

The Room To Keep  
by  
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FADE IN:

EXT. SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD - DAWN

SIGNATURE SHOT  
A SLOW AERIAL DRIFT over a  
carefully ordered suburb.

Lawns trimmed to regulation.

Garages timed.

Lives synchronized.

Clocks glow in kitchen windows.

Coffee makers hiss on cue.

One house interrupts the rhythm.

Not louder.

Just slower.

The camera descends.

EXT. MARA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Wind chimes move without pattern.

Morning light touches the porch and keeps moving.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

MARA KLINE (59) moves with quiet authority.

Not rushed.

Not idle.

Competent without being managed.

Two GRANDCHILDREN swirl around her—backpacks, shoes, noise.

Mara absorbs it without effort.

This isn't help.

This is fluency.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

LUCY (early 30s) enters already mid-thought, phone pressed to her ear.

LUCY  
I can shift it—yes, just ten  
minutes—

She ends the call. Exhales. Checks the time.

Sees Mara.

Relief.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

ETHAN (early 40s) adjusts his tie, watching Mara with unspoken gratitude.

ETHAN  
Morning, Mara.

Mara smiles.

It reaches her eyes.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Mara kneels, zips a backpack.

One grandchild hugs her—sudden, fierce.

Mara closes her eyes for half a second.

Stores it.

EXT. MARA'S HOUSE - MORNING

Lucy loads the kids into the car.

Mara buckles a seatbelt. Smooths hair. Adjusts a jacket.

LUCY  
Same time tomorrow?

MARA  
Of course.

The car pulls away.



Present. Peripheral.

She stops at one:

Lucy, pregnant. Mara beside her—supportive, secondary.

She touches the glass.

Moves on.

INT. FRONT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mara opens a door that hasn't been opened in years.

Dust lifts in the light.

Deferred furniture. Stored selves.

She steps inside.

INT. FRONT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A box marked ART - OLD.

Mara opens it.

A folded easel.

A sketchbook.

A letter never sent.

She opens the sketchbook.

Strong handwriting.

Momentum.

Then—nothing.

The pages stop mid-thought.

INT. FRONT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mara sits.

For the first time today, she doesn't immediately stand back up.

INCITING INCIDENT - EXTERNAL

Mara's phone BUZZES.

An email notification.

She almost ignores it.

Then reads.

INSERT - PHONE SCREEN

FROM: Hawthorne Gallery

SUBJECT: Open Studio Submission - Invitation

We're curating a limited-feature exhibition this fall.

One new work. Deadline: Six weeks.

Featured artist commission: \$10,000.

Mara stares.

Not excitement.

Recognition.

INT. FRONT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mara looks at the empty room.

The sketchbook.

The light.

Then—another BUZZ.

INSERT - PHONE SCREEN

LUCY (TEXT):

Dissertation defense date confirmed.

End of next month.

I'm freaking out already ??

Mara closes her eyes.

Two clocks just started ticking.

INT. FRONT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mara stands.

Opens the curtains wider.

Light floods the room.

She doesn't smile.

She doesn't panic.

She commits.

INT. FRONT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mara unfolds the easel.

The hinges creak—loud in the quiet.

She steadies it.

Steps back.

It stands.

So does she.

EXT. MARA'S HOUSE - DAY

The house sits in the neighborhood.

Same as before.

Already changing.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - MORNING

Mara stands alone in the room.

The unfolded easel feels larger now—less nostalgic, more demanding.

She touches the sketchbook again.

Not sentimentally.

Like checking a pulse.

INT. FRONT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mara flips through old pages.

We see:

\* Early confidence

\* Risk-taking

\* A voice that hadn't learned to apologize yet

Then the pages stop.

The gap matters.

She closes the book.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATE MORNING

Mara opens a drawer.

Bank statements.

She doesn't rifle through them—she already knows.

She sits at the table.

Adds numbers in her head.

Her jaw tightens—not panic, not shame.

Reality.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Her phone BUZZES again.

Lucy.

Mara waits before answering.

INTERCUT - INT. LUCY'S CAR - SAME

Lucy drives, phone on speaker, eyes flicking between traffic and a calendar alert on her dashboard.

LUCY  
Mom—are you there?

MARA  
I'm here.

Lucy exhales.

INTERCUT - CONTINUOUS

LUCY  
I just wanted to give you a heads  
up—

my defense date overlaps with your..

(chooses word)

art thing.

Mara absorbs this.

MARA  
Okay.

Lucy blinks—expected resistance.

INTERCUT - CONTINUOUS

LUCY  
Okay?

MARA  
We'll figure it out.

