

SING DON'T CRY

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. MEXICO - NIGHT

A freight train rumbles through the barren land.

EXT. FREIGHT TRAIN - MEXICO - NIGHT

MEXICAN AND CENTRAL AMERICAN MIGRANTS cling to the roof, packed tightly. Sweat glistens on their faces, fear in their eyes. They clutch their belongings, holding on to what little they have. A few, against all odds, try to sleep.

JOSE PAZ, 29, a Mexican migrant, lies on his back, staring at the stars. Beside him, a battered guitar case. The gold cross around his neck catches the moonlight, flickering softly.

A piercing scream rips through the night.

INT. BUS - CONTINUOUS

Jose jerks awake, startled by the scream. It's just a crying BABY. He leans against the window, watching the American landscape whizz by, the moonlight casting an ethereal glow.

EXT. NEW JERSEY TURNPIKE - DAY

The bus approaches Manhattan, the city's grandeur growing closer.

INT. BUS - DAY

Jose's eyes light up as he takes in New York's towering skyscrapers and flashing billboards.

EXT. PORT AUTHORITY - DAY

The bus rumbles to a halt at the bustling bus station.

INT. BUS - DAY

Jose removes the Mexican serape draped over his body, revealing a black, gold-embroidered Charro suit underneath.

BUS DRIVER (O.S.)  
New York!

Jose crowns himself with a black sombrero, then grabs his guitar case and bag.

EXT. PORT AUTHORITY - DAY

Under the blue sky, Jose stands still, taking in the traffic, skyscrapers, and pedestrians glued to their phones.

INT. TAXI - DUSK

Jose sits in the back of a taxi, crossing the crowded Williamsburg Bridge. He gazes out the window, eyes locked on the NYC skyline, full of hope and determination.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - EAST NEW YORK - NIGHT

Jose steps out of the cab, staring up at a crumbling apartment building in a graffiti-covered neighborhood. Across the street, a group of teenage boys, 15 to 18, and Natalia, a pregnant 16-year-old Hispanic girl, smoke and sip beer from brown paper bags. They spot Jose and erupt into laughter, mocking him from a distance.

TEENAGE BOY #1

Aw, shit, nah! Look at this clown!

TEENAGE BOY #2

Sing us a love song, faggot!

TEENAGE BOY #3

Another fucking freak!

Jose looks at Natalia, shaking his head in disappointment and disapproval.

NATALIA

(to Jose)

That's right! Just keep walking,  
you fucking loser!

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Jose finds the door and knocks. Loud music seeps through. He knocks again.

The door swings open to reveal MARIA, 35, exuding a Rita Hayworth-esque hairstyle. She wears a silky kimono that drapes over her narrow hips, highlighting her long legs. She looks over Jose's Charro suit with a hint of admiration.

MARIA

Nice.

JOSE

(in Spanish)

Do you speak Spanish?

Remaining dialogue in Spanish.

MARIA

Yes, what do you want?

JOSE

I'm looking for Mario?

MARIA

He doesn't live here anymore.

Maria starts to close the door, but Jose wedges his foot in the gap.

JOSE

W-- wait--

MARIA

He's gone!

JOSE

Wh-- where?

Unfazed, Maria shrugs. Her indifference wavers as Jose pulls out an envelope and holds it out for her to see.

JOSE (CONT'D)

This... this is the only address I have for him. I-- I don't know anyone in the city. I have to find him...

The blood recedes from Maria's face. She seizes the envelope, examines it, and hastily thrusts it back into Jose's hand.

MARIA

I-- I-- I don't know where he is.

With that, Maria slams the door, leaving Jose standing in the hallway.

JOSE

But-- but I have nowhere to go...

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Maria leans against the door, her face filled with shock and panic.

MARIA

Shit.

EXT. MARIA'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Sirens wail in the distance. Jose stands outside, rubbing his head, uncertain of his next move. A middle-aged DRUNK MAN stumbles by, shooting Jose a mocking glance before erupting into uncontrollable laughter.

Jose pulls his jacket tighter around him and trudges down the street.

Suddenly, Maria bursts out of the building, her eyes scanning the street with panic. Relief washes over her face as she spots Jose, and she sprints toward him.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Jose! Jose! Jose!

Jose turns around, a wave of relief crashing over him.

JOSE

You-- you know where I can find  
Mario? Wait... how do you know my  
name?

Maria raises her wrist, revealing a star tattoo. Jose instinctively does the same, exposing an identical tattoo.

INSERT - JOSE'S WRIST

The tattoos align perfectly.

MARIA

It's me... Mario.

Jose's face twists in shock and disbelief.

JOSE

Mario?

MARIA

Yes.

JOSE

I... I don't understand.

Momentarily overwhelmed, Jose takes a few steps away, his mind racing. He then turns back, gazing at Maria with intensity.

JOSE (CONT'D)  
Mario, it's you!

MARIA  
Well, it's Maria now.

JOSE  
Maria, like the Virgin Maria?

Jose makes the sign of the cross.

MARIA  
More like Maria Magdalene.

Maria twirls, showcasing her transformation. Jose stands in awe, unable to find words to express his astonishment.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Maria and Jose step into the apartment. Jose glances around the room as he takes in the space.

