthday.

Arben hands her the card, flashes his beautiful smile. Mariana doesn't want to be rude, she takes the card.

ARBEN (CONT'D)

Good night, beautiful.

Mariana watches as Arben walks away, follows him with her eyes. He walks to a place on the Blvd where other MALE and FEMALE PROSTITUTES (various ages over 18) are selling their wares. He pulls a silky disco type, button up shirt out of a small backpack. He takes off his shirt and puts on the button up shirt, leaves it unbuttoned so that his body is exposed.

Other MALE PROSTITUTES (various ages over 18) approach him. They greet each other, then Arben walks out to the boulevard. Mariana is saddened and clearly upset seeing Arben getting ready to sell himself. Some cars pass by, one finally stops. Mariana is horrified.

EXT. BUSY STREET, PRAGUE - NIGHT

Mariana drives out of the club parking lot, guns her car through traffic as Arben approaches the waiting car, leans on the window. Two WOMEN (40s) are inside of the car. Mariana is rushing through traffic to get to Arben before he gets into the car. Mariana pulls several hundred dollar bills out of her wallet, pulls up behind the parked car, honks her horn, waves her cash. Arben looks up, smiles.

ARBEN

(to the women in the car)
Sorry, ladies. Have a good night.

Arben jogs towards the car. Mariana is visibly shaken, can't believe she's doing what she's doing. Arben leans on the window.

ARBEN (CONT'D)

Hello beautiful. You changed your mind?

MARIANA

Yes, some company would be nice.
How much...do you charge?

ARBEN

Normally, three hundred. But for you beautiful lady, I will only charge one fifty because it's your birthday.

Mariana hands Arben the cash. He slides into her car with his small backpack. In the distance, Margaret can be seen peaking around a corner at the back door of the club. She has a shocked look.

INT. STREET, RENTAL CAR, PRAGUE - NIGHT

Arben runs his hand over Mariana's leg.

ARBEN (CONT'D)

I'm going to give you such a special time, sweetheart. I can go all night long for you.

Mariana gently takes his hand, places it on his seat. She pulls away from the curb and into busy traffic.

ARBEN (CONT'D)

So, what brings you to Prague, besides pleasure?

MARIANA

My company does a lot of business in the Czech Republic. My friends decided to meet me. The business trip just happened to coincide with my birthday.

Arben runs his hand gently across Mariana's face, starts to run his hand down her hair. She takes his hand, puts it back by his side.

MARIANA (CONT'D)

Are you from here?

ARBEN

No. I'm from Albania.

MARIANA

What brought you here?

ARBEN

Work...and play.

Arben takes her hand and kisses it. Mariana gently pulls her hand away. She pulls into her hotel.

INT. FIVE STAR HOTEL, PRAGUE - NIGHT

Mariana and Arben walk through the hotel. Mariana looks around nervously but no one cares that she's going up to her room with a male prostitute.

INT. FIVE STAR HOTEL, LUXURY SUITE, PRAGUE - NIGHT

Mariana sends Ugenia a quick text. As soon as she puts her phone down Arben approaches her, puts his arms around her waist, pulls her close, tries to kiss her. Mariana moves away from him.

MARIANA

I didn't bring you here for...for that. I just want to talk.

ARBEN

(flirtatiously)
Only talk?

MARIANA

Yes. Just talk.

ARBEN

You are a little shy? You want me to give you the massage first? It will relax you, sweetheart.

Mariana sits down on the couch, motions for Arben to sit beside her. He complies with a sultry look and smile.

ARBEN (CONT'D)

What do you want to talk about beautiful?

MARIANA

How did you get here?

ARBEN

I moved here from Albania 2 years ago.

MARIANA

But you're only 20. What are you doing?

Arben removes his shirt with a seductive smile.

ARBEN

What am I doing? Right now I am spending some wonderful time with you. You are nervous? You want to touch me? I won't make any move, I'll let you come to me.

MARIANA

Arben, I don't want to have sex with you. I just, I have two sons. My younger son, Remeny, is in college. Jason, my oldest, just graduated from medical school. He got a job at the local hospital.

ARBEN

Why are you telling me this?

MARIANA

Because, you don't have to do what you're doing. You could get a job. I mean, there has to be something else you can do.

ARBEN

Maybe there are opportunities where you come from beautiful lady, but not so much in Albania.

Mariana retrieves Arben's shirt.

MARIANA

Shirt please.

Arben slips into his shirt.

MARIANA (CONT'D)

I'm ordering room service. What do you want?

She grabs a menu, hands it to him.

ARBEN

You want me to stay?

MARIANA

I just paid \$150 dollars and it's my birthday.

ARBEN

You don't want to...

MARIANA

No, just talk.

Something changes in Arben. He turns off the "hustle".

ARBEN

I will have whatever you are having.

Mariana takes the menu, picks up the phone.

Moments Later

Mariana and Arben are sitting on the couch in front empty food trays and a half eaten charcuterie board. Mariana takes a sip of wine.

MARIANA

Why did leave Albania?

ARBEN

My parents died in a car accident two years ago. My older brother, he put me out, told me to get a job. He had too many mouths to feed and I was already 18. There's no work in my country. So, I came here.

MARIANA

You've been doing this since you were 18?

ARBEN

Yes. I just got hired at the club. They give me some time here and there when a guy is sick. I am making a little more money. Maybe someday, I can be like your sons.

MARIANA

I should get to bed. I've got a meeting tomorrow morning.

ARBEN

I'll go. Unless you want...?

MARIANA

No, no, I don't want that. But it's late, why don't you stay? You can sleep on the couch, there's some extra blankets. I can drop you off at your home in the morning.

Arben looks around at the luxurious surroundings.

ARBEN

Are you sure? I don't want to put you out, beautiful lady.

MARIANA

You can call me Mariana, and yes, I'm sure.

Mariana leaves the room, returns with pillows and blankets

ARBEN

Thank you, Ms. Mariana.

Arben starts to make himself comfortable on the couch as Mariana walks towards her bedroom. She stops at the door, turns.

MARIANA

Good night, Arben.

ARBEN

Good night, Ms. Mariana.

INT. FIVE STAR HOTEL, LUXURY SUITE, BEDROOM, PRAGUE - LATE NIGHT

Mariana is lying in bed wide awake. She tosses and turns several times, she can't sleep. She gets up, slips into a pair of sweat pants. She opens her door quietly, not wanting to wake up Arben.

INT. FIVE STAR HOTEL, LUXURY SUITE, PRAGUE - LATE NIGHT

Arben is not on the couch, he is sitting at a large ceiling to floor length window. It is lightly raining outside. Mariana can see tears running down his face, his chest silently heaves up and down. He doesn't hear Mariana enter.

Mariana's heart is broken watching him in the darkness. She quietly grabs a bottled water from the counter, goes back into her room, closes the door.

INT. FIVE STAR HOTEL, LUXURY SUITE, PRAGUE - MORNING

Mariana walks out of her bedroom dressed in a business suit. Arben is dressed, sitting on the couch. He stands when Mariana enters.

ARBEN (CONT'D)

Good morning, Ms. Mariana.

MARIANA

Good morning. You ready?

ARBEN

Yes.

Arben pulls the \$150 cash out of his bag, hands it to her.

ARBEN (CONT'D)

You should have this. I didn't exactly work for it.

(MORE)

ARBEN (CONT'D)

You paid for dinner and gave me a place to stay for the night. It was a beautiful time for me, just talking. I have never done that before. I can't take this from you.

Mariana looks at the money, then at Arben.

MARIANA

What if you had an opportunity to be off the street?

ARBEN

I don't know what you mean.

MARIANA

I'm inviting you to come and stay with me in America.

Arben has a look of complete shock on his face.

INT. UPSCALE RESTAURANT, BOSTON, MA - DAY

Mariana and Ugenia are back in their home town, Boston, Massachusetts. They have food plates in front of them.

UGENIA

A male prostitute from Albania? What are you going to do with him? Besides the obvious.

MARIANA

It's not like that. He's agreed to go back to school. For the visa, he has to be gainfully employed. I talked with a guy I work with that's Albanian. He's lined up a job for Arben as he works on starting his own business.

UGENIA

Starting his own business? They gave him a visa for that?

MARIANA

He's not going to be doing what he was doing in Prague. His father was a baker, taught Arben everything he knew. He wants to start his own bake shop.

UGENIA

What are you not telling me? He stayed in your hotel room all night.

MARIANA

Nothing happened. We just talked. He's only twenty.

UGENIA

Twenty, huh. Darn. I was carrying such a torch. Why can't he be 20 or 30 years older?

MARIANA

He's the same age as my Remeny.

UGENIA

I know. But he is yummy, girl. You're not tempted at all? Not even a little bit?

MARIANA

No. I just had a feeling about him. I think he'll have a chance here to make a new life.

UGENIA

What am I going to do with you? You wear your heart on your sleeve.

MARIANA

You can come with me to pick him up from the airport. He's arriving next week.

UGENIA

I can do that.

MARIANA

You're the only one I've told about his past. I want him have to have a fresh start.

UGENIA

The secret is safe with me.

INT. LOGAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, BOSTON - MORNING

Mariana and Ugenia are standing at the airport. Arben has one duffel bag he carries off the airplane. He sees Mariana, flashes his beautiful smile and waves.

UGENIA
Oh my heavens. The good Lord sure
made him pretty.

MARIANA
Behave.

Arben approaches them.

ARBEN
Mariana.

MARIANA
Arben, how was the flight?

ARBEN
It was good. Long, but good.

MARIANA
You remember Ugenia?

ARBEN
Of course I remember you.

UGENIA
Hello.

MARIANA
Well, let's go.

ARBEN
I can't believe I'm in America.

Arben looks through the airport window with a look of genuine excitement as they walk. Ugenia gives Mariana a craving look.

MARIANA
(whispering to Ugenia)
No!

INT. MARIANA'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - LATE MORNING

Arben sits his duffel bag down, walks around the room.

ARBEN
Wow, this is bigger than my entire
apartment back home.

MARIANA
Come on, let me show you around.
Everyone's coming over for dinner
tonight so you'll get to meet the
rest of the family.

INT. MARIANA'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - DAY

The gang arrives, REMENY FISCHER (20), SETH GRANGER (30s), REBECCA GRANGER (30s), very pregnant, DALTON GRANGER (8), SONJA MORALES (20s), JAQUES DUBOIS (20s), BENJAMIN FINNERY (30s), CASEY FINNERY (30s), BENJAMIN "BJ" FINNERY JR (6), JASON FISCHER (late 20s), LAINEY DALTON (late 20s), Jason's fiancée. BJ runs to Mariana.

BJ

Nana!

Mariana goes down to her knees, holds out her arms, gives BJ a big hug. Dalton comes to get a hug too.

BJ (CONT'D)

Nana can we make cookies?

MARIANA

I have everything all ready to go,
I was just waiting for you.

(beat)

Everyone, this is Arben. He'll be
staying for a while.

There are greetings and handshakes all around. Mariana turns to BJ and Dalton.

MARIANA (CONT'D)

You ready?

BJ

Yes!

Mariana walks into the kitchen with BJ and Dalton. Arben looks at Seth.

ARBEN

Hey, I recognize you.

SETH

Yeah, I play a little football.

JASON

(to Arben)

We need to talk.

Jason motions towards the family room. Arben follows, everyone falls in behind him.

INT. MARIANA'S HOUSE, FAMILY ROOM - DAY

They all sit. Everyone's focus is on Arben.

JASON

Look, I'm going to be straight up honest here. My mother has opened her home to you.

JAQUES

She opened her home to all of us at one point.

JASON

You need to respect her and this house. If I find out you've done anything to hurt her, that's not going to be a good day for you.

SETH

It's going to be a very bad day.

SONJA

An extremely bad day.

Arben looks around at all of the serious faces.

ARBEN

I promise you, I will never do anything to harm her.

JASON

Good. Now that we've got that in the clear, let's get that meat on.

Everyone files out of the room leaving Arben sitting alone. From his place on the couch Arben sees Jason and Jaques in the kitchen. Jason opens the fridge, grabs a large tray laden with meat. The two men walk through the patio door out to the back yard.

EXT. MARIANA'S HOUSE, BACKYARD - DAY

Jason and Jaques are grilling. Mariana is making cookies with BJ. Everyone else is relaxing by the pool. Remeny sits down next to Arben who has distanced himself. Arben is reading a study book for his GED.

REMENY

Jason can be a little rough around the edges.

ARBEN

I understand. It must concern him and you, having someone you don't know in your mother's home.

REMENY

We're used to it. What's your story?

ARBEN

I'm from Albania. But, I was living in Prague.

REMENY

What were you doing in Prague.

ARBEN

Selling my body for money.

REMENY

Ummm, how did you and my mom meet?

ARBEN

I thought she was buying me for the night. Instead we had dinner, we talked, then she invited me to come here.

REMENY

Yeah, that sounds like mom.

ARBEN

What about them?

Arben looks out at the gang.

REMENY

Jaques ran away from an abusive home. Benjamin and Casey were living in their car. Casey was already 7 months pregnant. Seth was in gang.

ARBEN

Really?

REMENY

Yeah, mom got Seth into football. Sonja was one of Jason's classmates. Her stepdad was paying a little too much attention to her.