Lucy nods—relief mixed with something else.

Expectation.

INTERCUT - CONTINUOUS

LUCY  
I just need this month to be  
predictable.

Mara hears what's unsaid.

MARA  
I understand.

Lucy smiles.

She thinks she's won something.

INT. MARA'S OLD APARTMENT - NIGHT - 1998

Young MARA (31) stands at an easel in a tiny, cluttered room. Paint on her hands. A half-finished canvas - bold, restless, alive. The sound of a small child crying from the next room. LUCY (5) appears in the doorway, clutching a stuffed rabbit, tears streaming.

LUCY  
Mommy... I had the bad dream again.

Mara looks at the canvas. Then at her daughter. She sets the brush down carefully, as if it might break.

MARA  
(soft)  
Come here, baby.

She lifts Lucy onto her hip. The child buries her face in Mara's neck. Mara's eyes stay on the painting a moment longer. Then she reaches over and closes the sketchbook with her free hand. The room goes darker as she turns off the lamp.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - PRESENT DAY

Mara still holding the phone after the call with Lucy. Her thumb hovers over the screen. The memory lingers in her face - not guilt exactly.

Recognition.

She puts the phone down.

HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - AFTERNOON

Mara brings in a blank canvas.

Larger than she intended.

She leans it against the wall.

Stares at it longer than necessary.

Then moves it closer to the easel.

INT. FRONT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mara lays out brushes.

Old ones. New ones.

She tests each in her palm.

The new ones feel unfamiliar—but alive.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

Mara passes the photo wall again.

This time she notices something else.

None of these photos show her alone.

She clocks it.

Keeps walking.

INT. LUCY & ETHAN'S HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

Lucy sits at the dining table surrounded by papers.

Tabs. Highlights. Notes.

A dissertation battlefield.

Her phone lights up—calendar alerts stacked.

She silences one.

Another pops up immediately.

Lucy rubs her temples.

INT. LUCY'S DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ethan watches from the kitchen.

ETHAN

You're allowed to breathe.

Lucy doesn't look up.

LUCY

Not until this is done.

She flips a page too fast.

Paper tears.

She freezes.

Then carefully tapes it back together.

Control restored.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - EVENING

Mara stares at the blank canvas.

She lifts the brush.

Stops.

Low stakes for anyone else.

Everything for her.

INT. FRONT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mara paints the first real stroke.

It's confident.

It scares her.

She steps back.

Lets it be.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - EVENING

Mara eats dinner alone.

No TV.

No phone.

She watches the light fade through the doorway.

Paint drying.

Time behaving.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - NIGHT

Mara writes in her notebook.

I stopped because I was needed.

I'm starting because I still am.

She closes it.

No underline.

EXT. MARA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The front room glows.

The rest of the house sleeps.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - NIGHT

Mara stands in the light.

Alone.

But not abandoned.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - MORNING

Morning light reveals the first painted stroke fully dry.

It holds.

Mara studies it—less like art, more like proof.  
She adds a second stroke.  
Different energy.  
Less fear.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Mara pours coffee.  
Her phone lies nearby, face up.  
A GALLERY COUNTDOWN WIDGET now lives on her screen.

39 DAYS REMAINING

She didn't install it impulsively.  
She did it deliberately.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

A text arrives.

LUCY (TEXT):

Can you take the kids this afternoon?  
Defense prep meeting got moved.  
Mara reads it.  
Looks at the clock.  
Looks toward the front room.  
Paint is still wet.  
She types.  
Stops.  
Deletes.  
Types again.

MARA (TEXT):

I can't this afternoon.

A beat.

She adds:

MARA (TEXT  
CONT'D):

I'm working.

She sends it.

Immediately uncomfortable with the word.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - AFTERNOON

Mara stands at the easel. The new stroke is still wet. She doesn't touch it. Her phone BUZZES on the windowsill. She ignores it at first. Then another buzz. Then a third. She walks over.

INSERT - PHONE SCREEN

Three missed calls from LUCY. One text from ETHAN:

ETHAN (TEXT)  
The kids are asking for you. Lucy's  
melting down.

Can you just do today? Mara closes her eyes.

EXT. MARA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The front door opens. The two GRANDCHILDREN (7 and 5) run up the porch steps, backpacks swinging. Lucy stands by the car, arms crossed, eyes tired.

GRANDDAUGHTER (7)  
Nana! We brought you a snack!

The younger boy runs straight into Mara's legs for a hug. Mara kneels automatically. Holds him. But her eyes are on the open front room door behind her - the easel visible in the distance.

LUCY  
(from the car)  
Just a few hours. Please.