A vintage poster of Rita Hayworth in "Gilda" reigns above the sofa, boasting, "There Never Was A Woman Like Gilda." In a corner, a Holy Mother statue stands, lit by a single flickering candle. Next to Maria's bed, a gold vanity with a three-sided mirror sits, cluttered with makeup and perfumes.

Maria busies herself preparing the couch for Jose, arranging sheets and a pillow.

Dialogue in Spanish.

MARIA  
I can't believe it... you're really here.

JOSE  
It's been a long time.

MARIA  
Seventeen years...

She reaches out, fingers grazing his face, as if making sure he's real.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
I've missed you, Jose.

JOSE

Your letters... I kept every single one.

Maria pulls out a wad of letters from a drawer.

MARIA

Me too. Every word. Your first kiss, your struggles, your fall from the train... I hate those damn trains.

Jose guides Maria's hand to the side of his head.

MARIA (CONT'D)

How many stitches?

JOSE

Thirteen.

MARIA

I thought of you often.

JOSE

Then why did you stop writing? Every day, I waited for a letter that never came.

MARIA

I... I was afraid. I didn't want you to be embarrassed by me.

JOSE

How could you think that?

Maria looks surprised.

MARIA

You don't care?

Jose shakes his head, his affection for her unmistakable.

JOSE

You were always like an older brother to me.

MARIA

I had to be. You were always getting into trouble... Remember when you fell out of that tree? Broke your leg?

JOSE

You carried me home.

MARIA

And you cried the whole way. Such a crybaby.

They share a laugh.

JOSE

And your family?

Maria looks away.

MARIA

My mother cried. Wished I was never born. My father... he broke my nose.

JOSE

I'm sorry.

Maria studies her reflection in the mirror, a bittersweet laugh escaping her.

MARIA

I think it looks better. They want nothing to do with me. Not that it matters. It's not their fault. They just don't understand.

She pauses for a moment.

MARIA (CONT'D)

I've come so far, all on my own. Sometimes... it's better that way.

Jose wraps Maria in a gentle hug.

JOSE

You're not alone anymore.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Moonlight spills in, casting a soft silver glow. Maria lies in bed, staring at the ceiling, lost in thought. Across the room, Jose curls up on the couch.

MARIA

Sing me a song. Like when we were kids.

JOSE

It's late.



MARIA  
Please. It's been years.

Jose reaches for his guitar.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
I miss Mexico...

Jose strums the guitar and sings, "Mexico Lindo y Querido." His voice fills the room with longing and nostalgia. Maria's eyes soften as she listens to the familiar song.

Abruptly, a loud banging from the adjoining apartment shatters the moment.

MAN (O.S.)  
It's 2:00 in the morning! Shut the fuck up!

Jose concludes the song, and Maria showers him with applause.

MARIA  
Bravo! Bravo!

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

A warm ray of sunlight on Maria's sleeping face.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - MORNING

Jose scrambles eggs, stirs beans, fries tortillas, pours coffee, and sets the table, seemingly all at once.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Jose gazes at Maria, marveling at her transformation. As she stirs awake, she greets him with a radiant smile.

JOSE  
(in Spanish)  
I made breakfast.

Jose extends a cup of coffee to her, which she accepts with a smile.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - MINUTES LATER

Maria takes a bottle and a syringe from the vanity, preparing her dose.

Dialogue in Spanish.

JOSE  
What's that?

MARIA  
My hormones.

Maria injects the hormone into her thigh.

JOSE  
Do you like men or women?

MARIA  
A good man.

JOSE  
Ever been with a woman?

MARIA  
Yeah.

JOSE  
Did you like it?

MARIA  
Um... it's a lot of work.

Jose chuckles at her candid response.

JOSE  
Is there someone special?

Maria shakes her head.

JOSE (CONT'D)  
Have you ever been in love?

Maria sets the syringe down.

MARIA  
All the time. Falling in love is  
easy. Being loved back... not so  
much.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - MORNING

Jose and Maria sit at the kitchen table, enjoying their  
breakfast.

Dialogue in Spanish.

JOSE

There's nothing left for me back home. The gangs have taken over.

MARIA

I know.

JOSE

Here, everyone moves so fast, like something exciting's about to happen.

MARIA

That's just anxiety.

They share a laugh.

MARIA (CONT'D)

This city's tough. Most people don't make it. You'll have to be stronger than ever.

Jose takes a moment to absorb her words.

MARIA (CONT'D)

So, what's your plan?

Jose pauses before replying.

JOSE

I want to sing. Do you think I'm crazy?

MARIA

Of course you should sing!

Jose smiles.

MARIA (CONT'D)

But first, you need a job. What did you do in Mexico?

JOSE

I sold snow cones by the beach. Ended up giving them to the kids for free. Sometimes, it was all they had to eat.

Maria smiles, not surprised by Jose's kindness.

MARIA

Restaurants in the city are always looking for busboys, dishwashers--

Suddenly, a rock shatters the window, sending glass flying.

VOICES (O.S.)  
(in English)  
Faggot! Go back to your country,  
freak!

Maria and Jose jump to their feet. At the window, they see, a group of YOUNG BOYS running away.