ARBEN

It must have been hard, having all of these people in your home.

REMENY

At first it was a little weird. But Jason and I never felt like we were being neglected. Eventually we just became one big family. Mom's got a big heart and a huge capacity for love.

ARBEN

I felt that about her.

REMENY

Mom's got a sixth sense about people too, about their character. That's why you're here. She felt something about you.

JASON

Meat will be ready in 15 minutes.

The gang gets out of the pool, gets up from lounge chairs, starts to head for the kitchen.

SONJA

I'll set the table.
(beat, to Arben)
Hey new kid, You wanna help me?

ARBEN

Sure.

INT. MARIANA'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Arben and Remeny follow Sonja into the kitchen. Remeny makes eye contact with Mariana, gives her the thumbs up.

EXT - STREET, ALBANIAN NEIGHBORHOOD - LATE AFTERNOON

Mariana and Arben walk down the street in an Albanian community. There are several stores with signs in English and Albanian. Mariana stops in front of a Niko's Cafe. Niko's Cafe is in a commercial strip building off a busy street. There are several different businesses within the commercial strip building. They walk inside.

INT. NIKO'S CAFE, FRONT - LATE AFTERNOON

NIKO AHMETI (50s-60s), Albanian, is behind the counter cleaning. A sign on the door says the café is closed. Most of the food items are gone except a few pastries in the display case. The bread racks are empty. Niko smiles cordially as Mariana and Arben walk in. Niko immediately notices Mariana.

MARIANA
You must be Niko. I'm Mariana.

ARBEN
I'm Arben.

Niko approaches, they all shake hands.

NIKO
My cousin told me that you would be coming. It is a pleasure to finally meet you.

MARIANA
You as well.

NIKO
(speaking to Arben)
My pastry baker moved to New York with his family. That has left me very short handed. Mariana tells me you can bake?

ARBEN
Yes sir.

NIKO
Adelina!

ADELINA AHMETI (19-20), Albanian, shy demeanor, walks out from the back of the café.

ARBEN
This is Mariana and this is Arben. Arben is applying for our open baker position.

ADELINA
Hello.

NIKO
Can you finish cleaning up?

ADELINA
Sure.

NIKO
(to Mariana and Arben)
Come in back, let me show you around.

INT. NIKO'S CAFE, REAR - LATE AFTERNOON

Niko walks Arben and Mariana into the back of the café, shows them both around. The operation is impressive, with a large storage room, a massive area for preparing food and four large, multi-tiered ovens.

NIKO
 (to Arben)
 Tell me about yourself. How long
 have you been baking?

ARBEN
 I started working with my father
 when I was six. By the age of ten I
 could bake just as good as him. It
 was something I loved to do.

NIKO
 What can you bake?

ARBEN
 Anything you want, sir. Baklava,
 shëndetlie, trilece, qumështor.

NIKO
 Bake me something. You can use any
 ingredients I have here. If I like
 it, you're hired.

ARBEN
 Yes sir.

NIKO
 (to Mariana)
 Would you like some coffee?

MARIANA
 Coffee sounds great.

Mariana looks nervous for Arben as she follows Niko.

INT. NIKO'S CAFE, FRONT - LATE AFTERNOON

Niko motions to a table, Mariana sits. Adelina is still cleaning.

NIKO
 What would you like?

MARIANA
 Anything is fine.

NIKO
 Adelina, can you bring some
 Shëndetlie and make a fresh pot of
 coffee please.

ADELINA
 Yes, Papa.

Niko sits with Mariana.

NIKO
 So, how did you and Arben meet?

MARIANA
 He was working in Prague. I was
 there on business and somewhat of a
 vacation. He lost both his parents
 two years ago. I just wanted to
 give him an opportunity.

NIKO
 That was very kind of you, Mariana.

MARIANA
 I have a big house, my kids are
 gone. It's really no big deal.

Niko smiles, he is attracted to Mariana.

MARIANA (CONT'D)
 You're from Albania too?

NIKO
 Yes.

Adelina sits coffee and pastries on the table.

NIKO (CONT'D)
 Thank you my dear.

MARIANA
 This looks great.

Mariana takes a sip of coffee, picks up her pastry to take a
 bite.

Later

Arben comes out of the kitchen. He has on an apron stained
 with baking ingredients. He sits a tray of Baklava on the
 table. Niko examines it.

NIKO

(to Mariana)

Oh, this looks nice. Baklava is hard to make. You over cook it, it is ruined. You don't bake it properly, the phyllo dough can be soggy. Let's see how Arben did.

Arben has already cut the Baklava into triangular shaped pieces.

NIKO (CONT'D)

Adelina, come and taste.

Adelina sits. Niko motions for Arben to sit. Niko grabs a piece, takes a bite. Mariana and Adelina both take a bite. They all have delighted looks on their faces.

MARIANA

This is so rich.

NIKO

This is perfect, Arben. What a magnificent flavor.

ARBEN

It is a cream baklava. It was one of my father's specialties.

Everyone grabs a second piece.

NIKO

You're hired. Can you start tomorrow? I need a baker, but could use someone to help out in the cafe as well.

Arben gives Mariana an uncertain look.

MARIANA

I can drop you off at the bus stop on my way to work until we figure out transportation.

ARBEN

Ok, yes, then I accept.

NIKO

I have some paperwork for you to fill out. You are welcome to stay, Mariana. Enjoy some more coffee and this wonderful baklava.

MARIANA

I've got to get to the office.

ARBEN

I can take the bus back home.

NIKO

No, no. We are closed for the day.
Once you are done with the
paperwork, I can take you home.

ARBEN

You are sure?

NIKO

Of course. It will give us a chance
to talk, to get to know each other
better.

MARIANA

Then it's settled.
(beat, to Arben)
Congratulations.

ARBEN

Thank you.

MARIANA

It was so nice to meet you both.
Arben, I will see you later.

Mariana grabs another piece of baklava, heads out the door.

INT. MARIANA'S HOUSE, DINING ROOM - DAY

Mariana, Ugenia, Margaret, Dede, Glennis and Libby are sitting at table having lunch. Outside, Arben is mowing the lawn. His shirt is stuffed in his back pocket. He grabs the shirt, wipes down his face and body, stuffs it back into his pocket. He stops mowing, goes to a flower bed, starts pulling weeds. The ladies watch him from the kitchen window.

GLENNIS

What is he doing?

MARIANA

He said he doesn't want to just
stay here for free. He's helping me
around the house.

UGENIA

My heavens. You're an oak. I just want a little piece of him, like sneaking candy from the candy store.

DEDE

Sometimes you feel like a nut. I want some of that candy too, mami.

MARIANA

Do I need to remind you both that he is only 20.

UGENIA

Let's see, in 20 years he'll be 40 and I'll be 80. You think I have a chance?

DEDE

If Cher can do it you can too, baby.

LIBBY

How are things working out?

MARIANA

He's a young man with a lot to learn about life. But he seems to be settling in. He got a job yesterday.

LIBBY

Oh, that's good news.

MARGARET

What is he doing? Working in a club?

MARIANA

No, he's working at a bakery.

DEDE

I'd like to see his dough rise.

MARIANA

Oh my goodness. What am I going to do with ladies?

MARGARET

I can't believe you spent all that money flying him here. Lots of kids out there like him.

(MORE)

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Runaways, broken homes. You can't save them all. What difference does it make?

MARIANA

It's making a difference to him.

The ladies consider Arben for a moment. Then Ugenia changes the subject.

UGENIA

You ready for Jason to get hitched?

MARIANA

Lainy is a wonderful young woman. I'm happy for Jason. I just have to try my best not to cry the entire wedding.

UGENIA

Girl, you were a mess at Seth's wedding.

MARIANA

I'm going to try to do better.

Ugenia pulls out several wedding planning books.

UGENIA

Well, we can't stop you from crying like a fool, but we can at least help you plan.

MARGARET

Isn't the bride's family supposed to be doing this?

MARIANA

Lainy's mom died when she was young. Her father doesn't know what to do.

UGENIA

You're being nice. The man is clueless.

MARIANA

I'm stepping in to help.

GLENNIS

More wine?

DEDE

Absolutely.

Glennis pours wine for everyone as Ugenia opens the books.

MARIANA

Ohh, I really like this.

Mariana points to a flower arrangement in one of the books.

LIBBY

That is pretty.

DEDE

Let me see it. I've been married
three times. I'll tell you if its
tacky or not.

The ladies conversation fades into the background. CLOSE IN on Margaret who is watching Arben with a look of desperate desire she is trying to hide.

INT. NIKO'S CAFE, REAR - MORNING

Silent Scene: Arben has several large trays in front of him with different unbaked pastries. Niko removes several loaves of bread from the ovens as Arben starts to load up the ovens with his pastries.

CUT TO:

INT. NIKO'S CAFE, FRONT - MORNING

Silent Scene: Niko flips a sign on the door to open. There is already a line outside waiting to get in. People load in, they buy bread, get breakfast sandwiches, coffee and pastries. Niko and Adelina are behind the counter serving customers.

CUT TO:

Silent Scene: Arben is serving people inside the café and cleaning tables after they leave. He is a big hit. Niko is watching him with a satisfied look from behind the counter.

INT. NIKO'S CAFE, FRONT - LATE AFTERNOON

Niko walks to the door, locks it, flips the sign to closed. Arben is cleaning a table as Niko approaches and hands him a check.

ARBEN

This is my first paycheck in
America!

(MORE)

ARBEN (CONT'D)

(beat, looking at the
check)

This is not what we agreed on, sir.
It is too much.

NIKO

Please call me Niko, Arben. We are
countrymen. I threw in some extra.
You deserve it. The pastries and
desserts are selling like hot
cakes.

ARBEN

Hot cakes?

NIKO

Yes, it is an American expression.

Mariana's car pulls up outside. Niko watches as she
approaches the café. She enters.

MARIANA

Hello there.

NIKO

Hello, Mariana. You look lovely
today.

MARIANA

Thank you.
(beat, to Arben)
You ready?

ARBEN

Yes, yes. But I need to make one
stop first.

Arben proudly holds up his check.

MARIANA

That's wonderful. We can swing by
the bank and get an account opened
up for you.

NIKO

(to Mariana)
And I have something for you too.
One moment, please.

Niko disappears into the rear, returns with a white bakery
box filled with croissant breads.

NIKO (CONT'D)

These are two of my best sellers.
One is a sun-dried tomato, the
other is prosciutto and cheese.

MARIANA

They look amazing. Thank you.

Mariana takes the box, looks shyly at Niko. She suddenly realizes he's attracted to her, doesn't know how to respond.

MARIANA (CONT'D)

Well, thank you again, for
everything.

NIKO

Of course.

ARBEN

I will see you tomorrow. Thank you,
sir, Niko. Thank you.

Mariana and Arben leave with Arben grasping his first check.

EXT. STREET IN FRONT OF BANK - LATE AFTERNOON

Mariana and Arben walk out of the bank.

ARBEN

Thank you for co-signing for me.

MARIANA

Having your own bank account is a
first step.

ARBEN

And I can wire funds to my family
in Albania. I can't believe this. I
am actually doing it. Making a
career for myself.

MARIANA

Yes, you are.

At the car, Arben opens the door for Mariana. He is beyond excited.

INT. MARIANA'S CAR - LATE AFTERNOON

Arben has an ear to ear smile as the Boston scenery goes by.

MARIANA

Have you considered applying for citizenship?

ARBEN

Here? In the US?

MARIANA

Sure. You're working now and you're taking classes to get your GED. There are other classes you would need to take, but I think you could handle them.

ARBEN

I never thought about it. An American citizen. Would I have to give up my citizenship in Albania?

MARIANA

No, you could have dual citizenship.

ARBEN

How do I do this?

MARIANA

We can talk about it over dinner.

INT. MARIANA'S HOUSE, DINING ROOM - EVENING

Mariana and Arben finish dinner.

ARBEN

That was really good, thank you.

MARIANA

You're welcome.

Arben collects the dishes, rinses them off, puts them in the dishwasher.

ARBEN

I can't wait to have some face time with my family. I want to tell them the good news.

INT. MARIANA'S HOUSE, ARBEN'S ROOM - EARLY MORNING

Arben is in front of his laptop. He opens up Zoom, makes a video call.

JOSIF BAJRAMI (mid-20s) brother, ARDIT BAJRAMI (11) brother, TEUTA BAJRAMI (7) sister, DEA BAJRAMI (5) sister, are gathered around a computer, on video, in Albania.

ARBEN

Hey, how are you?

ALL THE KIDS

Good.

ARDIT

We miss you.

ARBEN

I miss you so much too.

ARDIT

How is America? What are you doing for work?

ARBEN

I am doing the same thing papa did, baking.

DEA

Are you making the Pacavure?

ARBEN

Yes. I am making so many different types of pastries and desserts. They are selling out every day.

TEUTA

When are we going to see you?

ARBEN

You are seeing me now.

TEUTA

It's not the same.

ARBEN

I'm going to work really hard and get my citizenship here. Then I'll get a house and we can all be together again. Would you like that?

ALL THE KIDS

We want to come, we want to come and see you!

The kids jump up and down with excitement.

ARBEN

Did you get the things I sent you?