Mara stands. Looks at her daughter.

MARA  
I can't today.

The little girl's face falls.

GRANDDAUGHTER  
But... you always can.

A quiet beat. Mara touches the girl's hair – gentle, but her hand trembles slightly.

MARA  
I know.

That's why I have to start saying no sometimes. Lucy looks away. Starts the car. The children linger a second longer, confused, then climb in.

Mara watches the car pull away.

The silence that follows feels heavier than usual.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mara returns to the canvas.

She waits.

Paint needs time.

She respects it—even though it costs her something.

INT. LUCY & ETHAN'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Lucy stares at her phone.

Reads Mara's message twice.

LUCY  
Working?

She looks at the clock.

Her calendar explodes with alerts.

She exhales sharply.

INT. LUCY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Lucy gathers her bag too aggressively.

Papers slide off the table.

She doesn't pick them up right away.

That's new.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - AFTERNOON

Mara adds a third stroke.

The painting begins to push back.

She adjusts—not forcing it.

EXT. MARA'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

A car pulls up.

Lucy.

Unannounced.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - ENTRYWAY - CONTINUOUS

Lucy enters fast.

Phone in hand.

Defense notes visible in her bag.

LUCY  
I don't understand what's  
happening.

Mara doesn't flinch.

MARA  
I told you.

Lucy shakes her head.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Lucy gestures toward the front room.

LUCY  
This?

Mara nods.

MARA

Yes.

Lucy's jaw tightens.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

LUCY

You didn't used to say no.

Mara hears the accusation beneath the observation.

MARA

I didn't used to say yes to myself.

Lucy absorbs this.

Not angry.

Disoriented.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

LUCY

My defense is in three weeks.

Mara nods.

MARA

I know.

LUCY

I need you steady.

Mara chooses her words carefully.

MARA

I am steady.

Lucy blinks.

That wasn't the answer she expected.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Lucy exhales—harder now.

LUCY

This feels selfish.

Mara meets her eyes.

MARA  
It feels necessary.

Silence.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Lucy stands in the doorway.

Watches Mara paint.

Really watches.

The waiting.

The restraint.

The attention.

She's never seen this version.

INT. FRONT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

LUCY  
You could've told me it mattered  
this much.

Mara doesn't stop painting.

MARA  
I didn't know until I didn't stop.

That lands.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - EVENING

Lucy leaves without hugging.

Not punitive.

Processing.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - EVENING

Mara finishes the layer.

Steps back.

The painting has a pulse now.

She exhales—relief mixed with grief.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Mara updates the countdown widget.

36 DAYS REMAINING

She doesn't rush.

She doesn't celebrate.

She keeps going.

EXT. MARA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The front room glows.

The rest of the neighborhood moves on schedule.

This house is off-grid now.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - MORNING

The painting has dried unevenly.

Mara notices where the pigment pooled, where it resisted.

She doesn't correct it.

She builds around it.

This is who she is now—responsive, not controlling.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Mara opens the mail.

A BANK STATEMENT sits on top.

She opens it.

Balances lower than she wants.

Not catastrophic.

But finite.

She exhales—not fear, calculation.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Her phone lights up.

GALLERY EMAIL  
(PREVIEW):

Reminder: Artist check-in scheduled this week.

Mara stares at it.

The deadline is no longer theoretical.

INT. LUCY & ETHAN'S HOUSE - MORNING

Lucy moves fast.

Hair half-done. Coffee untouched.

Her phone pings.

CHILDCARE CANCELLATION EMAIL

Lucy freezes.

Stares.

Then forwards it—to Ethan.

Not Mara.

That choice costs her something.

INT. LUCY'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Ethan enters.

ETHAN  
What happened?

Lucy doesn't look up.

LUCY  
I'm handling it.

She means it.

She's never had to before.

INT. LUCY & ETHAN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Ethan stands at the counter, phone in hand.

The forwarded email from Lucy glows on the screen:

CHILDCARE CANCELLATION - TODAY.

He looks toward the dining room where Lucy is already back at her laptop, headphones on, typing furiously.

Ethan exhales.

Sets the phone down.

He opens a cabinet, pulls out two travel mugs.

Fills one with coffee for Lucy.

Adds exactly the right amount of cream—no measuring, muscle memory.

He carries both mugs into the dining room.

INT. LUCY'S DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ethan sets Lucy's mug beside her elbow.

She doesn't look up.

ETHAN  
(quiet)  
You forwarded it to me.

Lucy pulls one earbud out.

Finally meets his eyes.

LUCY  
I didn't want to fight with her  
today.

ETHAN  
You didn't want to ask.

A beat.