MARIA  
(in English)  
Pigs! Cowards!

Maria hurls the rock back at them, but they are already far gone.

Dialogue back to Spanish.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
Second time this month. I just had  
the window fixed.

Jose snatches his boots.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
Where are you going?

JOSE  
To find those delinquents!

MARIA  
And then what?

Jose pauses, not having considered that.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
Forget it. It doesn't matter.

Maria looks out the shattered window, her expression resigned.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - DAY

Jose hums as he soaps up.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Maria paints her lips in the mirror.

MARIA  
(in Spanish)  
Hurry up!  
(to herself)  
Jesus, worse than me.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - DAY

Jose slips into his Charro suit and smiles at his reflection in the mirror.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Jose emerges from the bathroom. Maria looks him up and down, shaking her head.

Dialogue in Spanish.

MARIA  
No, no, no. They'll kill you! Take  
it off! Now!

Deflated, Jose scuttles back into the bathroom.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - DAY

Jose begins to undress.

Dialogue in Spanish.

MARIA (O.S.)  
I'm sorry. I just don't want  
anything to happen to you. It's not  
safe out there. Trust me.

Jose smiles, he knows she's just being protective.

JOSE  
If I can't find anything, can you  
help me get a job where you work?

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Maria paces nervously.

Dialogue in Spanish.

MARIA  
I don't think you'd like it very  
much.

JOSE (O.S.)  
Why not? I'll work hard. Give me a  
chance. Where do you work?

Maria hesitates before replying.

MARIA  
The streets.

JOSE (O.S.)  
What?

Maria nervously bites her nails. Jose emerges from the  
bathroom, now in jeans and a T-shirt.

JOSE (CONT'D)  
What do you mean, "the streets"?

Maria avoids his gaze. He understands.

JOSE (CONT'D)  
Do you bring them here?

MARIA  
No.

Jose takes a moment to process this, then grabs his guitar  
case and cowboy hat. He never leaves without them.

JOSE  
Okay.

Maria breathes a sigh of relief.

MARIA  
Start uptown, work your way  
downtown.

JOSE  
You're not coming with me?

MARIA  
They won't give you a chance if  
they see me with you. Can you do it  
alone?

JOSE  
Yeah, I'll be fine.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY STREETS - MONTAGE - DAY

-- In a bustling Italian restaurant, Jose talks to a MANAGER, gesturing animatedly with his hands. The manager shakes his head dismissively, barely looking up from his paperwork.

-- We see Jose walking into and out of countless doors. Each rejection leaves him a little more dispirited.

-- In a busy intersection, Jose pulls out a city map, turning it this way and that. He stops a PASSERBY, asking for directions. The passerby shrugs and hurries away.

-- Jose sits on a park bench, his smile fading as he watches the sun set on the city.

EXT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

A long line snakes around the corner of a flashy nightclub. Jose approaches a WOMAN in line, glued to her phone.

JOSE  
(in Spanish)  
What's going on? What's the line  
for?

She shrugs, doesn't look up. Jose turns to a MAN with earbuds in, head bobbing to the music.

JOSE (CONT'D)  
(in Spanish)  
Excuse me? You speak Spanish?

The man pulls out an earbud.

MAN  
(in English)  
What?

A YOUNG HISPANIC MAN in line cuts in.

HISPANIC MAN  
(in Spanish)  
New club. Auditions for musicians,  
dancers, performers...

JOSE  
(in Spanish)  
Thanks!

INT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

Jose stands at the front of the line. The MANAGER, 50s, a woman with a piercing gaze and a migraine, downs an aspirin and gestures for Jose to start.

MANAGER

All right, you're up. Move it!

Jose steps to the mic, flashing a broad smile. He strums his guitar, his voice filling the club with a heartfelt Spanish ballad. The manager watches, her hardened face softening, captivated.

As the last notes fade away, the manager breaks the silence.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

Well? Who are you? Where you from?

JOSE

(in Spanish)

Want to hear another song?

The manager sighs.

MANAGER

Lemme guess... no English, no papers. Sorry, kid.

The manager signals the BOUNCER, who steps forward.

BOUNCER

(to Jose)

Come on, let's go.

MANAGER

Next!

EXT. UNION SQUARE - NIGHT

Sunset tints the sky as Jose, disheartened, makes his way to the subway station.

INT. SUBWAY - NIGHT

As the subway train rumbles along, Jose leans against the doors, utterly drained.



INT. SUBWAY PLATFORM - NIGHT

Two TEENS, 15, walk up to a MUSLIM WOMAN, 20s, in a hijab, grinning.

TEEN #1  
Terrorist! Terrorist!

Teen #1 grabs her bag, yanking it.

TEEN #1 (CONT'D)  
Get out of my country, dirty  
Muslim!

MUSLIM WOMAN  
Stop it! Leave me alone!

She rummages through her bag, hands shaking. Teen #2 laughs.

TEEN #2  
She's gonna throw a bomb at us!

She pulls out her phone, dialing fast.

TEEN #1  
Take that fucking rag off your  
head!

A train screeches in. As passengers step out, Jose spots the fight: Teen #1 pulling at the woman's hijab.

MUSLIM WOMAN  
Leave me alone! Leave me alone!