ALL THE KIDS

Yes!

Dea holds up a baby doll.

ARBEN

I can't wait until I can see you in person again. It is going to be soon, ok.

DEA

Ok, but don't wait too long cause I miss you.

ARBEN

I miss you all and love you so much.

JOSIF

(to the kids)

Ok, you all go and play. I need to talk to your brother.

ALL THE KIDS

Love You!

Dea blows Arben a kiss. The kids run into the other room.

JOSIF

Sounds like things are going well for you in America.

ARBEN

It is going very well. Did You get the money I sent?

JOSIF

It's a third of what you usually send.

ARBEN

I'm just getting started here. It's going to take me a little time to make the kind of money I made in Prague.

JOSIF

We don't have a little more time, Arben. I need to get them ready for school.

(MORE)

JOSIF (CONT'D)

Dea needs to go to the dentist.
She's got a tooth that's bothering
her.

ARBEN

I'm doing the best I can. I'm
looking for a second job. I just
haven't found anything yet.

JOSIF

Why don't you ask that woman you're
tapping for a loan?

ARBEN

It's not like that.

JOSIF

What is it then? You run off to
America with some woman you met in
a bar and you leave me here with
all the responsibility.

ARBEN

I'm doing this for all of us. I
just need time to make it work.

JOSIF

We don't have time, Arben. They
need stuff now. Not months from now
or a year from now, right now.

ARBEN

Ok, ok. I will come up with
something. I'll get you the money,
I promise.

JOSIF

Other than that, things are good?

ARBEN

Yes. There are so many
opportunities here for men like us.
Niko, the guy I work for, he came
here from Albania with nothing. Now
he has his own business.

Josif looks tired. You can see the pressure he is under in
his eyes.

JOSIF

I'd better get going. I
told the kids I'd take them to the
park.

ARBEN

Love you.

JOSIF

Love you too, little brother.

Arben ends the call. He has a troubled look on his face.

INT. MARIANA'S HOUSE, ENTRYWAY - MORNING

Mariana answers the door to Niko. He is wearing a Niko's cafe shirt.

MARIANA

Good morning, come in.

Niko enters.

NIKO

You have a beautiful home, Mariana.

MARIANA

Thank you.

(beat)

Arben should be down any moment.
Thank you for giving him the extra
work.

NIKO

It is my pleasure. Trust me,
Adelina and I can use the help.

Niko looks around, sees he and Mariana are alone.

NIKO (CONT'D)

Mariana, would you like to have
dinner with me?

Arben comes bounding down the stairs. He also has on a Niko's cafe shirt.

ARBEN

(to Niko)

Thank you for giving me this
opportunity.

NIKO

We have a lot of events we cater. I
can offer you extra work whenever
you want it.

ARBEN

I'll take it.

NIKO

Good, it would be a tremendous assistance to me. Adelina is in the car. Can you give me a moment with Mariana?

Arben glances at Mariana. She nods approval.

ARBEN

Sure.

Arben leaves reluctantly, glances back one time before he heads outside.

NIKO

I would like to make dinner for you Saturday, at my home.

MARIANA

You're home?

NIKO

Mariana, I am a man of old fashioned values and faith. When I say dinner, I only mean dinner. I give you my word as gentleman.

MARIANA

Ok, dinner sounds nice.

Ugenia peaks in the front door.

UGENIA

Hey.

MARIANA

Come in. Niko, this is Ugenia. Ugenia, this is Arben's boss.

UGENIA

The baker. Wonderful to meet you.

NIKO

You as well.

Margaret, Dede, Glennis and Libby enter.

MARIANA

This is Margaret, Dede, Glennis and Libby. This is Niko, Arben's boss.
(beat, to Niko)
We're doing some wedding planning.

NIKO

Ah, I see.

Dede gives Niko an appreciative look.

DEDE

Well, hello there.

NIKO

Hello. It is a pleasure to meet all of you. If you will excuse me, I have an event to cater.

MARIANA

I can pick Arben up at the cafe later.

NIKO

No, no, I can bring him home. Then, I can give you my address. Have a wonderful day, Mariana, ladies.

LADIES

Nice to meet you. Bye.

Nico walks out.

UGENIA

What's this about him giving you his address? Don't think I didn't hear that.

DEDE

Arben, now Niko. Mami, you have a harem up in here.

MARIANA

Oh gosh, it's not like that.

The ladies follow Mariana into the dining room.

INT. MARIANA'S HOUSE, DINING ROOM - MORNING

Mariana disappears, returns with a tray of sandwiches. Dede pulls a bottle of wine out of her bag.

DEDE

You got glasses?

Mariana disappears again, returns with glasses. The ladies sit around the table. Ugenia pulls books out of her bag.

UGENIA

We're looking at cakes today.

DEDE

Nobody eats wedding cake. The bride and groom will cut the cake, they'll take one bite, then you'll have cake in your fridge for six weeks.

LIBBY

Ignore her, lets see that book.

DEDE

Forget the cake. I want to know about that baker. He single?

UGENIA

Down chihuahua, he invited Mariana to his house for dinner. I overheard it as I was eavesdropping outside the door.

MARGARET

Dinner at his house? He's just looking to get laid. Take your pepper spray.

GLENNIS

Why would you say something like that?

DEDE

What's wrong with getting laid? Get you a little something, something. Why not?

LIBBY

I think its wonderful. From what you told us he sounds like a good man.

DEDE

He probably kneads dough all day long. I bet he's got great hands.

LIBBY

I think she needs to get to know him first before he's doing anything with his hands.

DEDE

You need to learn to live a little. We're grown ass women.

LIBBY

Living doesn't mean jumping into bed with every man you meet. I want a loving relationship too. But I want a man that's willing to commit.

UGENIA

That's right girl. He better put a ring on it before he gets to knead my dough.

GLENNIS

I agree. From a woman that's getting her dough kneaded all the time, if he's not willing to make a solid commitment, its not worth it.

MARGARET

Having the ring doesn't guarantee happiness, trust me.

LIBBY

But it shows a man's character. I say go to dinner, enjoy yourself. But let him know that the night ends after dinner.

UGENIA

And have that pepper spray in your purse ready to use, girl. Just in case he tries to get too frisky.

DEDE

And some condoms. I've heard Albanian men are great in bed. A little pig in the blanket ain't going to hurt you.

UGENIA

How do you know about Albanian men? You been with every nationality on the planet?

DEDE

The world is a buffet of men. I need to try a little of everything before I die.

MARGARET

Yeah and your going to catch a little of everything before you die.

MARIANA

I'm completely terrified now.

UGENIA

Everyone Stop. Just let the girl go out to dinner. Libby, Glennis, yes! Dede, no. Hell no. Mariana, just go and have a good time, girl. Now, let's look at those cakes.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING CONFERENCE ROOM - LATE MORNING

Arben is helping Niko unpack food. Adelina is in another part of the conference room setting up a drinking station.

ARBEN

What was that about?

NIKO

What?

ARBEN

With Mariana?

NIKO

I asked her if she would like to have dinner with me.

ARBEN

And?

NIKO

She said yes.

Arben stops what he's doing, gives Niko his full attention.

ARBEN

I have to ask you what your intentions are, sir.

NIKO

No bad intentions. Just dinner and maybe some dancing afterward if she chooses.

ARBEN

Dinner and dancing, that's it?

NIKO

Yes, that is it.

ARBEN

I don't want some guy trying to take advantage of her. I don't care if your my boss.

NIKO

I have no intention of taking advantage of her, Arben.

ARBEN

I know how guys are.

NIKO

Not all men are like this. You have my word, I will be a perfect gentleman.

ARBEN

No funny business?

NIKO

No. Just dinner and dancing.

ARBEN

With respect, sir. Mariana, she is so beautiful. How can you just be around her and not want to...you know...be with her?

NIKO

Have you ever been with a woman that you truly loved?

ARBEN

I've been with lots of women.

NIKO

I am not talking about just having sex. I am talking about making love to a woman that you are going to spend the rest of your life with.

ARBEN

No, I have not.

NIKO

That, Arben, that is worth waiting for.

Arben nods, finally satisfied. He continues unpacking and setting up the food. He steals glances at Niko who is doing the same, thinking about what Niko said to him.

INT. NIKO'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Niko leads Mariana into the living room. She takes a seat.

MARIANA
Dinner was marvelous. Thank you.

NIKO
I will be right back.

Niko disappears, returns with a tray holding two ramekins and a lighter. He walks to the bar, grabs a couple of glasses and a bottle of wine.

NIKO (CONT'D)
Now, for the finishing touch.

He grabs the lighter. Mariana's eyes go to his hands. CLOSE IN on Niko's hands. Mariana is obviously thinking of the "kneading dough" conversation. She giggles.

NIKO (CONT'D)
What?

MARIANA
Oh, nothing.

NIKO
Are you ready?

MARIANA
Sure.

Niko lights the creme brulee, it burns for a moment, then he blows out the flame. He pours the wine. Mariana takes a taste of dessert, gets a heavenly look.

MARIANA (CONT'D)
Oh, Niko. You truly have a gift.

NIKO
Thank you, I'm glad you like it.

They dig into the dessert.

MARIANA
Where's Adelina?

NIKO
Out with friends.

MARIANA
Can I ask you something?

NIKO
Of course?

MARIANA
Adelina's mother?

NIKO
When we moved here from Albania,
Adelina was just a baby. We had
nothing. I was working two jobs to
make ends meet.

MARIANA
We all have to start somewhere.

NIKO
She was a beautiful young woman.
She got stars in her eyes, wanted
more than what we had. She moved to
California to become an actress.

MARIANA
Oh, goodness. I'm sorry, Niko.

NIKO
Adelina and I have done just fine
with the two of us. What about you?
Your husband?

MARIANA
He ran off with his secretary.

NIKO
It seems we have both had some
tragedy in the relationship
department.

MARIANA
It's never what you imagine when
you say your vows. You think it's
going to be forever. Then,
suddenly, everything falls apart.

NIKO
I think things happen for a reason.

MARIANA
Me too. It's just tragic.

NIKO
So, no man in your life now vying
for your affections?

MARIANA

No.

NIKO

That is hard to believe.

MARIANA

At our age you still deal with a lot of immaturity or other issues.

NIKO

I have had the same.

MARIANA

I finally gave up. I decided to take care of my boys and just work on me.

NIKO

Me too. Until a beautiful, compassionate, lovely woman walked into my cafe.

MARIANA

Who is this woman? You should probably go after her.

NIKO

I'm working on it.

Niko lifts up a glass, they do a toast.

NIKO (CONT'D)

Now, some dancing?

MARIANA

I'm willing to try anything.

NIKO

Have you ever done the tango?

MARIANA

I've seen it, it's beautiful. But I've never tried to do it. I don't know if I have that much grace.

Niko stands, holds out his hand. Mariana takes his hand. He leads her to a home gym/dance studio.

INT. NIKO'S HOUSE, GYM/DANCE STUDIO - NIGHT

There is work out equipment on one side, an open space for dancing on the other. Niko has a phonograph and speakers.

MARIANA
This is quite the set up.

NIKO
I teach.

MARIANA
Tango.

NIKO
Yes. I can show you.

MARIANA
Ok.

Niko walks to the phonograph, puts on a record. He holds out his hand. Mariana shyly approaches.

NIKO
Follow my lead.

Niko steps, Mariana steps. He steps again, she follows. He starts to lead her in a tango dance. She picks up quick.

NIKO (CONT'D)
You are a quick learner.

MARIANA
I like it.

Niko leads, Mariana follows. The scene fades out with Niko and Mariana talking and dancing.

INT. KEYSTONE MARKETING, FRONT ENTRANCE - MORNING

Mariana enters the building with her brief case. Margaret is waiting.

MARGARET
Congratulations.

MARIANA
For what?

MARGARET
The Prague deal closed. Full marketing package.

MARIANA
How do you know?

MARGARET

I work in accounting. We're the first one's to see the money.

MARIANA

That's great news. I was hoping we'd get that deal. We have to celebrate. Dinner on me tonight.

MARGARET

Speaking of dinner, how did things go with your baker?

MARIANA

It was nice. Very refreshing.

MARGARET

Was he on his best behavior?

MARIANA

Dinner and dancing, just like he said.

MARGARET

A man that keeps his word. That's almost impossible these days.

MARIANA

I was pleasantly surprised. I think he's a keeper.

(beat)

And he does have nice hands.

The two women laugh as they head for the elevator.

INT. KEYSTONE MARKETING, MARIANA'S OFFICE - MORNING

Silent Scene: Mariana is in her office on the phone. Her assistant JANET DEVINE (30s) walks in, places some papers on her desk.

CUT TO:

INT. KEYSTONE MARKETING, MEETING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Silent Scene: Mariana is having lunch with a potential client, MEN and WOMEN (various ages). She hands them some marketing information. She is very confident.

CUT TO:

INT. KEYSTONE MARKETING, CONFERENCE ROOM - AFTERNOON

Silent Scene: Mariana and Margaret are in a meeting. The CEO, STEVE DANBERRY (60s) is listening to Mariana, nodding his head approvingly. At the rear of the table Margaret is watching Mariana. She has a look tinged with jealousy.