LUCY  
Same difference.

Ethan sits across from her.

Doesn't push.

Just waits.

ETHAN  
She's not wrong, you know.

About needing space.

Lucy's jaw tightens.

LUCY  
I know she's not wrong.

That's the problem.

Ethan nods slowly.

ETHAN  
I've watched her hold everything  
together for twenty years.

Including us.

Including you when I was working eighty-hour weeks.

He gestures vaguely toward the papers, the laptop, the chaos.

ETHAN (CONT'D)  
Maybe it's time we figure out how  
to hold some of it ourselves.

Lucy looks at the coffee mug.

Then at him.

LUCY  
(soft)  
I don't know if I remember how.

ETHAN  
Then we learn.

Together.

He stands, kisses the top of her head—brief, steady.

Leaves her with the coffee and the silence.

CUT TO:

EXT. LUCY & ETHAN'S HOUSE - MORNING - MOMENTS LATER

Ethan steps onto the porch with his own mug.

Looks across the street toward Mara's house.

The front room light is already on.

A faint silhouette moves behind the curtain.

He raises the mug slightly—invisible toast.

Then heads to his car.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - MIDDAY

Mara paints through discomfort.

Her strokes grow more assured.

She pauses.

Steps back.

Sees something emerging she didn't plan.

She smiles—brief, private.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MIDDAY

The doorbell rings.

Mara startles.

She wasn't expecting anyone.

EXT. MARA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Mara opens the door to KAREN (early 60s), holding a flyer and coffee.

KAREN  
You still human in there?

MARA  
Depends on the hour.

Karen steps inside.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Karen stops short at the canvases.

Doesn't speak immediately.

That restraint matters.

KAREN  
When did you start again?

Mara considers.

MARA  
When I stopped waiting.

Karen nods.

INT. FRONT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Karen notices the GALLERY COUNTDOWN on Mara's phone.

KAREN  
Deadline?

Mara nods.

KAREN (CONT'D)  
Good.

Deadlines tell the truth.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Karen pours coffee without asking.

KAREN  
Lucy coping?

Mara shrugs.

MARA  
She's learning.

Karen studies her.

KAREN  
So are you.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - AFTERNOON

Karen leaves.

Mara returns to the painting.

Adds a bold stroke—almost too much.

She freezes.

Leaves it.

Trusts the process.

INT. LUCY & ETHAN'S HOUSE - EVENING

Lucy sits at the dining table.

Defense notes everywhere.

Her phone lights up with reminders.

She ignores them.

She speaks aloud—practicing her defense.

Her voice shakes.

She keeps going.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - EVENING

Mara waits for paint to dry.

Doesn't rush.

Time presses in from both sides now.

She feels it.

She doesn't retreat.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Mara checks her bank app.

Transfers a small amount to savings.

Not enough.

But intentional.

She labels the transfer:

"STUDIO."

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - NIGHT

Mara updates the gallery widget.

32 DAYS REMAINING

She doesn't flinch.

She writes in her notebook:

I am allowed to want this.

She closes it.

EXT. MARA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The front room glows.

The neighborhood ticks along.

Inside one house, time is being renegotiated.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - MORNING

The painting is no longer tentative.

It has weight.

Mara stands back, arms folded—not admiring, assessing.

She turns the canvas slightly.

Light reveals a flaw she didn't see yesterday.

She smiles.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Mara checks her phone.

GALLERY EMAIL:

Curator visit confirmed. Today. 2:00 PM.

Mara reads it twice.

No adrenaline.

Just focus.

She puts the phone face down.

INT. LUCY & ETHAN'S HOUSE - MORNING

Lucy practices her defense aloud.

Her voice tightens on a key sentence.

She stops.

Starts again.

The clock on the wall ticks—loud.

Her phone BUZZES.

CALENDAR ALERT: Advisor Check-in.

Lucy silences it.

Keeps talking.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - LATE MORNING

Mara cleans the space.

Not hiding anything—clarifying.

She removes one unfinished canvas from view.

Leaves the bold one.

A choice.

INT. FRONT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mara's hands shake slightly as she mixes paint.

She notices.

Breathes.

Waits.

The shaking stops.

EXT. MARA'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

A sleek car pulls up.

Out steps ELENA RUIZ (40s)—gallery curator. Calm, observant, precise.

She carries no clipboard.

That's deliberate.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - ENTRYWAY - CONTINUOUS

Mara opens the door.

ELENA  
Mara Kline?

MARA  
Yes.

They shake hands.

Equal footing.

INT. FRONT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Elena enters the space slowly.

Doesn't speak right away.

Lets the room speak first.