TEEN #1  
Take it off! Take it fucking off!

Her phone drops. She shields her hijab. The crowd looks away. Jose steps in, blocking the teens with his guitar case.

JOSE  
(in Spanish)  
Get back!

The teens crack up.

TEEN #1  
It's Zorro! It's fucking Zorro!

A POLICE OFFICER appears across the platform.

TEEN #2  
Five-O!

The teens run. Jose spots the officer and runs off.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Maria lounges on the bed, flipping through a fashion magazine absentmindedly. When she hears the door, she looks up with a sense of relief. Jose walks in, his shoulders slumped, visibly distressed.

Dialogue in Spanish.

MARIA

How did it go? Find anything?

Jose shakes his head, drops onto the couch, exhausted. He pulls off his boots.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Tough day?

JOSE

People are so mean to each other.

MARIA

Yeah, I know.

JOSE

What should I do?

Maria gives him a small, reassuring smile.

MARIA

Try again tomorrow.

EXT. TIME SQUARE - DAY

Jose sits on a bench in bustling Times Square, with a Spanish newspaper, *El Diario*, open on his lap as he circles job postings with a pen.

INT. FRANK RESTAURANT - DAY

With a weary sigh, Jose slaps the newspaper onto the bar and sits down, rubbing his temples.

INT. FRANK RESTAURANT - KITCHEN - DAY

The kitchen is in full swing. FRANK, 60s, the owner, scowls at a pile of dirty dishes in the sink. ANTONIO, 50s, a short and stocky Mexican busboy, catches his glance.

FRANK  
Where the hell is Dante?

Antonio shrugs.

ANTONIO  
No idea, boss.

FRANK  
I swear, I'm gonna kill him!

DANTE, 20s, a devil-may-care waiter, struts into the kitchen.

FRANK (CONT'D)  
What are you getting paid for, a vacation?

DANTE  
I was on my break.

Frank points to Antonio, never breaking stride in his work.

FRANK  
He never takes a break, and I pay him half of what you make!

Dante looks over to Antonio.

DANTE  
This is all he has. I'm just killing time.

FRANK  
Oh, really.

DANTE  
I'm an actor.

FRANK  
No kidding. Any good?

DANTE  
Best in my class.

FRANK  
Impressive.

DANTE  
I got a call-back next week.

FRANK  
Good luck. Hope you get it.

Dante smirks, basking in the praise.

DANTE

Thanks.

FRANK

Now get the fuck out of my place!

Dante's face drops, clearly not expecting that.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Come on, move it! Out! Out!

Dante tosses his apron to the floor and heads for the door.

DANTE

You'll see me on the big screen  
soon. Billboards. I'll be a star.

FRANK

Sure, sure.

Dante throws a fist in the air to Antonio.

DANTE

(to Antonio)

Fight for your rights, man!

Frank glares. Antonio quickly drops his smile.

INT. FRANK RESTAURANT - DAY

As Jose sips his coffee, Frank slumps down at the bar next to him, prompting the bartender to pour him a drink.

FRANK

Make it a double.

He catches sight of the job postings in Jose's newspaper.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Any luck?

Jose shrugs, unsure of what to say. Frank points to the newspaper.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Find anything?

Jose just nods.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Goddamn it. Does anyone here speak  
English anymore?

(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)  
(switches to Spanish)  
Looking for work?

Jose perks up at the Spanish.

Remaining dialogue in Spanish.

JOSE  
You speak Spanish!

FRANK  
Half Cuban.

Jose brightens, thinking he's found an ally in Frank.

JOSE  
I'm Jose.

FRANK  
Yeah, I know.

Frank empties his glass.

FRANK (CONT'D)  
Come on.

INT. FRANK RESTAURANT - KITCHEN - DAY

Frank ushers Jose into the kitchen.

Dialogue in Spanish.

FRANK  
Got papers?

Jose looks down.

FRANK (CONT'D)  
No papers, huh?

JOSE  
I'll work really hard.

FRANK  
Who's gonna pay the taxes? Me?

Frank thinks for a moment.

FRANK (CONT'D)  
Listen... I could pay you under the  
table. Four bucks an hour, okay?  
I'm sticking my neck out for you.  
ICE is everywhere!

Antonio rolls his eyes, clearly having heard this before.

JOSE

Okay.

FRANK

Can you start now?

JOSE

Yes.

Frank tosses Dante's old apron at Jose.

FRANK

All right, start with those.

Frank gestures to the dirty dishes.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Then scrub the floor.

Jose forces a smile, nodding.

INT. FRANK RESTAURANT - KITCHEN - LATER

Jose scrubs the floor as Antonio offers him a cold beer.

Dialogue in Spanish.

ANTONIO

Here...

JOSE

Thank you.

They sip their beers.

ANTONIO

So, where you from?

JOSE

Oaxaca.

ANTONIO

I'm from Chiapas!

Antonio extends his hand. Jose shakes it.

ANTONIO (CONT'D)

Antonio.

JOSE

Jose.

Antonio eyes Jose's guitar case.

ANTONIO

You play?

Jose nods.

JOSE

And sing too.

ANTONIO

I'm in a band called El Trio De El Norte. But there's only two of us.

JOSE

Then why's it called a trio?