INT. MARIANA'S HOUSE, BATHROOM - AFTERNOON

Arben is under the bathroom sink. He removes an old pipe, puts in a new one, screws everything tight. The doorbell rings.

INT. MARIANA'S HOUSE, ENTRYWAY - AFTERNOON

Arben opens the door to Margaret.

ARBEN

Hello, Mrs. Russo.

Margaret lets herself in. She looks around.

INT. MARIANA'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

ARBEN

Mariana is out shopping with Lainey for the wedding. She won't be home for several hours.

MARGARET

That's good. It will give us some time.

Margaret approaches Arben, runs her hand over his chest, tries to remove his shirt.

ARBEN

What are you doing?

MARGARET

What do you think?

ARBEN

I can't.

MARGARET

Why not? Isn't that what you do? Sleep with women for money?

ARBEN

How do you know about that?

MARGARET

I saw you and Mariana in Prague.

ARBEN

I'm not doing that anymore.

MARGARET

You want me to pay you?

Arben walks to the door, opens it.

ARBEN

Please leave.

MARGARET

You're kicking me out of the house?
Do you know how many times I've
been here, way before you came
along.

ARBEN

Mrs. Russo, I don't want any
trouble.

MARGARET

I get it. You're Mariana's boy. All
that holier than thou talk and
she's screwing you on the side.

ARBEN

There is nothing going on between
us. She is a better woman than you.
Please leave. I won't disrespect
her house.

Margaret leaves in a huff.

INT. MARIANA'S HOUSE, ARBEN'S ROOM - EVENING

Arben opens his computer, makes the Zoom call. Josif appears on video alone.

ARBEN

Where are the kids? Is everything
ok?

JOSIF

Giyshi and gjyshja took them. They
wanted to give me a break.

ARBEN

Did you get the money I sent to
you?

JOSIF

I did.

Josif looks stressed and disappointed.

ARBEN

I'm working at the bakery. I'm helping Niko with events too. I sent you everything, even my tips.

JOSIF

I barely made the mortgage this month and Dea has a dentist appointment that's going to cost a small fortune. But that's fine. As long as you are doing ok and having a good time.

ARBEN

Why do you say it like that?

JOSIF

Not all of us can forget about our responsibilities and move to another country.

ARBEN

Do you know what I did for that money brother?

JOSIF

My finance walked out on me when she found out I was going to have custody of the kids.

ARBEN

I know.

JOSIF

And what are you complaining about? Lots of men would die to do what you did.

ARBEN

I want to have a business like Niko and maybe a wife and family some day. I can't do that if I'm a prostitute.

JOSIF

There is no other job that's going to pay an uneducated man like you what you were making in Prague. I never forced you to do it.

ARBEN

I am not blaming you. It was my choice. But I don't want to do it anymore. I am building a life here. People respect me now. I'm getting an education.

JOSIF

Do what you have to. These problems are far away from you now. I will figure something out. I have to go.

ARBEN

I love you.

Josif ends the call. Arben sits in front of the computer with a crushed look on his face. He logs into an escort service web site. Arben is very emotional as he updates his contact information to his US phone and email. A button pops up that says "Reactivate Your Account". Arben pauses a long moment, looks at the provocative pictures of himself. He hits the reactivation button.

INT. KEYSTONE MARKETING, MARIANA'S OFFICE - MORNING

Mariana is greeted by a massive arrangement of red roses. Janet walks in.

MARIANA

Where did these come from?

JANET

A handsome gentlemen dropped them off. Said his name was Niko.

Mariana reads the card. She gets a look of absolute joy.

JANET (CONT'D)

Mr. Danberry said he wanted to see you in his office as soon as you arrived.

MARIANA

Thank you, Janet.

Mariana takes a sniff of the roses, then heads out of her office.

INT. KEYSTONE MARKETING, CEO'S OFFICE - MORNING

Steve is sitting behind his desk in a massive corner office. Margaret stands up when Mariana enters.

MARIANA
(to Margaret)
Hey.

Margaret leaves, doesn't meet Mariana's eyes or respond.

STEVE
Sit down, Mariana.

Mariana takes the seat opposite her boss.

STEVE (CONT'D)
I don't know how to say this so I'm
going to come right out with it.
We're letting you go.

MARIANA
Why?

STEVE
This firm has been in business for
over 30 years. We have established
a reputation as being one of the
best firms in the industry.
Reputation is everything.

MARIANA
I understand that, Steve.

STEVE
Margaret informed me you picked up
a male prostitute in Prague on your
last business trip and you brought
him home with you. What you do in
your private life is your business.
But this is unacceptable behavior
on company time. It's a breach of
confidence and integrity.

MARIANA
I've been here for 10 years. I've
never done anything to harm the
reputation of this company. I'm
Arben's sponsor in the United
States. Nothing more.

STEVE
You met him in Prague?

MARIANA
Yes.

STEVE
Is he or is he not a prostitute?

MARIANA

That's personal. I'm not going to talk about someone else's private life with you or anyone else.

STEVE

Margaret's been with this company 20 years. I know the two of you are friends, but she's a loyal employee that doesn't want to see this firm's reputation damaged.

MARIANA

So that's it?

STEVE

I'm afraid so. A guard is in your office now. He'll watch you pack up your things and escort you out of the building.

Mariana rises, still stunned.

INT. KEYSTONE MARKETING, MARGARET'S OFFICE - MORNING

Mariana walks in and slams the door.

MARIANA

How could you? I thought we were friends?

MARGARET

I thought we were too. Until I found out you have a male whore living in your house.

MARIANA

Who told you this? And don't tell me Ugenia.

MARGARET

I saw him follow you guys out of the club. I was worried, so I walked out too. I saw you pick him up after Ugenia left.

MARIANA

Why didn't you come to me? After all these years I deserve the benefit of the doubt.

MARGARET

After all these years why didn't you trust me?

MARIANA

I wanted Arben to have a fresh start. I wanted him to leave his past behind.

MARGARET

Well, I'm sure you're enjoying the payback.

MARIANA

There's nothing going on between Arben and I. You should have talked to me first.

Mariana walks out of Margaret's office.

EXT. KEYSTONE MARKETING - MORNING

Mariana is heading towards the parking lot as MR. WATANABE (70s) is walking towards the building.

MR. WATANABE

Mariana, where are you going? We have a meeting.

MARIANA

Mr. Watanabe, hello. You'll be meeting with Steve today. I was...I was just let go.

MR. WATANABE

Let go?

MARIANA

Long story.

MR. WATANABE

You are the reason my company works with this firm. What are you going to do?

MARIANA

I don't know. I really haven't had time to think about it.

Mr. Watanabe pulls out a business card, writes down his personal phone number.

MR. WATANABE

Call me. I want to know where you land.

Mariana takes the card.

MARIANA

Thank you. I'll do that.

MR. WATANABE

This is ridiculous. I'm going to give Steve a piece of my mind. You should start your own business. I will be your first client.

MARIANA

(whispering)

My own business?

(beat)

I'll call you. Thank you.

Mr. Watanabe bows, she returns the gesture as best she can with the box and flowers in her hands.

MR. WATANABE

Nice flowers.

Mr. Watanabe walks away heading towards the office.

EXT. UGENIA'S EVENT VENUE - AFTERNOON

Mariana and Ugenia are seated at a table outside.

UGENIA

What a bitch.

MARIANA

I just don't understand why.

UGENIA

George is having an affair. He's forcing the sell of the house so he can get digs with his new girlfriend.

MARIANA

I know how that feels. Poor Margaret.

UGENIA

On top of that, Theo knocked up his girlfriend and they found marijuana in Chelsea's purse.

(MORE)

UGENIA (CONT'D)

So, she's having problems with the kids too. But that's no excuse for what she did to you.

MARIANA

Misery loves company I guess. I'm sorry to hear about all of her family troubles.

UGENIA

She's still a big old bitch in my book. What are you going to do?

MARIANA

I don't know. But I can't worry about that now, my son is getting married.

UGENIA

You bringing smooth, hot and handsome to the wedding?

MARIANA

Niko is driving his mother upstate to live with his sister and her husband. He already rented the truck and made plans.

UGENIA

What about Arben?

MARIANA

He'll be there.

UGENIA

Girl, I want to steal some cookies from that cookie jar.

MARIANA

Ugenia, what am I going to do with you?

UGENIA

You know I'm joking, girl.
(beat, suddenly serious)
It's just, it gets lonely sometimes, being single at 60. When I was 20 I would walk into a room and men would notice. Now I walk into a room and nobody notices.

MARIANA

Maybe your walking into the wrong rooms.

UGENIA

Maybe. I never thought I'd be divorced, single and alone at 60.

MARIANA

None of us got married thinking our marriage would end.

UGENIA

What do you do with the loneliness?

MARIANA

I filled it up with other things. This is the prime of your life. Your successful, beautiful...

UGENIA

Uhhh..love goggles.

MARIANA

I mean it. You're a beautiful woman. It may be a little harder to date at our age, but just be patient. Stop putting your life on hold looking for a relationship and just enjoy your life. When you least expect it, you'll meet someone.

UGENIA

Hopefully he won't be twenty.

MARIANA

Nowdays you never know. Things are a lot different then when we got married.

UGENIA

Girl, I don't even know what I'd do with a man that age. I'd probably break a hip.

Mariana and Ugenia laugh themselves to tears.

UGENIA (CONT'D)

You ready to do one last walk through?

MARIANA

Yeah, lets do it.

Mariana and Ugenia get up, start to walk around the venue.

EXT. UGENIA'S EVENT VENUE - EARLY EVENING

Mariana is wearing a beautiful dress. Arben has on his tuxedo. Arben escorts Mariana. The venue is beautifully decorated for the wedding. Ugenia is the entrance greeting the guests. Mariana's group of lady friends are all already there except Margaret. Ugenia and Mariana hug.

MARIANA

This looks amazing.

UGENIA

Only the best for you and my boy!

(to Arben)

Hello, Arben.

ARBEN

Hello, Ugenia.

Remeny approaches, gives his mother a big hug, shakes hands with Arben.

MARIANA

How's he doing?

REMENY

He's pacing.

MARIANA

I'd better go and check on him.

Mariana walks away.

ARBEN

Thank you for including me in the festivities.

REMENY

You're family now. We're gonna drag you to every family event. Wait until Becca and Seth have their baby. They'll have you playing quarterback as that little sucker pops out.

ARBEN

Are you joking?

REMENY

No. I was there when Dalton was born. Seth filmed it. I saw everything. I'm traumatized for life.

The rest of the Mariana family gang arrives. They greet each other, include Arben.

SONJA
How's our boy doing?

REMENY
Looked like he was gonna pass out.
He's gonna need mouth to mouth.

SONJA
I'll let Lainey do that.

SETH
He's just nervous. We'll go and
check on him.

Seth, Jaques and Benjamin head towards the grooms quarters.

REBECCA
Need to sit.

SONJA
Let's get you off your feet.

Sonja and the ladies sit down with Rebecca. Remeny stays with Arben. Arben sees Remeny grimace, follows his gaze. WILLIAM "WILL" FISCHER (50s) and SOPHIA FISCHER (20s) arrive. Sophia is in a designer outfit, nails and hair done, designer jewelry, pink tinted glasses with a groomed poodle in her arms.

REMENY
My dad and his trophy wife.

ARBEN
He left Mariana for her? I can't
believe it.

REMENY
Yeah, he definitely downgraded. We
don't talk anymore.

ARBEN
What do you think about Mariana and
Niko?

REMENY
I like Niko. He seems like a great
guy. It's just freaking me out a
little.

ARBEN
How?

REMENY

I never thought of my mom like that. Dating, falling in love, maybe even...you know.

ARBEN

I think that is the way society looks at women. It does them a disservice in a way.

REMENY

I know, it's crappy. I just don't want to think of her doing anything but mom stuff.

ARBEN

The older a woman gets, people start to see her as a mother, a nurturer, a wife. They forget that underneath it all, there is a woman too. Sometimes a very passionate woman.

REMENY

Dude, I don't even want to know about that.

ARBEN

I like older women.

REMENY

Why?

ARBEN

Most of my clients are...were older.

REMENY

You gotta spill man. I want details.

ARBEN

I never kiss and tell.

REMENY

You gotta give me something. What was it like?

ARBEN

Not as glamorous as it may seem. But I can tell you I found older women to be more grounded, more mature.

(MORE)

ARBEN (CONT'D)

And they know what they want. In life and in bed. It's some of the best sex I ever had.

REMENY

Damn, I've been doing this all wrong. How much older?

ARBEN

Forties, fifties, even older than that. There's no game playing.

REMENY

Really?

ARBEN

They're already successful. They've made all the stupid mistakes we make when were younger. They're at a stage where they just want to enjoy life.

REMENY

There's this woman at the bank. She's always kinda flirty with me. I think she's maybe thirty-ish.

ARBEN

Ask her out. You might be surprised.

REMENY

Yeah, my last girlfriend and I broke up a week ago.

ARBEN

Why?

REMENY

She was hot, but sex was awful. It was like I was supposed to be happy she was even letting me touch her. She laid there like a corpse.

ARBEN

That isn't good.

REMENY

She was dumb as a doorknob too.

ARBEN

How old was she?

REMENY

My age.

ARBEN

There you go. My point is proven.