Mara resists the urge to explain.

INT. FRONT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Elena stops in front of the canvas.

Studies it.

Steps closer.

Then farther away.

Time stretches.

Mara doesn't interrupt.

INT. FRONT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

ELENA  
You haven't shown publicly in a  
long time.

Statement. Not judgment.

MARA  
I know.

ELENA  
Why now?

Mara considers.

MARA  
Because I stopped waiting to be  
needed.

Elena looks at her—interested now.

INT. FRONT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Elena circles the canvas.

ELENA  
This work isn't tentative.

Mara nods.

MARA  
Neither am I.

A beat.

Elena smiles—small, genuine.

INT. FRONT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

ELENA  
The deadline is firm.

MARA  
So am I.

Elena registers that.

INT. FRONT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

ELENA

If you deliver the piece-  
we'll feature it.

Mara absorbs this.

ELENA (CONT'D)

But we don't extend deadlines.

Mara nods.

She already knew.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Elena leaves.

Mara stands alone.

Her phone BUZZES.

Lucy.

INTERCUT - INT. LUCY'S OFFICE - SAME

Lucy paces.

Papers everywhere.

LUCY

My advisor moved my defense  
rehearsal.

Again.

Mara listens.

INTERCUT - CONTINUOUS

LUCY

I don't know how I'm supposed to do  
this without everything falling  
apart.

Mara feels the pull.

The old reflex.

She pauses.

INTERCUT - CONTINUOUS

MARA  
You're doing it.

Lucy blinks.

LUCY  
I am?

MARA  
Yes.

A beat.

MARA (CONT'D)  
It's just louder without me  
catching the edges.

Lucy swallows.

INTERCUT - CONTINUOUS

LUCY  
Are you... okay?

Mara looks at the canvas.

At the light.

MARA  
I am.

Lucy nods.

Relief mixed with resentment.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - EVENING

Mara adds another layer.

The painting resists again.

She waits.

Lets it dry.

Time presses.

She doesn't force it.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Mara updates the widget.

28 DAYS REMAINING

She writes in her notebook:

Midway is where doubt pretends to be wisdom.

She closes it.

EXT. MARA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The house glows.

Steady.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATE AFTERNOON

Karen and Mara sit at the table with coffee. The gallery countdown widget glows on Mara's phone between them:

27 DAYS REMAINING

KAREN

You're really doing it.

MARA

Trying to.

Karen studies her old friend.

KAREN

I almost went to Paris in '89.

Had the acceptance letter. Plane ticket. Everything. Then my mother got sick. Then the kids came. Then... life. Mara listens.

KAREN (CONT'D)

I still have the letter in a drawer.

Sometimes I take it out and wonder what version of me never came back from that trip. She reaches across and squeezes Mara's hand – firm, not sentimental.

KAREN (CONT'D)  
Don't put yours in a drawer.

Mara looks down at their hands.

MARA  
What if Lucy never forgives me?

KAREN  
Then she'll have to grow up too.

Same as you did. A long beat. Mara nods once. Small. Decisive.

Outside, the neighborhood lights begin to come on – one house at a time.

The front room glows behind them.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE – FRONT ROOM – MORNING

The canvas has multiplied.

Two works now lean against opposite walls.

One advancing.

One resisting.

Mara stands between them.

Choosing where to invest her energy.

She turns toward the harder one.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE – KITCHEN – MORNING

Mara opens the mail.

A UTILITY NOTICE—routine, but close to the margin.

She folds it neatly.

Sets it under the gallery email printout on the counter.

Art above necessity.

For now.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Her phone BUZZES.

BANK ALERT: Balance below preferred threshold.

Mara closes the app.

Not panic.

Awareness.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - LATE MORNING

Mara paints with urgency she didn't have before.

Not rushed.

Focused.

The brushwork tightens.

She stops herself.

Breathes.

Waits.

Paint needs time.

So does she.

INT. LUCY & ETHAN'S HOUSE - MORNING

Lucy rehearses aloud—again.

This time Ethan watches from the doorway.

LUCY  
(reading)  
"—the methodological framework  
collapses without—"

She falters.

Stops.

INT. LUCY'S DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

                          ETHAN  
          You know this.

Lucy rubs her face.

                          LUCY  
          I know it with conditions.

That line lands.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - MIDDAY

Mara's phone BUZZES.

A text from Lucy.

LUCY (TEXT):

Advisor wants another revision.

I don't have time.

Mara reads it.

Types.

Deletes.

Types again.

MARA (TEXT):

You're allowed to take time.

She sends it.

Immediately worries it sounded dismissive.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mara steps back from the canvas.