ANTONIO

Uh, I don't know. Sounds better, I guess. More professional, you know. Like a real band.

They share a laugh, the first moment of camaraderie in a long day.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jose watches Maria from the couch as she primps in front of her vanity mirror. She wears a slinky, low-cut dress that fits her like a second skin. Strumming his guitar softly, Jose starts to sing "María Bonita" by Agustín Lara.

His gaze follows Maria as she prepares for the night:

-- She takes out her hair rollers, revealing a cascade of glossy curls.

-- With a deft hand, she applies false eyelashes.

-- She carefully paints her lips a bold, sultry red.

-- A gentle mist of perfume is spritzed onto her neck.

-- Finally, she slips into her high-heeled shoes, completing her transformation.

Jose's song fades out as Maria slips on a stylish jacket over her dress.

Dialogue in Spanish.

MARIA

Don't wait up for me. I won't be home until tomorrow.

She leaves some cash on the end table.

MARIA (CONT'D)

This should be enough for you to get to work and grab something to eat. Don't want to watch others eat while you're hungry.

She heads towards the door, opening it before turning back to Jose.

MARIA (CONT'D)

How do I look?

JOSE

Beautiful.

Maria smiles, then steps out and closes the door behind her.

EXT. ROOSEVELT AVE - QUEENS - NIGHT

Maria steps onto Roosevelt Avenue, a throwback to the old days of Times Square. The street is lined with prostitutes, seedy dance bars, rundown motels, and vendors selling illegal goods. Drug addicts occupy the shadows, creating a somber atmosphere beneath the city's surface.

Confident and unyielding, Maria struts down the avenue, lighting a cigarette with a flick of her lighter.

EXT. MOTEL - NIGHT

Maria approaches a cheap motel, passing by two young prostitutes. Their glazed eyes and sluggish movements hint at their altered state.

INT. MOTEL - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Maria saunters down the hallway bathed in an eerie blue light.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

A WHITE MAN, 40s, well-dressed and detached, hands Maria some cash, focusing more on the transaction than the woman in front of him.



MARIA

The same?

The man simply nods in response. Maria's demeanor shifts; she becomes more assertive.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Not so hard. You were really rough last time.

Resigned, she hikes up her dress. The man unzips his pants, preparing for the encounter. As he positions himself behind Maria and starts to thrust, her gaze zeroes in on the wedding ring on his finger. Despite the intimate act, the atmosphere is thick with loneliness and despair.

INT. FRANK RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Jose hums a Spanish tune while washing dishes. Antonio enters with a fresh load and sets them down beside him, stealing a moment to listen to Jose's humming.

Dialogue in Spanish.

ANTONIO

The guy I sing with just got deported. I'm looking for a new partner. What do you think?

Jose looks up, his eyes lighting up.

JOSE

Really?

ANTONIO

Yeah, we can't make ends meet with what Frank gives us. So...?

Jose's eyes twinkle with eagerness.

JOSE

Yes!

Antonio leans against the counter, talking and gesturing with enthusiasm.

ANTONIO

Great! We go from restaurant to restaurant in Queens. There are lots of Spanish restaurants there, and the owners don't mind us performing. Plus, the ladies love it!

Jose's grin widens as he dries his hands on his apron.

JOSE

All I want is to sing and make  
people happy.

ANTONIO

Well, I really need the extra cash.  
I have a wife and six daughters  
back in Mexico. By the way, do you  
have a Charro suit? You can't sing  
without a Charro suit. My sister  
can make you one. She's a fantastic  
seamstress.

Jose nods, his excitement evident.

JOSE

I have a Charro suit!

They exchange a smile.

INT. MOTEL - NIGHT

Maria freshens her lipstick before a cracked mirror. The  
white Man fixes his tie. She gestures to his wedding ring.

MARIA

Your wife doesn't know, right?

WHITE MAN

You wouldn't understand.

Maria meets his gaze in the mirror.

MARIA

Like it or not, I think we're not  
so different, you and me.

WHITE MAN

Shut the fuck up!

He slaps Maria across the face. She hardly flinches. She's  
been here before.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Jose lies on the couch, eyes fixed on the ceiling. Maria  
enters the apartment, quietly closing the door behind her.

Dialogue in Spanish.

JOSE

Maria, guess what? I'm going to be singing--

He breaks off as he sees her split lip.

JOSE (CONT'D)

What happened?

Maria shrugs, trying to make light of the situation.

MARIA

It's nothing. Don't worry, I'm fine.

Jose walks to the kitchen, returning moments later with a dishcloth filled with ice. He hands it to Maria, concerned.

JOSE

Why don't you take a break? Maybe find something else to do.

Maria smirks bitterly, but there's a deep sadness in her eyes.

MARIA

Sure, maybe I'll ask the Holy Mother to cover for me.

She gazes deeply into the mirror, deep in thought.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Who's going to hire me? Most people can't even look at me.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Jose, now dressed in his Charro suit, grabs his guitar. Maria watches him with a hint of worry in her eyes.

MARIA

Come here.

Jose walks over to her and she straightens his bow tie.

MARIA (CONT'D)

You have to be careful, okay?

JOSE

I'll be fine.