REMENY

You ever had clients that were married?

ARBEN

No, I never wanted to be that guy.

REMENY

How could you tell?

ARBEN

You can see it on the hand, where a ring has been. It takes time to heal once the ring is removed, like if someone gets a divorce. I avoided it whenever I saw it.

REMENY

You had like a whole code of ethics and everything.

ARBEN

Not all guys, just me.

REMENY

I wish Sophia was like you.

Several PEOPLE (50s-60s) approach William, start a conversation. Sophia is not involved, she's looking the other way, looks bored. William looks across the event. See's Remeny.

REMENY (CONT'D)

Lets hit the grazing table.

Remeny walks towards a massive grazing table, Arben follows. Ugenia is checking to make sure everything is in order as they approach.

ARBEN

Ms. Ugenia. This place is wonderful. You are working here?

UGENIA

This is my place.

ARBEN

Your place? You own this?

UGENIA

Yes, and another one across town. I do weddings, bar mitzvahs, birthdays, quince eras. Whatever you celebrate, I accommodate.

Ugenia's ASSISTANT (any age), runs up.

ASSISTANT

It's time.

UGENIA

You two had better grab your seats.

EXT. UGENIA'S EVENT VENUE - DUSK

The sun is setting. Soft music is playing. Jason and Lainey cut the cake. They share a bite off the same slice. They put the slice on a plate. WEDDING GUESTS (various ages) clap and cheer. Dede turns to Ugenia.

DEDE

(whispering)

What did I tell you.

UGENIA

Shush!

EXT. UGENIA'S EVENT VENUE - NIGHT

People are dancing to disco music being played by a live band, eating and talking. Arben is standing beside Remeny eating cake. William approaches them.

WILLIAM

Hello, son.

REMENY

William.

WILLIAM

I wish you wouldn't call me that.

REMENY

Well, I wish you wouldn't have left us high and dry for Sophia, but we can't always get what we want in life.

ARBEN

I should leave you two alone.

REMENY

No, you were bound to meet sooner or later. William, this is Arben. He's with Mom.

Remeny hints at something more. William gives Arben a shocked looked.

REMENY (CONT'D)

Arben's from Albania. He and Mom met while she was traveling. He moved here...just for her.

WILLIAM

Well, Arben, nice to meet you.
(beat, to Remeny)
I just wanted to say hello. It's been a long time since we talked.

REMENY

Honestly, I haven't missed it.

WILLIAM

Well, it's good to see you, son.

William walks away from Remeny and Arben. Sophia, in the background, has noticed William talking to Arben and Remeny. She is still wearing her sunglasses at night and holding her poodle. She dips the glasses, gives Arben an appreciative look.

A Moment Later

Mariana is dancing with the ladies, having a wonderful time. William watches her in the distance with open longing and regret. Sophia is turned away from him, on her cell phone. Arben sees William watching Mariana.

A slow dance comes on. Arben walks to Mariana, offers his hand. They slow dance. Arben glances over at William, he looks distraught. Jason cuts in on the dance. Lainey is dancing with her FATHER (60s). Everyone claps as they start a mother/father/daughter/son dance. Arben heads to the restroom.

INT. UGENIA'S EVENT VENUE, RESTROOM - NIGHT

Arben comes out of the toilet. William is waiting.

WILLIAM

What's going on with you and Mariana?

ARBEN

She looks beautiful tonight doesn't she?

WILLIAM

Of course I think she's beautiful. I was married to her.

ARBEN

Your loss is my gain.

WILLIAM

What does that mean?

ARBEN

I never kiss and tell.

Arben gives William a manly slap on the back and a wink, leaves the bathroom.

EXT. UGENIA'S EVENT VENUE - NIGHT

William walks out of the bathroom behind Arben. He has a look like he's been hit by a freight train. William walks to Sophia, says something to her, they leave. Remeny approaches Arben.

REMENY

What happened?

ARBEN

I fed his fears. It might be wrong, but he deserves it after what he did to Mariana.

REMENY

I love you man.

INT. MARIANA'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Mariana and Arben, still in wedding clothes, walk into the living room from the entryway.

MARIANA

I wish I could say it wasn't true. But Seth does like to share all of the various milestones in his life. From playing football to having babies.

Arben's cell phone beeps. He checks the message. His composure changes.

ARBEN

I'm going to hang out with some friends tonight.

MARIANA

How do you have the energy? I'm beat. You want me to drop me off somewhere?

ARBEN

No, I can take the bus. You already had a big day.

MARIANA

It was special.

ARBEN

I'm going to be out late.

MARIANA

I don't mind. I'm a night owl. Call me if you need a ride home.

ARBEN

Ok.

Arben bounds up the stairs. Mariana looks after him. She senses something is going on.

INT. MARIANA'S HOUSE, STAIRS/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Arben has his small backpack. He walks downstairs, peeks to see where Mariana is. She is in the office/library. Arben rushes for the front door.

ARBEN

I'm heading out.

MARIANA (O.S.)

Ok, be safe out there.

EXT. STREET, BUSY PARTY DISTRICT - NIGHT

Arben jumps off a bus, walks down the blvd, dips into a gas station bathroom.

INT. GAS STATION BATHROOM - NIGHT

Arben walks into a stall. From the outside, his clothes are thrown over the bathroom stall door. When he exits the stall he looks like an American Gigolo.

He stuffs his street clothes into the backpack, brushes his teeth, combs his hair. He checks his appearance, leaves the bathroom.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Arben looks at his cell phone, brings up a picture. He looks around, sees TERESA (40s), the same woman in the picture. He approaches. She is dressed up with expensive jewelry.

ARBEN

Teresa? May I sit with you?

TERESA

You must be Arben. How did you recognize me?

ARBEN

From the picture you sent. But you are so much more beautiful in person.

TERESA

I've never done anything like this before.

Teresa looks very nervous. Arben flashes his smile, turns on the charm. Arben caresses her hand, kisses it.

ARBEN

It is ok. I promise I am going to take such good care of you beautiful Teresa.

TERESA

It's...ummm...still three hundred?

ARBEN

Yes, sweetheart.

TERESA

For how long?

ARBEN

I am all yours for as long as you want, beautiful lady. I am so ready for you, baby.

TERESA

I'm nervous.

ARBEN

You want to go somewhere more private?

TERESA

Yes. That sounds nice.

Arben stands, holds out his hand. She puts her hand in his. They leave the club together.

EXT. STREET - LATE NIGHT

Arben jumps off the bus on a deserted street. He runs into a convenience store.

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE - LATE NIGHT

Arben runs to the back of the store, bathrooms are situated down a hallway. He tries to open the bathroom doors, they're locked. He looks around, sees he's alone in the hallway, takes off his shirt, slips into the normal shirt. He takes off his pants. A MALE CUSTOMER (30s) walks up.

MALE CUSTOMER

What are you doing?

ARBEN

Get lost!

The man backs away. Arben sees him head to the counter. He talks to the cashier, points towards the bathroom. Arben quickly pulls on his other pants, stuffs the gigolo clothes in his backpack and rushes out of the store.

EXT. STREET - LATE NIGHT

Arben is running down the street towards the bus stop. The bus is already there, it pulls away.

EXT. STREET IN FRONT OF NIKO'S CAFE - LATE NIGHT

Arben walks up, stands in front of the cafe. It is quiet and dark. He goes around to the back, sits down at the back door. He pulls out his cell phone, sends a text to Mariana. CLOSE IN on Arben's cell phone.

ARBEN

(text to Mariana)

Staying at my friends house. I'll see you tomorrow.

MARIANA
 (return text)
 Is everything ok?

ARBEN
 (text to Mariana)
 Everything is fine. I'm just tired.

MARIANA
 (return text)
 Ok. Call me if you need anything.

Arben leans his head against the door, closes his eyes.

INT. NIKO'S FRIENDS DANCE STUDIO - EVENING

Mariana and Niko are close, their faces inches apart. The music starts. They do a sensual tango dance. They make a striking couple. The music stops. Niko leans in, they kiss.

NIKO
 I've been wanting to do that since
 we met.

MARIANA
 I'm glad you did.

NIKO
 Me too.

MARIANA
 (looking around)
 This is nice.

NIKO
 It is my best friends studio. I
 have a key.

Niko walks to the stereo, shuts it down.

NIKO (CONT'D)
 I'm famished. Let's go out to
 dinner.

MARIANA
 Ok.

NIKO
 I need to stop by the cafe first. I
 have a big event tomorrow and I
 need to make sure my dough is
 rising.

Mariana giggles, thinking about the dough conversation she had with the girls.

NIKO (CONT'D)

What?

MARIANA

Nothing. I just love your dedication.

NIKO

My clients expect nothing less.

Niko shuts off the lights. As they are walking out the door Mariana notices a large poster that says MILANGO in red letters. There are also details about the event.

MARIANA

It this a competition?

NIKO

No, it is a social gathering. People who love to tango and people who love to watch tango.

MARIANA

Do you have to be a professional?

NIKO

No, just a lover of dance.

MARIANA

Are you going?

NIKO

Maybe. It depends.

MARIANA

On what?

NIKO

I do not have a dance partner.

MARIANA

Sounds fun, count me in. If you want to that is.

NIKO

Of course I want to. I will sign us up.

Niko kisses Mariana on the cheek, they leave the dance studio.

INT. NIKO'S CAFE, REAR - EVENING

Niko is looking into a large freezer. Mariana is peeking over his shoulder.

NIKO

Look at that. Perfect.

(beat)

Let's have a little coffee before we go to dinner. I want to talk to you.

INT. NIKO'S CAFE, FRONT - EVENING

Mariana is sitting at a table watching the busy street outside and people walk by. Niko sits next to her, passes her a coffee. A MAN (any age), Albanian, knocks on the window, waves at Niko. Niko waves back.

MARIANA

You know everyone here.

NIKO

It is a tight knit community.

Niko places his hand on Mariana's. Gives her a serious look.

NIKO (CONT'D)

Talk to me.

MARIANA

About what?

NIKO

About what is going on with you.

MARIANA

I'm not used to this.

NIKO

What?

MARIANA

Being close to a man like this, sharing.

NIKO

Mariana, we are more than just friends at this point. If we want this to work, we need to be open with each other. Is it me?

MARIANA

Oh goodness no, Niko. You are a part of everything that is wonderful in my life right now.

NIKO

Then what it is?

MARIANA

I got fired.

NIKO

Fired? Why?

MARIANA

One of my best friends told my boss that something happened between Arben and I on company time.

NIKO

I am so sorry. But you are an amazing, brilliant woman. I think this means there is something better out there for you.

MARIANA

Then there's Arben. Something is going on with him.

NIKO

I have sensed it too.

MARIANA

Everything happened so fast, inviting Arben to come to America. I didn't think it through, how it would affect him and his family.

NIKO

You have done a wonderful thing for him, giving him this opportunity. Now it is his responsibility to make something out of it.

MARIANA

But he's so young.

NIKO

He is young, but he is still a man.

MARIANA

I want to help him but he's shutting me out.

NIKO

This is a new beginning for him. He needs to grasp it and run with it. We can't do that for him.

MARIANA

I just want him to succeed and I feel helpless right now.

NIKO

Arben told me about the other people you have helped. You have a beautiful heart, Mariana. What you have done for these people, it has changed their lives.

MARIANA

I'm not doing it for the glory.

NIKO

I know. And that is what makes it so beautiful. We will be here for Arben, you and I. But we can't live his life for him. Only he can do that.

Niko stands, walks away from Mariana into the rear of the cafe. He returns with a laptop.

NIKO (CONT'D)

Now, what are we going to do about your work situation? Have you thought of starting your own business?

MARIANA

We?

NIKO

Yes, we. I'll make more coffee and I'll call Luan. He owns the restaurant down the street. We can stay in and have some dinner while we work on this.

Mariana gets emotional as Niko gets up. He has his back to her as he makes the call and makes coffee.

NIKO (CONT'D)

Hey, Laun. It's Niko. I'm at the cafe. Can you have your guy bring me a couple of specials?

(beat)

Great! I'll tip him good.

Niko returns with the coffees, see's Mariana's emotional state.

NIKO (CONT'D)

Having your own business can be a scary because it's all on you. But you told me you were a top producer at your firm. Why not do this for yourself?

MARIANA

It's not that. Well, maybe a little. It is scary, to be my age and suddenly unemployed.

NIKO

What else?

MARIANA

William...every time I had an idea, he would tell me how ridiculous it was. He never supported anything I did.

(beat)

I'm sorry. I don't want to talk about him with you.

NIKO

We both have a lot of pain in our past. Sometimes we will need to talk about it, as long as we don't dwell on it.

Mariana gets up, sits in Niko's lap. Gives him a big kiss.

NIKO (CONT'D)

What was that for? Not that I'm complaining.

MARIANA

For being so wonderful.

Mariana and Niko kiss. As they are kissing some PEOPLE (20s), Albanian, walk buy. One of them knocks on the window.

ALBANIAN GUY

Way to go Niko!

The other people cheer, give them the thumbs up. Mariana and Niko laugh.

INT. MARIANA'S HOUSE, ARBEN'S ROOM - EVENING

Arben is sitting in front of his computer. He makes the Zoom call, Josif and all the kids are waiting.