The painting pushes back harder now.

It demands something she hasn't named yet.

INT. LUCY & ETHAN'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Lucy stares at Mara's text.

Her jaw tightens.

She tosses the phone onto the couch.

Guilt creeps in.

Then anger.

Then resolve.

She opens her laptop.

Keeps working.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Mara opens her notebook.

Writes numbers.

Budget math this time.

She circles the \$10,000.

Not greed.

Relief.

She crosses out half.

Taxes. Fees. Reality.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Mara writes beneath it:

What does this buy me?

She doesn't answer yet.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Mara paints until the light shifts too far.

She stops mid-stroke.

Leaves it unfinished.

This restraint costs her.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - EVENING

Mara eats dinner standing.

Notices.

Sits.

Corrects.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - NIGHT

Mara watches the painting dry.

Minutes stretch.

Her phone vibrates.

Lucy calling.

Mara hesitates.

Answers.

INTERCUT - INT. LUCY'S CAR - SAME

Lucy parked outside campus.

Eyes red.

LUCY  
I can't do this if everything  
around me keeps moving.

Mara feels the pull again.

The old gravity.

INTERCUT - CONTINUOUS

MARA  
Everything isn't moving.

Lucy laughs bitterly.

LUCY  
It feels like you are.

Silence.

Mara doesn't deny it.

INTERCUT - CONTINUOUS

MARA

I am.

A beat.

MARA (CONT'D)

But I'm not leaving you.

Lucy exhales.

Not fully convinced.

But steadied.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - NIGHT

Mara updates the widget.

21 DAYS REMAINING

She stares at it.

Writes in her notebook:

Urgency is not the same as importance.

She underlines importance.

EXT. MARA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The house glows.

The light flickers once.

Holds.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - DAWN

A COUNTDOWN MONTAGE begins—quiet, observational.

- Light creeps across the canvas.
- Paint dries in uneven bands.
- Mara's hands wash, re-stain, wash again.
- The countdown widget ticks down silently.

14 DAYS REMAINING

Mara doesn't rush.

She tightens.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Mara opens the fridge.

Less food now. More intention.

She pours coffee. Drinks it cold.

Checks the utility notice again.

Folds it smaller this time.

INT. LUCY & ETHAN'S HOUSE - MORNING

Lucy practices her defense in front of a mirror.

She stops mid-sentence.

Stares at herself.

Her phone BUZZES.

REMINDER: Defense - 10 days

She silences it.

Keeps going.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - MIDDAY

Mara stares at the painting.

Something is wrong.

Not technically.

Emotionally.

She knows it.

She sits.

Waits.

This costs time she doesn't have.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

The doorbell rings.

Mara opens the door to ELENA, the curator.

Unexpected.

INT. FRONT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Elena studies the painting again.

Longer this time.

ELENA

You're holding something back.

Mara nods.

MARA

I know.

Elena doesn't push.

ELENA

We don't need perfect.

We need honest.

She leaves it there.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Mara stands alone in front of the canvas. The section she removed earlier lies crumpled on the floor like shed skin. She picks up a brush. Dips it. Holds it inches from the surface. Nothing happens. Her hand trembles—just once. She sets the brush down. Steps back until her shoulders hit the wall. Slides down slowly until she's sitting on the floor. The room is quiet except for the faint tick of the hallway clock drifting in. Mara looks at her hands—stained, cracked, older than she remembers allowing them to be. She speaks to the empty room. Voice low. Almost a whisper.

MARA

I thought if I just started again...

the rest would follow. Like muscle memory. A long beat.

MARA (CONT'D)

But it's not the same hand.

And it's not the same life. She closes her eyes. For the first time since she unfolded the easel, doubt arrives fully—not as fear, but as grief. She lets it sit there. Doesn't fight it. After a moment she opens her eyes. Reaches for the discarded section of canvas on the floor. Smooths it out. Not to fix it. Just to see it again. She traces the brushstrokes with her finger—old decisions, abandoned choices. Then she stands. Picks up a fresh brush. Different color. Adds one small mark to the main canvas—deliberate, unapologetic. It doesn't solve anything. But it answers something. She exhales.

The light in the room has shifted—golden hour beginning.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Mara returns to the canvas.

Removes a section she labored over.

It hurts.

The painting breathes.

INT. LUCY & ETHAN'S HOUSE - EVENING

Lucy sits on the floor, surrounded by papers.

Overwhelmed.

Ethan kneels beside her.

ETHAN  
You don't have to be your mother.

Lucy looks up.

LUCY  
I know.

A beat.

LUCY (CONT'D)  
I just don't know how not to need  
her.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Mara paints through discomfort.