MARIA

Just... keep your eyes open.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Jose spots Antonio, who is squeezed into a Charro suit. He has a half-finished six-pack of beer in his hand. He tears one off and holds it up.

Dialogue in Spanish.

ANTONIO

Here.

JOSE

No, I'm okay.

ANTONIO

I sing better when I'm drunk.  
Cheers!

Antonio drains the beer can and tosses it into a nearby trash can. He smiles at Jose.

ANTONIO (CONT'D)

Let's sing!

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A WAITER carries a birthday cake, blazing with candles, toward a table full of YOUNG WOMEN, followed by Antonio strumming his guitar and Jose singing "Las Mañanitas."

JOSE

(in Spanish)

*The day you were born all the  
flowers were born...*

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - NIGHT

In the stark, fluorescent-lit hallway of the high school, JANE KARLOWSKI, 30s, with pale skin and sunken cheeks, walks alone down a long, deserted corridor. Her exhausted face suggests she carries more than just the weight of the day on her shoulders.

EXT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Antonio eagerly counts their earnings, his face lighting up with each bill.

Dialogue in Spanish.

ANTONIO  
The ladies love you!

He divides the cash and hands Jose his portion. Grateful, Jose carefully stashes the money deep within his boot.

ANTONIO (CONT'D)  
Let's grab a drink!

Jose shakes his head, declines, and stows away his guitar.

ANTONIO (CONT'D)  
Come on. One drink. It cures everything!

JOSE  
Not tonight.

ANTONIO  
Too bad.

Jose heads off, leaving Antonio behind.

ANTONIO (CONT'D)  
Hey, you sure? We're loaded!

He brandishes a thick wad of cash. Jose continues walking, not looking back.

ANTONIO (CONT'D)  
Ah, come on! Where you going?

Jose offers a warm smile without stopping.

JOSE  
Home.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

The packed auditorium buzzes with anticipation as the orchestra and chorus file onto the stage.

INT. TRAIN - NIGHT

In stark contrast to the lively auditorium, Jose sleeps in a near-empty train car.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Center stage, Jane stands facing the orchestra and chorus. Her nervous energy is palpable;

she touches her nose, wrings her hands, and brushes her hair back nervously. The stage lights dim, leaving her under a solitary spotlight. She signals, and with a swift response, the orchestra and chorus start playing Mozart's "Lacrimosa."

INT. TRAIN - NIGHT

The mournful requiem from the auditorium reverberates over the following scenes.

A YOUNG POLICE OFFICER stumbles upon the sleeping Jose and smacks his baton against the seat.

Startled, Jose jolts awake. He catches sight of the imposing Police Officer and bolts out of the train car in a flurry of panic just before the doors snap shut.

EXT. STREET - BRIGHTON BEACH - BROOKLYN - NIGHT

Jose looks around, unsure where he is. Close behind, two ADDICTS, 20s, lurk, their disheveled appearances and faces scarred by the ravages of drug abuse. They track Jose with hawkish eyes.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Overcome by emotion, Jane hurries down the hallway. She passes by MR. CUNNINGHAM, 40s, sporting braces and a beard that gives him the appearance of a classical scholar.

MR. CUNNINGHAM

Oh, Jane. It was wonderful...

Jane brushes past him, unresponsive.

MR. CUNNINGHAM (CONT'D)

Jane, are you all right? Jane?

Ignoring him, Jane makes a beeline for the exit.

EXT. STREET - BRIGHTON BEACH, BROOKLYN - NIGHT

Jose gazes up at the stars, momentarily lost in his thoughts.

ADDICT #1 (O.S.)

Dreaming of space...?

Jose whirls around. Addict #1 delivers a sharp punch to Jose's face. His sombrero flies off.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Jane strides quickly down the street.

EXT. STREET - BRIGHTON BEACH, BROOKLYN - NIGHT

The requiem concludes.

Addict #1 rifles through Jose's pockets.

ADDICT #1  
Fucking empty!

ADDICT #2  
Check again!

Addict #1 pats Jose down again.

ADDICT #1  
Not a single penny. Just...

He pulls out Jose's worn Mexican passport, then flings it aside with disgust.

ADDICT #1 (CONT'D)  
...another fucking Mexican!

ADDICT #2  
Shit, shit, shit, shit, shit!

ADDICT #1  
This is all your fault. I said not him. Look at him!

ADDICT #2  
Get the case! It has be worth something.

Addict #1 goes for the guitar case, but Jose fights back.  
Addict #2 picks up a bottle from the street and shatters it.

ADDICT #2 (CONT'D)  
Hand it over! Now!

JOSE  
(in Spanish)  
Stop! Stop! Leave me alone!

Addict #2 spits at Jose.

ADDICT #2  
English! You fucking cockroach!

Laughing uproariously, they continue to kick Jose.

From across the street, Jane witnesses the assault. She scans the deserted street. Fuck.

Addict #1 lunges for the guitar again, but Jose hangs onto it with all his strength.

Jane pulls out a can of pepper spray from her bag.

JANE  
Stop it!

ADDICT #2  
Fuck you!

Jane brandishes the can, ready to spray.

JANE  
Enough!

Addict #2 brandishes the jagged bottle.

ADDICT #2  
Don't fuck with us, bitch!