ALL THE KIDS

Hello!

ARBEN

Hello, how are you.

ARDIT

We're good!

TEUTA

I got an A on my math test.

ARBEN

You're so smart. I'm proud of you.

ARDIT

I made the Futbol team.

ARBEN

That is wonderful brother. Josif will have to send me some pictures.

Dea opens her mouth. There is a tooth missing.

DEA

The dentist took my tooth. We put it under my pillow and the tooth fairy left me five dollars.

ARBEN

Oh my gosh. I can't believe it. What are you going to do with the five dollars?

DEA

I'm going to wait until I see you again, then we can go and get ice cream.

ARBEN

That sounds so wonderful. I can't wait.

JOSIF

I need to talk to Arben. You guys go and play, ok.

ALL THE KIDS

Ok. We love you!

ARBEN
I love you too.

Josif waits until the kids are gone.

JOSIF
How are things?

ARBEN
I'm good.

JOSIF
The lady, Mariana, she is there
with you?

ARBEN
She's down stairs.

JOSIF
She's not taking advantage of you
living there?

ARBEN
No. She is a good person.
(beat)
Did you get the money I sent?

Josef looks down and away. He is ashamed, can barely meet Arben's eyes.

JOSIF
I'm sorry little brother.

ARBEN
You said it yourself. We both have
to make sacrifices. Was it enough
for us to get caught up?

JOSIF
Yes.

ARBEN
Dea, the dentist? Were you able to
cover the bill?

JOSIF
The bill's paid in full.

ARBEN
Good. That's good.

Josif finally meets Arben's eyes. He looks very defeated and tired.

JOSIF

I'm glad things are going well for you in America.

ARBEN

I know it's not easy for you. As soon as I can, I will bring you all here. It will get better for us, I promise you this.

JOSIF

Ok little brother. I love you.

ARBEN

I love you too.

INT. MARIANA'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Arben walks down the stairs with his laptop. Mariana is sitting on the couch with her laptop.

ARBEN

Mariana?

MARIANA

Arben, hey there. You done with your family call?

ARBEN

Yes.

MARIANA

How are they?

ARBEN

They're doing good. The kids are getting so big.

MARIANA

They grow fast.

ARBEN

I'm going to study. Are you ok if I use the library?

MARIANA

Of course.

INT. MARIANA'S HOUSE, LIBRARY - EVENING

Arben sits down his laptop. He walks to a shelf, runs his hand over a set of old encyclopedias.

He notices a chess set sitting on a table. He gets a nostalgic look, delicately touches the pieces on the board. Arben grabs the chess board, carefully walks out of the library.

INT. MARIANA'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Mariana is typing on her computer when Arben enters. Her eyes light up when she sees the chessboard.

INT. MARIANA'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

ARBEN

Checkmate.

MARIANA

You're killing me here. Where did you learn to play?

ARBEN

My father taught me. My dad was amazing. There are five of us, but he seemed to always know what each of us needed.

MARIANA

Chess was your special time with him?

ARBEN

Yes. My brother was a man's man. He played futbol, was very physical.

MARIANA

I have one of those.

ARBEN

I really needed him, needed his guidance. I was always under his wing, like his shadow. But he didn't care. He had a way of loving each of us individually.

MARIANA

It sounds like he was a great man.

ARBEN

He was. I miss him.

Mariana makes a move, Arben takes her queen.

MARIANA

I didn't see that coming. I'm going to make some tea. Then I challenge you to round two. Want some?

ARBEN

Sure.

Arben is resetting the chessboard when his cell phone beeps. He pulls it out of his pocket, reads the message.

ARBEN (CONT'D)

I'm going to have to take a rain check on the rematch. I told a friend I would help him out with something. He just texted me.

MARIANA

You need me to give you a ride?

ARBEN

No, I can take the bus.

MARIANA

You sure?

ARBEN

I'm sure. I'll be back late. But I would love to continue our chess game another day.

MARIANA

You sure everything is ok, Arben? If something is going on, I want to know. I want to help. I'm here for you.

ARBEN

Nothing's going on. Just helping out a friend.

MARIANA

Ok.

Mariana watches Arben as he walks out of the kitchen.

INT. MARIANA'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Mariana is sitting on the couch on her laptop. Arben peeks in.

ARBEN

I'm heading out.

MARIANA

Be safe out there and call me if you need a ride home. I really don't mind.

ARBEN

Thank you, Mariana.

Arben backs away, disappears from the doorway.

EXT. MANSION DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

A porsche pulls up to a mansion, then drives into the garage.

INT. MANSION LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Arben follows MEGAN (50s) into the house. She walks to a stand alone bar, pours herself a drink.

MEGAN

You want something?

ARBEN

No, I am good beautiful.

Arben approaches her from behind, puts his arms around her, kisses her neck. He turns her to face him.

ARBEN (CONT'D)

You are so lovely, Megan. I am a very lucky man.

She walks away from him, goes to a stereo, turns on some down tempo music.

MEGAN

I want to see you.

Arben starts to move to the music.

ARBEN

This is what you like, baby?

MEGAN

Yes. Can you take off your shirt?

ARBEN

Anything for you, sweetheart.

Arben unbuttons his shirt as he's swaying to the music, pulls it off, tosses it on the couch. Megan approaches, they start to kiss passionately.

The sound of a door opening in the background draws his attention away from her. A GOOD SIZED MAN (60s) steps into the living room. Arben is immediately alarmed.

ARBEN (CONT'D)

You are married?

Megan and the man look at each other, then they look at Arben.

ARBEN (CONT'D)

I'm sorry if there was some misunderstanding. I told you, I don't do men.

Arben grabs his shirt from the couch, slips it on. He grabs his backpack, starts to head for the door. The man grabs him from behind, tries to force him towards the couch. Arben pushes the man off. The man punches Arben, knocking him back. The man grabs Arben, forces him to the bar, slams him down.

Arben elbows the man hard which knocks him back. Arben turns on him, hits him again and again. Megan tries to pull Arben off, he slaps her, throws her on the couch. He punches the man one more time rendering him unconscious. Arben walks to Megan's purse, pulls out her wallet, counts out three hundred dollars.

ARBEN (CONT'D)

This is for wasting my time.

Arben stuffs the money in his pocket, heads out the door.

EXT. NIKO'S CAFE, REAR DOOR - EARLY MORNING

Arben is sitting in the doorway sleeping when Niko pulls up. The sound of the car door closing wakes him up.

NIKO

Arben, what are you doing here?
What happened to you?

ARBEN

I got into a fight.

Niko opens the back door, ushers Arben in.

INT. NIKO'S CAFE, REAR - EARLY MORNING

NIKO

Why don't you get cleaned up. Then we can talk.

INT. NIKO'S CAFE, BATHROOM - EARLY MORNING

Arben uses paper towels to clean his face. There is a knock on the door. When Arben opens it Niko hands him a towel. Arben uses the towel to wipe off his face.

INT. NIKO'S CAFE, REAR - EARLY MORNING

Arben exits the bathroom.

NIKO
Sit down.

Arben complies. Niko sits across from him.

NIKO (CONT'D)
You know, I was a young man once.
Just like you, fresh off the boat
from Albania.

ARBEN
I'm...

NIKO
Don't talk.
(beat)
I worked hard. It was even harder
when my wife left me alone with a
baby. I slept on couches, in
garages, then, once I could afford
it, a studio apartment. Times were
tough. But you, you're in a nice
house with a woman that has given
you an immense opportunity.

ARBEN
I'm sorry.

NIKO
Don't tell me you're sorry. You
need to tell Mariana.

ARBEN
I'm doing the best I can.

NIKO
Really? Staying out late, making
her worry, getting into fights?

ARBEN
I'm trying to figure things out.

NIKO

Then figure it out. But if any harm comes to her in any way, I will put you back on the boat to Albania myself. Do you understand this?

ARBEN

Yes sir.

NIKO

She is here for you and so am I.

ARBEN

I know.

NIKO

Is there anything you want to tell me?

ARBEN

No sir.

NIKO

What were you doing here in the doorway?

ARBEN

I didn't want Mariana to see me like this. I knew she would only worry. I also had a new idea for a dessert. I wanted to try it before Monday.

Niko walks out of the room. He comes back with a key, hands it to Arben.

ARBEN (CONT'D)

You are giving this to me?

NIKO

Yes. I am trusting you with my business. The same way Mariana trusts you with her home. Do not take advantage of my trust.

ARBEN

I won't sir.

NIKO

I need to run some errands.

Arben looks at the key in his hand.

ARBEN

Thank you, for everything. I mean that.

NIKO

You're welcome, Arben.

Once he's alone Arben opens his backpack, pulls out the gigolo shirt he was wearing. The shirt is covered in blood. He sticks it back in his backpack. He walks to the pantry, gets ingredients he needs.

CUT TO:

Arben pulls his apron off a wall peg, puts it on. He turns on the oven.

CUT TO:

Arben is carefully blending the ingredients, he has a look of raw emotion on his face.

CUT TO:

Arben is layering a baklava. He does a phyllo dough, then some some nuts, then candied orange slivers. He repeats these steps, pours a syrup over the baklava, puts a candied orange on top. He slips the baklava into the oven. He walks across the room, slides down to the floor. He weeps as he watches the pastry cooking.

INT. EXECUTIVE SUITE - MORNING

Silent Scene: Mariana is in a conference room with Mr. Watanabe. They are having a lively conversation. They stand, bow to each other and shake hands.

INT. NIKO'S CAFE, FRONT - AFTERNOON

Niko is at a table chatting with a customer when Mariana enters. Adelina is behind the counter.

ADELINA

Hello, Mariana.

MARIANA

Hello, Adelina.

NIKO

(to his client)

Enjoy your meal and the day.

Nike approaches Mariana, gives her a kiss on the cheek.

NIKO (CONT'D)
Come in back.

INT. NIKO'S CAFE, REAR - AFTERNOON

The back door is open. Arben is outside unloading boxes from a truck. Niko walks Mariana into his office.

NIKO
So?

MARIANA
I officially have my first client.

NIKO
I knew you could do it.

MARIANA
The executive suite is perfect. I have my own office, access to a conference room, even a receptionist.

NIKO
A good friend of mine owns that building. He'll take good care of you.

MARIANA
I couldn't have done this without you.

Mariana gives Niko a big hug. Then her mood changes.

MARIANA (CONT'D)
William texted me. He wants to have lunch.

NIKO
Did he say why?

MARIANA
He was at the wedding. We didn't talk much, but he looked miserable.

NIKO
It doesn't bother me if you meet with him. He is the father of your children and there has to be trust between you and I.

MARIANA
You don't mind?

NIKO
Of course not. Maybe it has something to do with the sons you share. But, if he tries anything with you, I am going to have to fight him. I am serious about this.

Mariana's concerned mood quickly lightens.

MARIANA
Thank you for protecting my honor. I'd better let you get back to work.

Niko and Mariana leave the office. Arben is inside now unpacking boxes and stocking shelves.

ARBEN
Mariana, hello.

MARIANA
Hello, Arben.

ARBEN
You ready for the big night?

MARIANA
I'm so nervous.

NIKO
You're going to be fabulous.

MARIANA
(to Arben)
Are you coming?

ARBEN
I wouldn't miss it for the world. Remeny said he'd pick me up.

MARIANA
I'll see you tonight then.

INT. MARIANA'S HOUSE, ARBEN'S ROOM - EVENING

Arben is sitting in front of his laptop. He has showered, has on clean clothes, is toweling his hair dry. He dials Josif on Zoom. His face is not completely healed from the fight.

JOSIF

I see why you didn't want the kids on this call. What happened to you?

ARBEN

Did you get the money I sent?

JOSIF

Yes.

ARBEN

Was it enough?

JOSIF

Yes. The kids are all ready for school. I used the rest to buy groceries and pay the mortgage.

ARBEN

Good.

JOSIF

Arben, what happened to you?

ARBEN

I had to defend myself.

JOSIF

Defend yourself?

ARBEN

I was with a client...she had a guy there.

JOSIF

Did he do something to you?

ARBEN

I was able to fight him off. It's not the first time it's happened and it won't be the last.

JOSIF

It's happened before? How many times?

ARBEN

It's just a hazard of what I do.

Josif tries to reign in his emotions, he fails. He starts to weep bitterly.

ARBEN (CONT'D)
I should go. I'm going to a show
tonight. Mariana's son is picking
me up. Love you, brother.

JOSIF
I love you too little brother.

Arben ends the call as he hears someone enter the house.

REMENEY (O.S.)
Hey, you ready?

INT. REMENEY'S CAR - EVENING

Arben is in a blue mood. Remeny doesn't notice.

REMENEY
What happened to you?

ARBEN
Stupid guy stuff. Got into a fight.

REMENEY
Mom must have freaked out when she
saw you.

ARBEN
Yeah. I told her I'd be more
careful.

REMENEY
You seen her dance?

ARBEN
Yes, she has been practicing at the
house. She's really good.

REMENEY
I never thought I would see my mom
at a milanga.

ARBEN
It's a milango.

REMENEY
Milanga...milango, it's just so not
like her.

ARBEN
She is trying new things.

REMENY

I heard she got her first client today too.

ARBEN

I'm happy for her. She lost her job because of me.