Her movements are sure now.

No second-guessing.

She stops.

Steps back.

The painting is finished.

She doesn't smile.

She exhales.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Mara checks her phone.

A missed call from Lucy.

She doesn't call back yet.

She needs to sit with this.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - NIGHT

Mara updates the widget.

7 DAYS REMAINING

She doesn't write tonight.

She just looks.

INT. LUCY & ETHAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Lucy stares at her laptop.

The cursor blinks.

She types a sentence.

Deletes it.

Types again.

Keeps it.

Growth.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - NIGHT

Mara covers the finished painting with a cloth.

A protective gesture.

She turns off every light except one.

EXT. MARA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The house glows from a single room.

Steady.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - NIGHT

Mara sits in the chair.

Hands still stained with paint.

She rests them on her knees.

Waits.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - MORNING

The painting waits beneath the cloth.

Mara stands in front of it, hands folded.

Her phone BUZZES.

She doesn't look.

She lifts the cloth.

The work is whole.

Not perfect.

True.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Mara finally checks her phone.

Two reminders stacked:

- Gallery Delivery: TODAY - 3:00 PM

- Lucy's Dissertation Defense: TODAY - 4:30 PM

The overlap is brutal.

Unavoidable.

Mara closes her eyes.

Breathes.

INT. LUCY & ETHAN'S HOUSE - MORNING

Lucy stands in the doorway, bag packed, notes clipped tight.

She looks composed.

Too composed.

Ethan watches her.

ETHAN  
Your mom coming?

Lucy hesitates.

Just a fraction.

LUCY  
She has something today.

Ethan nods.

He knows what that means.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - LATE MORNING

Mara carefully wraps the painting.

Not like cargo.

Like a body.

She tapes the final seam.

Stops.

Adds one more layer of padding.

Her phone BUZZES again.

Lucy calling.

Mara lets it ring.

That decision costs her something real.

EXT. MARA'S HOUSE - MIDDAY

Elena's car pulls up.

Mara carries the wrapped painting outside.

Elena steps out, meets her halfway.

No small talk.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

ELENA  
You ready?

Mara looks back at the house.

At the front room window.

Then—

MARA

Yes.

She hands over the painting.

Elena takes it carefully.

A transfer of trust.

INT. LUCY'S UNIVERSITY - HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

Lucy waits outside the defense room.

Faculty move past her.

She checks the time.

Her phone stays dark.

She swallows.

Straightens her jacket.

INT. GALLERY LOADING AREA - AFTERNOON

Mara watches as the painting is unwrapped.

Hung.

Stepped back from.

Other artists hover nearby.

Younger. Louder.

Mara stands apart.

Grounded.

INT. GALLERY - CONTINUOUS

Elena approaches.

ELENA

You did the work.

Mara nods.

No celebration.

Just acknowledgment.

INT. UNIVERSITY DEFENSE ROOM - AFTERNOON

Lucy stands before the panel.

She begins.

Her voice wavers—then steadies.

She finds her footing.

Without Mara in the room.

INT. GALLERY - AFTERNOON

Mara stands alone in front of her painting.

People gather.

Someone reads the placard.

No one knows the cost.

INT. UNIVERSITY DEFENSE ROOM - AFTERNOON

Lucy answers a hard question.

Pauses.

Then—

She answers honestly.

Not defensively.

The panel listens.

INT. GALLERY - AFTERNOON

Elena steps beside Mara.

ELENA  
The commission stands.

Mara exhales.

Relief flashes—then fades.

This wasn't the only thing at stake.

INT. MARA'S CAR - LATE AFTERNOON

Mara sits behind the wheel.

The gallery receipt on the seat beside her.

Her phone lights up.

MISSED CALL - LUCY

Then a text.

LUCY (TEXT):

It's done.

Mara types.

Stops.

Deletes.

Types again.

MARA (TEXT):

I'm proud of you.

She sends it.

INT. LUCY'S UNIVERSITY - HALLWAY - SAME

Lucy reads the text.

Her eyes fill.

She closes them.

Leans against the wall.

Alone.

But standing.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - EVENING

Mara enters the quiet house.

The front room is empty.

The easel bare.

She stands there.

Loss and gain in equal measure.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Mara opens the box labeled FAMILY.

Takes out one photo.

Lucy and Mara—years ago.

She sets it on the table.

Doesn't hang it yet.

EXT. MARA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The house is dark.

No room glowing tonight.

A pause.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mara lies awake.

Phone on the nightstand.

Silent.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - PRE-DAWN

Mara enters the room.

Stands where the painting once was.