Jane returns his gaze unflinchingly.

JANE  
I'll burn your eyes off!

Addict #2 kicks Jose one more time.

JANE (CONT'D)  
Get outta here!

They run off laughing.

JANE (CONT'D)  
Assholes!

Jane turns to Jose, who still clings to his guitar.

JANE (CONT'D)  
Are you hurt?

Jose doesn't respond.

JANE (CONT'D)  
You okay?

Jose slowly lifts his head. One side of his face is covered in blood.



JANE (CONT'D)  
You're bleeding.

Jose opens his eyes, seeing nothing but a blur of lights.

JANE (CONT'D)  
Hello...?

Jose blinks, and his vision clears.

JANE (CONT'D)  
Can you hear me...?

Jose just stares.

JANE (CONT'D)  
What's wrong? Can't you speak?

JOSE  
(in Spanish)  
I got lost-- I-- I was looking at  
the stars-- I didn't see them  
coming. I didn't see them.

JANE  
You don't speak English? No  
English?

Weakened and bloodied, Jose reaches for his hat and passport.  
He starts to fall, but Jane catches him.

JANE (CONT'D)  
I got you. Don't worry. Just hold  
on.

Their eyes lock for a moment.

JANE (CONT'D)  
Where do you live?

JOSE  
(in Spanish)  
I'm okay, I'm okay.

Jane gestures towards a sea of identical, nondescript  
buildings.

JANE  
That's where I live...

Jose looks up.

INT. JANE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jane assists Jose onto the couch, pausing momentarily as if second-guessing her decision.

JANE  
(to herself)  
What am I doing?

KITTY, a white cat, leaps onto the couch, startling Jose.

JANE (CONT'D)  
Don't worry, that's Kitty.

As Kitty springs into Jane's arms, she plants a kiss on the cat.

JANE (CONT'D)  
Do you like cats?

Receiving no answer:

JANE (CONT'D)  
You don't understand me, do you?

She sees the cut on his forehead.

JANE (CONT'D)  
You're still bleeding.

Placing Kitty on the couch, Jane heads to the bathroom. Jose pets Kitty.

INT. JANE'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Jane sniffs a line of cocaine, then grabs bandages, cotton balls, and hydrogen peroxide from the medicine cabinet.

INT. JANE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jane attends to Jose's wound, prompting a wince as she cleans it. She attempts to soothe him by gently blowing on the cleaned area. Her eyes are drawn to his Charro suit.

JANE  
Did you just come from a costume  
party?

As she secures a bandage over his cut, Jose responds.

JOSE  
(in Spanish)  
I need to go.

He makes an attempt to stand but a wave of dizziness forces him back down onto the couch.

JANE  
Relax. Just sit...

She falls silent, assessing the situation. Her anxiety is palpable as she wrings her hands.

JANE (CONT'D)  
You can stay here. But if you try anything, I'm calling the police.

Jose jerks back in alarm, he understands the word "police."

JOSE  
(in Spanish)  
No! No! No police!

JANE  
Okay, okay, no police. Just don't try anything funny, or I'll...

Jane clenches her fist to emphasize her point, leaving Jose confused.

INT. JANE'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jane secures the door with a lock. She reaches over to her night stand, retrieves a prescription bottle and consumes a few pills.

INT. JANE'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - MORNING

Jane's gaze falls upon the closed door.

INT. JANE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Cautiously, Jane enters the living room to find Jose sleeping peacefully. She studies him briefly; he seems harmless. Her tension eases and she proceeds to the kitchen.

INT. JANE'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - MORNING

Seated at the table, Jane busies herself with grading papers. The sound of a kettle reaches its high pitched whistle in the background.

INT. JANE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

The hissing kettle stirs Jose from sleep, he winces from a throbbing headache. Jane approaches, offering a steaming cup of coffee and gestures towards his head.

JANE  
It hurts, huh?

Jose returns her gaze, silent.

JANE (CONT'D)  
I have something...

She pulls out a prescription bottle from her pocket.

JANE (CONT'D)  
This might help.

He eyes the bottle, then shifts his gaze to her.

JOSE  
(in Spanish)  
Why do you take this? It's not good  
for you. It just makes things  
worse.

JANE  
Go on. Take one.

She indicates his head once more.

JANE (CONT'D)  
It takes the pain away.

With some hesitation, Jose swallows the pill, then starts reaching for his boots.

JANE (CONT'D)  
You don't have to go. You can  
stay...

Jose just nods, struggling to make sense of what she is saying. Jane sways nervously, something flickers in her eyes.

JANE (CONT'D)  
Wait-- wait stay right there.

Jane departs towards the bedroom. Left alone, Jose spits the pill out and puts it into his pocket. Upon her return, Jane empties her bag onto the couch. She presents her faculty staff ID to Jose.

JANE (CONT'D)  
Jane Karlowksi. That's me...

Jose examines the ID.

JOSE  
Jane...

He struggles with the surname.

JOSE (CONT'D)  
Karlowksi.

JANE  
That's right.

Jose picks up a perfume bottle, then stops. Jane places it back in his hand.

JANE (CONT'D)  
It's okay.