REMENY

What do you mean? People get laid off everyday.

ARBEN

She wasn't laid off, she was fired. I overheard her talking to Ugenia.

REMENY

Why?

ARBEN

Because of Margaret. She didn't want to say anything to me.

REMENY

Mom and Margaret are friends.

ARBEN

Margaret tried to seduce me. I said no. Mariana was fired the next day.

REMENY

Holy crap. Are you serious?

ARBEN

Yes.

REMENY

Mom was the best salesperson and designer that company had. Now that she has her own business, they're going to lose all of her clients. They'll rue the day.

Remeny pulls his car up to a large event center.

REMENY (CONT'D)

Well, we're here. At the M...i...l..a..go?

ARBEN

Milango, but close.

The two men get out of the car and head inside.

INT. EVENT CENTER, TANGO EVENT - NIGHT

Arben and Remeny enter. All of Mariana's girlfriends are there except Margaret. Glennis is with her husband GERALD "Jerry" BOLINSKE (50s-60s). The entire Mariana family gang is there as well except Seth and Rebecca. Ugenia is waiiing.

UGENIA

I saved you all some seats. Come on, the action is about to begin.

They all sit. An ANNOUNCER (60s) walks on stage.

ANNOUNCER

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to a night of music, excitement, tango and love.

UGENIA

(whispering)

Ooh, I like the sound of that.

ANNOUNCER

To get us started, welcome Niko Ahmeti and Mariana Penrose.

The announcer leaves the stage. Niko and Mariana walk on the stage. They get into their dance pose.

DEDE

(whispering)

Oh dios mio, look how beautiful she looks.

The music starts, Niko and Mariana start to dance. Everyone applauds as they start. Arben is watching them dance with intensity and longing. He wants what they have.

INT. LUXURY RESTAURANT - AFTERNOON

Mariana walks in. The restaurant is luxurious with a beautiful view. She looks around, sees William seated at a nice table. She approaches and sits.

WILLIAM

You look great.

MARIANA

Thank you.

WILLIAM

Jerry told me your dance thing went well last night.

MARIANA
It was very nice.

A waiter approaches.

WILLIAM
Order anything you want, my treat.

MARIANA
Cobb salad and a water with lemon
please.

WILLIAM
I'll have the same, thank you.

The waiter departs.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)
You look really beautiful, Mariana.

MARIANA
Why did you want to see me, Will?

WILLIAM
You'll be happy to know I'm
miserable. It would cost me a small
fortune to divorce Sophia. So, I'm
stuck. I guess that makes you
happy.

MARIANA
Some else's misery never makes me
happy. I'm sorry to hear that.

WILLIAM
I heard about your job. Sorry about
that too.

MARIANA
How did you know?

WILLIAM
George.

The waiter delivers salads and waters, leaves.

MARIANA
How is George?

WILLIAM
He's an idiot. I hoped he would
learn from my mistake.

(MORE)

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

But when a younger woman starts paying attention to you, it's an ego thing. A macho thing.

MARIANA

That's unfortunate.

WILLIAM

Yes, it is. You divorce your wife like a moron and marry the other woman thinking that's going to solve all of the problems you have with yourself. But in the end, you end up with less, much less than what you had. Because wherever you go, there you are. And no one can change who you are but yourself.

Mariana takes a few bites of her salad, sips her water.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

I saw Remeny at the wedding. He still won't talk to me and when he does it's like a knife to the heart.

MARIANA

It was really hard for Remeny when you left. He was still very young.

WILLIAM

You ever think about us?

MARIANA

Sometimes. I think about how it was, when things were good. Before Sophia.

William pushes his food aside. Fixes Mariana with a serious look.

WILLIAM

It could be good again.

MARIANA

Oh, Will. There was a time when I would have done anything to hear you say these words, to have you back in our lives. What we had is in the past now.

WILLIAM

I never should have left you, Jason and Remeny. I just want a chance to make things right.

MARIANA

I forgave you a long time ago. But its never too late to patch things up with Remeny.

WILLIAM

It's never too late? But too late for you and I?

MARIANA

I'm sorry, Will.

Mariana stands, pulls cash out of her purse.

WILLIAM

You don't have to do that.

Mariana sits the cash on the table.

MARIANA

I hope George listens to you.

Mariana walks away.

INTERCUT: INT. MARIANA'S CAR - AFTERNOON / UGENIA'S EVENT VENUE - AFTERNOON

Mariana is sitting in her car with a look of deep contemplation. She picks up her phone, makes a call. Ugenia is at her venue inside of a large hall. There are wedding decorations and broken plates everywhere. PEOPLE (any age) are in the background cleaning.

MARIANA

Ugenia.

UGENIA

What's up girl?

MARIANA

What are you doing right now?

UGENIA

Girl, I just hosted a Greek wedding and it was insane. They were singing, dancing, breaking plates.

MARIANA

Breaking plates?

UGENIA

Yes.

MARIANA

Sounds like an interesting time.

UGENIA

I was just hosting as I usually do, but this wonderful gentleman pulled me into the action. I was dancing and breaking stuff too.

MARIANA

Oh my goodness. I would have paid money to see that.

UGENIA

I'm gonna have to go to the chiropractor because I threw my back out. But it was fun, and I got his number.

MARIANA

Congratulations.

UGENIA

We'll have to go on a double date some time. You, me, Niko and my new acquaintance.

MARIANA

Let's do that. Dinner, this weekend. I'd love to meet him.

UGENIA

You know I'm going to take you up on that. But I have known you long enough to know there's something else on your mind.

MARIANA

There's something we need to do.

EXT. MARGARET'S HOUSE, FRONT ENTRANCE - DAY

Mariana knocks on the door. Margaret answers. She looks terrible, is very surprised to see Mariana.

MARIANA

Can I come in?

Margaret steps aside, lets her enter.

INT. MARGARET'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - DAY

There is a massive corner sectional in the living room. Packed boxes are everywhere. Margaret plops down on the couch, bursts into tears. Mariana sits next to Margaret, takes her in her arms.

MARGARET

I gave that bastard the best years of my life. Then he just throws me away like he's taking out the trash.

MARIANA

It's not a good feeling. But trust me when I say it gets better.

MARGARET

I built my whole life around him, our kids, our marriage.

MARIANA

Just take it one day at time.

MARGARET

I hate getting old. I look in the mirror and I hate the person that looks back at me. I was beautiful once.

MARIANA

You still are. Don't let George or this world determine your worth.

MARGARET

What am I going to do?

MARIANA

You're going to take care of yourself and your kids. You're going to be strong.

MARGARET

I can't do this alone.

MARIANA

You're not alone.

There is a knock on the door. Mariana gets up, answers. The entire group of lady friends walks in. Dede has a bottle of wine. Margaret bursts into fresh tears.

MARGARET

I'm not like you.

MARIANA

You don't have to be like me. Who
you are is pretty darn special.

The ladies sit on the couch. Dede opens the bottle of wine. Margaret takes a swig strait from the bottle, passes it to Mariana, then to Dede, then to Ugenia, then to Libby, then to Glennis. The bottle ends up back with Margaret. The ladies hug Margaret and surround her with love.

INT. NIKO'S CAFE, REAR - AFTERNOON

Niko, Mariana, Arben and Adelina enter through the back door.

NIKO

I just want to grab a few things
for the picnic.

ADELINA

I'll get the condiments.

Adelina walks into the pantry. Niko walks to the fridge, starts to load up the items, notices the tray of baklava.

NIKO

(to Arben)
What is this?

ARBEN

Just something I threw together.

NIKO

May I?

ARBEN

Of course.

Niko takes a bite. Looks like he is in heaven.

NIKO

This is exquisite. What is this?

ARBEN

It's candied orange baklava. It's
just an idea I had.

Niko feeds Mariana a bite.

MARIANA

Oh my goodness. That is delicious.

Adelina emerges with a bag of food items.

ADELINA
What's delicious?

Niko gives Adelina a piece, Niko and Mariana grab seconds.
Arben joins the eating.

NIKO
Arben, this is a masterpiece. You
have outdone yourself. Can you make
more?

ARBEN
Sure.

NIKO
We have to have a batch for Monday.
But not this batch. I'm taking this
with us.

Arben grabs a bakery box, loads up the baklava.

ADELINA
Let me have one more piece.

MARIANA
Me too.

ARBEN
The baklava is not going to make it
to the picnic.

MARIANA
Definitely not.

ARBEN
I'm glad you like it.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Mariana, Niko, Arben and Adelina are at the park with NIKO'S FRIENDS (40s-60s), CHURCH GOERS (all ages), from Niko's Church and Jason and Remeny. The Church is in the background. There is a large table laden with food. The bakery box that had the baklava is empty. Everyone is playing football except Arben and Mariana who are sitting in lawn chairs watching the game. A MAN (50s) approaches.

MAN
Hey, you brought that baklava?

ARBEN
Yes, sir.

MAN

Where can I get some more?

Mariana and Arben exchange a surprised, excited look.

ARBEN

I work at Niko's cafe. We'll have a fresh batch on Monday.

MAN

I'll grab the address from you before I leave. I'd like to have some for my boss's retirement party.

ARBEN

Sure. I can do that for you.

MAN

See you Monday.

The man walks away.

MARIANA

I think that baklava is going to be a big hit.

ARBEN

I hope so.

Arben looks off in the distance at the football game. Niko is running with the football. Mariana is watching also.

ARBEN (CONT'D)

He is a good man.

MARIANA

Yes, he is.

ARBEN

You have some misgivings? I can hear it in your voice.

MARIANA

Not about him, about me.

ARBEN

Why?

MARIANA

In my first marriage, I was never good enough. I know I need to put those feelings aside. But I still have this fear...

ARBEN

Mariana.

She turns at the serious sound of his voice.

ARBEN (CONT'D)

In Prague, when I approached you, it was not all business. There is something different about you. Something poised and elegant. I needed to make money that night because of my obligations. But it wasn't about the money. I wanted to be with you, just for me.

MARIANA

Arben, I don't know what to say.

ARBEN

I don't mean to make you uncomfortable. But you deserve this. You deserve a man like him.

REMENY

(calling from the field)

Hey, Arben. We're getting our butts kicked here. You gonna help out or what?

ARBEN

(calling out)

I'm coming.

Arben turns back to Mariana.

ARBEN (CONT'D)

You deserve this.

Arben squeezes her hand affectionately, then runs out to the field. Mariana watches as Niko passes the football to Jason who makes a touchdown. Jason spikes the football starts to do a touchdown dance.

JASON

That's how we do it.

Remeny throws up his hands in frustration. Arben take his phone out of his pocket. He walks away from everyone, takes the call.

REMENY

What are you doing? You just got here.

ARBEN
I'll be right back.

Mariana watches Arben on the call. His demeanor changes as he turns away from everyone for privacy. Mariana continues to watch him.

INT. MARIANA'S HOUSE, ARBEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Arben is looking at himself in the mirror. He opens a bedroom drawer, removes a tube of liquid concealer makeup. He dabs some makeup on what is left of a scar from his fight. Satisfied, he grabs his backpack, heads out of the bedroom.

INT. MARIANA'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Mariana is lying on the couch. She has a book laying across her lap and she is wrapped in a blanket sound asleep. Arben looks at her for a long moment, then he quietly sneaks out the front door.

EXT. BUSY STREET - NIGHT

Arben is walking down a busy street in front of a dance club. Loud trance type music can be heard from outside. Next to the club is a parking lot. He looks at the picture of a woman on his cell phone. He heads towards the parking lot.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Arben walks up to a Mercedes-Benz. A woman OFFICER JANICE DUNHAM (50s) is sitting in the drivers seat.

ARBEN
Janice?

JANICE
You must be Arben.

ARBEN
I am. How are you lovely lady?

JANICE
I'm good. Get in.

Arben slides into the car.

INT. JANICE'S CAR - NIGHT

ARBEN

You are so beautiful, Janice.

Janice smiles, lets out a nervous laugh.

JANICE

So...three hundred...right?

ARBEN

Yes, sweetheart.

JANICE

How long and...um...what do I get?

ARBEN

You get anything you want beautiful lady, as long as you want. I am going to be so good to you.

JANICE

I want to...I want to do everything. Do you have condoms?

ARBEN

Baby, I have everything we will need. I am going to make you feel so good, sweetheart.

JANICE

Ok.

Janice takes three hundred dollars out of her purse, hands it to Arben. He slips the cash into his pocket.

ARBEN

You want to go somewhere more private?

A light flashes into the car temporarily blinding Arben, he turns towards the light. OFFICER BRYANT (40s) is standing outside.

OFFICER BRYANT

Step out of the car please sir.

Arben looks at the drivers seat where Janice was sitting. The door is open, she is standing outside. She flashes her police badge at Arben, starts to read him his rights. Arben has a mortified look on his face.

INT. POLICE STATION, FRONT - LATE NIGHT

Mariana rushes into the police station clutching her purse. She runs up to the desk.

MARIANA

I need to speak to Officer Dunham please. She called me.

INT. POLICE STATION, HOLDING AREA - LATE NIGHT

Mariana is walking down the hallway with Officer Dunham.

OFFICER JANICE DUNHAM

Normally we'd charge him with solicitation. He'd do jail time, pay a fine, then he'd be deported.