She places her palm against the wall.

Leaves it there.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - MORNING

The house wakes slowly.

No alarm. No alerts.

Mara sits at the kitchen table with coffee gone cold.

The gallery receipt lies folded beside her.

She doesn't look at it yet.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - MORNING

The room is empty now.

The absence is clean.

Mara removes the cloth from the easel—even though nothing is there.

Habit.

She folds it carefully.

Places it in a drawer.

Not grief.

Transition.

EXT. MARA'S HOUSE - MIDDAY

Mara retrieves the mail.

A thick envelope from the gallery.

She opens it standing.

Inside:

- Commission confirmation
- Exhibition opening date
- Check attached

Mara looks at the check.

Then folds it.

Puts it back in the envelope.

Not ready yet.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Mara opens her bank app.

Deposits the check.

The balance changes.

She exhales.

Relief without triumph.

She labels the deposit:

"TIME."

INT. LUCY & ETHAN'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Lucy sits at the dining table.

Her defense materials are stacked neatly.

Finished.

She stares at them.

Not sure what comes next.

Her phone BUZZES.

MARA (TEXT):

Coffee?

Lucy hesitates.

Types.

Deletes.

Types again.

LUCY (TEXT):

Okay.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - LATE AFTERNOON

Mara and Lucy sit across from each other.

Neutral ground.

No children. No deadlines.

Just space.

They don't speak right away.

That's new.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - CONTINUOUS

LUCY  
I passed.

Mara smiles.

Not relieved.

Proud.

MARA  
I know.

Lucy blinks.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - CONTINUOUS

LUCY  
I kept waiting to look for you.

Mara nods.

MARA  
I kept waiting not to be needed.

A beat.

They sit with that.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Lucy's voice cracks—not dramatic.

LUCY  
I didn't realize how much I built  
my life around you holding things  
up.

Mara listens.

Doesn't absolve.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - CONTINUOUS

MARA  
I didn't realize how much I taught  
you to.

Lucy looks at her.

Recognition lands both ways.

EXT. COFFEE SHOP - DUSK

They exit together.

Not arm in arm.

Side by side.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - EVENING

Mara opens the box labeled FAMILY.

She takes out more photos now.

Chooses where to place them.

Not all of them.

Enough.

INT. MARA'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - EVENING

Mara sets up a new canvas.

Smaller.

Different orientation.

She primes it.

Waits.

EXT. GALLERY - NIGHT (OPENING)

The gallery hums quietly.

Not a spectacle.

Mara stands near her painting.

Lucy enters with Ethan and the children.

They spot Mara.

They don't rush her.

They approach naturally.

INT. GALLERY - CONTINUOUS

Lucy stands beside Mara.

Reads the placard.

Looks at the work again.

LUCY  
This is brave.

Mara shrugs.

MARA  
It's honest.

Lucy nods.

INT. GALLERY - CONTINUOUS

The grandchildren tug at Mara.

She kneels.

Listens.

Ethan watches—soft gratitude.

No debt.

INT. GALLERY - CONTINUOUS

Elena approaches.

ELENA  
Strong response tonight.

Mara nods.

MARA  
Thank you.

Elena turns to Lucy.

ELENA  
You must be proud.

Lucy doesn't hesitate.

LUCY  
I am.

EXT. COASTAL PARK - LATE AFTERNOON (TIME JUMP)

ONE YEAR LATER

Open sky.

Wind off the water.

EXT. PARK - CONTINUOUS

Mara sits on a blanket.

Sketchbook open.

Paint-stained hands.

Her GRANDCHILDREN, older now, run toward her.

They collapse beside her.

Laughter.

Noise.

Life.

EXT. PARK - CONTINUOUS

Lucy and Ethan watch from a short distance.

Lucy's posture is different now.

Less braced.

More present.

EXT. PARK - CONTINUOUS

Lucy brings coffee.

Hands one to Mara.

Their fingers touch.

Neither pulls away.

EXT. PARK - CONTINUOUS

A kite tangles.

One child struggles.

Mara stands.

Helps untangle it.

Shows.

Then lets go.

The child holds the string.

The kite lifts.

EXT. PARK - CONTINUOUS

Lucy watches.

Steps closer.

She places her hand over Mara's-paint-stained, steady.

The camera lingers.

Not for symbolism.

For truth.

EXT. PARK - SUNSET

The group sits together.

No hierarchy.

No urgency.

Just presence.

EXT. PARK - FINAL IMAGE

Mara's paint-stained hand rests beneath Lucy's hand.

Lucy doesn't move.

The wind carries laughter.

The kite holds.

FADE OUT.

**THE END.**