MARIANA

Oh no. Is there anything I can do?

They reach a holding cell. Officer Dunham opens the door. Arben is sitting in the cell looking down. He looks miserable.

OFFICER JANICE DUNHAM

He told me the story, about how you met him, how you brought him here, the circumstances.

(beat, to Arben)

Look at me please.

Arben looks up. He looks at Officer Dunham, but can't meet Mariana's eyes.

OFFICER JANICE DUNHAM (CONT'D)

Look at her.

Arben does as he's told.

OFFICER JANICE DUNHAM (CONT'D)

This woman has put a lot on the line for you. Bringing you here, being your sponsor. I'm going to let you go...

Arben looks extremely hopeful at her words.

OFFICER JANICE DUNHAM (CONT'D)
 But, if I ever catch you soliciting
 in my town again, it's straight
 back to Albania and don't let the
 door hit your ass on the way out.
 You got it?

ARBEN
 Yes ma'am.

OFFICER JANICE DUNHAM
 Apologize to Ms. Penrose.

ARBEN
 I am so sorry Mariana.

OFFICER JANICE DUNHAM
 Apologize to me for ruining my
 night.

ARBEN
 I'm sorry, ma'am.

Officer Dunham unlocks the cell, motions Arben out.

ARBEN (CONT'D)
 You're really letting me go?

OFFICER JANICE DUNHAM
 Yeah, I'm letting you go. Cause I
 got a stupid, bleeding heart.

ARBEN
 Thank you, ma'am.

Arben follows Mariana and Officer Dunham out of the holding
 area. Officer Dunham walks them down the hall to a door. She
 opens the door that leads out of the holding area. Arben
 looks extremely relieved.

OFFICER JANICE DUNHAM
 And my name ain't sweetheart or
 baby or any of that other crap.
 It's Officer Dunahm, you got that?

ARBEN
 Yes, ma'am. Officer Dunham.

OFFICER JANICE DUNHAM
 Now get out of here before I change
 my mind.

EXT. POLICE STATION - LATE NIGHT

Arben looks utterly crushed and humiliated as Mariana walks him out of the police station. Mariana slides into the driver's seat of her car, Arben into the passenger seat.

INT. MARIANA'S CAR - LATE NIGHT

Arben is so ashamed he can't look at Mariana.

ARBEN

I'm so sorry, Mariana. I needed the money.

MARIANA

We'll talk when we get home.

INT. MARIANA'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - LATE NIGHT

Mariana and Arben enter the house. She is clearly furious.

MARIANA

Arben, why? I can't express how disappointed I am. Why would you do this? I thought you left that life behind.

Arben still won't look at her.

MARIANA (CONT'D)

Look at me. You made me a promise. You've broken that promise and you lied to me. I deserve to know why.

ARBEN

I wasn't making enough money to support my family. I have to help Josif take care of my brother and my sisters. We are all we have left.

MARIANA

Oh, Arben.

He goes to the couch, sits down. Mariana joins him.

MARIANA (CONT'D)

Why didn't you tell me? You are doing so much around the house. I can pay you...

ARBEN

I don't want to take money from you, Mariana. You have already done so much for me. This was such a beautiful dream. But that is all it was, just a dream.

MARIANA

Maybe we can find you another job.

ARBEN

I tried. My English is good. My reading and writing, not so good.

MARIANA

I have an idea. It'll be hard work.

ARBEN

I don't mind hard work. As long as I can support my family.

Mariana jumps up, runs out of the room. She returns with her laptop, sits back down.

MARIANA

I'm going to do for you what Niko did for me.

ARBEN

What is that.

MARIANA

You're going to start you own business.

ARBEN

How?

Mariana opens up her design software. She starts to type.

MARIANA

You have a product. An exclusive product. We're going to market it.

ARBEN

What is that?

MARIANA

Hmmm, Pastries by Arben? No.
Exquisite Pastries by Arben. No.
(beat, looking at Arben)
The Candied Orange Bakery.

ARBEN

I can do this?

MARIANA

You're darn right you can do it.
You're not going anywhere. Just
promise me...no more lies.

ARBEN

I promise.

Arben start to weep, he wraps his arms around Mariana.

ARBEN (CONT'D)

Thank you for seeing something in
me that no one else sees.

Mariana wraps her arms around him like a son.

EXT. MARIANA'S HOUSE, DRIVEWAY - AFTERNOON

Silent Scene: Niko drives up in a beat up old food truck. He jumps out. Mariana and Arben are standing outside. The truck is a disaster but Arben looks at it like its a mercedes benz.

CUT TO:

INT. MARIANA'S NEW OFFICE - MORNING

Silent Scene: Mariana is in a new office in a high rise building. The view is amazing. She stands up as NEW CLIENTS, man and woman, (40s-60s) enter. Mariana shakes their hands, invites them to sit. Janet brings coffee, beams at Mariana as she walks out.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL, DELIVERY AREA - DAY

Silent Scene: Mariana's family gang are at the hospital outside of a delivery room. They all file into the delivery room except Arben. He stays behind. Seth peeks out, he has a camera in his hand. He grabs Arben and pulls him in.

CUT TO:

EXT. NIKO'S CAFE, STREET - MORNING

Silent Scene: Niko has several bags of take out food in his hands.

He walks out to the car of a female CLIENT (70s), loads the bags into her car. He opens her door for her. As she drives off Niko turns to go back into the cafe. He stops. The business next to Niko's cafe is gone. There is a for sale sign in the window.

EXT. NIKO'S CAFE, REAR DOOR - EARLY MORNING

Arben walks up to the cafe. The Candied Orange Bakery truck is parked outside. The truck has been restored and looks beautiful. He runs his hand over the truck, then opens the back door.

INT. NIKO'S CAFE, REAR - EARLY MORNING

Arben enters the cafe. The clock on the wall reads 2 am. He walks into the pantry, starts to pull out ingredients. He is startled when the back door opens. Niko, Mariana, Adelina and the entire Mariana family gang files in except Seth and Rebecca. Arben gives them a surprised look.

ARBEN

What are you all doing here?

JAQUES

Seth told us about the big order.

REMENY

You're family now bro. Let's get this business started. What do you need.

Arben is floored. He just stares at everyone.

REMENY (CONT'D)

Well?

ARBEN

I need to make enough pastries for the cafe, but also for the truck. I need to put together boxes, I have to pack everything, I need a driver...

REMENY

I'll start putting boxes together cause I can't cook worth a damn.

BENJAMIN

I'm all about that too. You don't want me in a kitchen.

CASEY

So true.

REMENY

I can also be your driver until you get your license. I can studying while your doing your thing.

The door opens. Ugenia and Dede enter.

UGENIA

This where the party is?

DEDE

I can't believe I'm up this early and there's no wine.

UGENIA

You'll be fine you lush. What do you'all need done?

MARIANA

(to Arben)

What do you need to make pastries?

Arben still has a look of utter disbelief.

NIKO

Come with me. I can show you what is needed.

Several people follow Niko, they return with bags of flour, sugar and other ingredients. Adelina grabs a large tray of eggs and cartons of milk out of the fridge.

ARBEN

We'll need those large bowls.

Mariana grabs several large bowls, passes the bowls around. Niko passes around a box of disposable gloves. Everyone slips them on. Adelina gives everyone measuring cups. They all look at Arben expectantly.

ARBEN (CONT'D)

We need three cups of flour for each bowl.

UGENIA

You heard the man. Three cups of flour.

Everyone digs into the flour with their measuring cups, dumps it into their bowl. The back door opens, Margaret peeks in. She looks uncertain.

DEDE

Just get your crazy ass in here. We need all the help we can get.

Margaret looks at Mariana, then at Arben. Arben smiles and nods approval. Margaret enters.

REMENY

We could use help with boxes. There's like a million of them here.

Margaret joins Remeny and Benjamin with the box making.

SONJA

What's next?

ARBEN

Two cups of sugar.

UGENIA

Sugar everyone. Get on it.

Everyone dips into the sugar, dumps it into their bowl.

REMENY

We need some music.

Remeny turns on classic rock. The place is jumping. Everyone is laughing and talking. Their conversations are in the background. Niko walks up to Mariana with his bowl, gives her a kiss on the cheek. Arben looks around at everyone. He is blown away at the love he is receiving.

INT. MARIANA'S HOUSE, ARBEN'S ROOM - AFTERNOON

Arben sits down in front of the computer. He makes the call. Josif and the kids are there. Dea is sitting on Josif's lap.

ALL THE KIDS

Hi! Hello!

DEA

We got the orange baklava. It was so good.

ARBEN

You liked it?

DEA

And the box was so pretty too. I kept it!

ARBEN

I'm so glad. What is going on with you?

TEUTA

I got another A on my math test and on my science test.

ARBEN

That is wonderful!

DEA

My tooth came in.

ARBEN

Let me see.

Dea opens her mouth really wide.

ARDIT

We've won our first few games. Well, we lost yesterday. But we're doing really good.

ARBEN

That is wonderful. I am so proud of all of you.

JOSIF

Ok, I need to talk to your brother.

ALL THE KIDS

We love you!

ARBEN

I love you too.

Once the kids are gone Josif gives Arben a serious look.

JOSIF

I don't want you doing it anymore. We'll figure something out. I don't want anything to happen to you.

ARBEN

The money I sent you, it's from my new business.

JOSIF

From baking? How?

ARBEN

Seth gave some of my candied orange baklava to his coach's wife as a birthday present and she loved it. The team placed a large order.

JOSIF

You are serious?

ARBEN

Yes. They're also letting me park my food truck at all the games. My pastries are selling like hot cakes.

JOSIF

Hot cakes?

ARBEN

It's an American phrase.

JOSIF

You are really doing it, the American Dream. I am so proud of you brother.

ARBEN

It's just the beginning for us.

JOSIF

I had better go. You know how it is with the kids. They'll be up all night if I don't get them in bed.

ARBEN

Give them all a big kiss from me.

JOSIF

I love you little brother.

ARBEN

I love you too.

Arben ends the call.

EXT. NIKO'S CAFE, STREET - LATE AFTERNOON

Mariana parks her car in front, gets out. Niko's cafe has expanded to the space next door and it's now twice the size. There is a large sign that reads: Niko's Cafe and The Candied Orange Bakery. Josif gets out of the car on the passenger side. Ardit, Dea and Teuta jump out of the car. Josif looks up at the sign.

JOSIF
 (to the kids)
 Look at that.

ALL THE KIDS
 Wow. Whoa!

MARIANA
 Come inside.

INT. NIKO'S CAFE, FRONT - LATE AFTERNOON

Inside the expanded space are more tables. Arben has his own display area with a sign that says "The Candied Orange Bakery". Niko looks up and smiles as Mariana enters with Josif and the kids. Arben is cleaning, his back to the door.

DEA
 Arben!

He turns as Dea runs into his arms. Josif, Ardit and Teuta approach him, they all hug each other for a long moment.

ARBEN
 I can't believe this! When did you get here?

JOSIF
 We just arrived. Ms. Penrose picked us up from the airport. It's just a visit.

ARBEN
 It's a start. Welcome to America!
 Let me show you around.

JOSIF
 Ok.

Arben picks up Dea. Gives her a big hug.

DEA
 How is the business going?

ARBEN
 Business is booming.

JOSIF
 Booming?

ARBEN
 It is an American phrase. It means things are going very well.

JOSIF
That is good.

Arben starts to lead them into the back. He turns to Mariana and Niko.

ARBEN
Thank you.

Arben disappears into the back with his family. Niko motions to a table. Mariana sits.

NIKO
Coffee?

MARIANA
Coffee would be great.

Niko makes a coffee. He grabs a plate with a dessert in one hand, the coffee mug in the other. He sits across from Mariana, sits the plate and the coffee in front of her. The plate holds a chocolate ganache cake. It is beautifully decorated with whip cream and strawberries. "Mariana, will you marry me" is written in chocolate on the plate. There is a diamond ring perched on top of the whipped cream.

MARIANA (CONT'D)
This looks wonderf...

Mariana notices the words, then the ring. She looks at Niko.

NIKO
Well?

MARIANA
Yes. Absolutely Yes!

Mariana sits in his lap. Pulls the cake in front of them. They kiss, she feeds him a bite of cake.

INT. EVENT CENTER, TANGO EVENT - NIGHT

Arben arrives, takes his seat. Mariana's family gang is there with Jason and Remeny. Seth and Rebecca are present with the baby. All of the ladies are there. Ugenia is with her guy, DIMITRIS GEORGIOU (60s).

REMENY
(to Arben)
You made it.

ARBEN

I had to close up shop. But I didn't want to miss this. They've been working on this new dance for weeks.

The announcer steps onto the stage.

ANNOUNCER

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to a night of music, excitement, tango and love.

UGENIA

(whispering)

I always get chills when he says that.

ANNOUNCER

To get us started, welcome Niko and Mariana Ahmeti.

The announcer leaves the stage. Niko and Mariana walk on the stage. They get into their dance pose. The music starts, Niko and Mariana start to dance, everyone applauds. They do a flourishing tango move. Niko dips Mariana. The crowd goes crazy. They are smiling at each other, looking at each other with complete love.

CUT TO BLACK.