He sprays a hint on his wrist and takes a sniff. Subsequently, he uncaps a lip balm. Jane motions towards her own lips.

JANE (CONT'D)  
My lips get dry.

She applies some on her lips, then motions to Jose's.

JANE (CONT'D)  
Try some...

Following her lead, Jose applies some to his lips. They share a brief smile. Then he pulls out his passport and hands it to Jane. She leafs through it.

JANE (CONT'D)  
Jose Paz.

Jose nods in affirmation.

JANE (CONT'D)  
I've never been to Mexico. I bet it's beautiful...

Dreamily, she continues.

JANE (CONT'D)

I've always wanted to go somewhere new, see things I've never seen before.

She seems lost in thought.

JANE (CONT'D)

We always talked about going on a trip, but we never had the time. He would've loved it. I miss him so much...

JOSE

(in Spanish)

Are you okay?

A photo tumbles out from Jose's passport, pulling Jane back from her daze. She picks it up, her fingers tracing over the image.

INSERT - PHOTO

A young boy perched on a woman's lap, holding a toy guitar.

JOSE

(in Spanish)

That's my mother and me. Before she got sick.

Jane smiles gently.

JANE

It's a beautiful picture.

JOSE

(in Spanish)

She passed away when I was seven.

JANE

She's very pretty.

His expression is heavy with sorrow.

JOSE

(in Spanish)

My father never smiled again. Alcohol made his pain worse. One day, he vanished and never came back.

Their eyes meet, carrying a silent understanding.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Maria enters, kicks off her heels, and starts massaging her feet. She immediately notices that Jose is not home. That's odd.

INT. JANE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Maria Callas' "Un bel Di Vedremo" plays on an old Victrola. Jane changes Jose's bandage.

JANE

When I was a little girl, my mother  
would play this all day long...

Jose steals glances at Jane's lips, hair, skin, and eyes. Each glimpse quickens his heartbeat.

JANE (CONT'D)

From the moment she woke up until  
late at night. I hated it then, but  
now... I can't stop listening to  
it. It's not really a sad song.  
It's not...

She applies a fresh bandage over Jose's cut.

JANE (CONT'D)

It's life.

They both listen to the music, completely absorbed.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Maria lies in bed, smoking, her expression filled with worry.

INT. JANE'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Jose prepares a Mexican dish for dinner, skillfully chopping the ingredients and maintaining a clean workspace.

JOSE

(in Spanish)

I hope you like it spicy.

JANE

Can I help with anything?

She reaches for a tomato, and their fingers accidentally touch.

They are now inches apart, surrounded by each other's scent. Their eyes briefly lock, but before it can escalate further, Jane interrupts.

JANE (CONT'D)

I-- I need to... I'll be right back.

Jane heads towards the bathroom. Jose rubs the back of his neck, feeling a slight flush.

INT. JANE'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Jane snorts a line of cocaine and gazes at herself in the mirror.

INT. JANE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jane and Jose sit at the table, eating. They engage in conversation, despite their language barrier. They speak freely, without inhibitions.

JANE

I'm tired of everything. I'm becoming meaner. More scared... I just want to feel normal again.

JOSE

(in Spanish)

Your eyes look sad. Why? Are you alone? Do you need someone?

JANE

I need to stop. I know it's wrong. There have been so many times since the accident that I've wanted to end it all.

JOSE

(in Spanish)

Do you sleep? Often, very often, I can't. I have nightmares ever since I left Mexico. Wouldn't it be nice if we could forget everything?

JANE

I don't feel anything anymore. It's hard to get up some days. Do you ever wake up wishing you were somewhere else? Anywhere but here?



JOSE  
(in Spanish)  
God, you are so beautiful.

Jose smiles, and Jane gazes at his smile for a moment.

JANE  
I like your smile. I could use  
someone around who smiles once in a  
while.

JOSE  
(in Spanish)  
Today's almost over. I'd like to  
see you again. Would you like that?  
Will you remember me tomorrow?

JANE  
I haven't been kissed in a long  
time...

She looks down at the table, speaking softly to herself.

JANE (CONT'D)  
I would like it if you kissed me.

JOSE  
(in Spanish)  
Girls like you never notice guys  
like me.

They lock eyes for a moment before returning to their meal.

JANE  
So, what do you do, Jose? Are you a  
musician?

She points to his guitar case.

JANE (CONT'D)  
Music? Uh, musico? Musica?

Jose understands! He stands up and grabs his guitar.

JOSE  
(in Spanish)  
I'll sing you a song.

Jose passionately sings "Cielito Lindo." His voice is deep  
and filled with longing.

As Jose hits the last note, their eyes meet.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Nervously, Maria picks up the phone and dials. It rings.

OPERATOR (O.S.)  
Kings County Hospital...

INT. JANE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Drenched in sweat, Jose wakes up screaming.

JOSE  
(in Spanish)  
Stop! Stop! Stop!

After Jane rushes into the room, she quickly crouches down beside him and tenderly takes his hand, gently rubbing it.

JANE  
Shh-shh. It's just a dream. A bad dream. That's all.

INT. JANE'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jose and Jane face each other in her bed.

JOSE  
(in Spanish)  
It was raining... I sneaked into one of the freight cars. I fell asleep behind some stacked crates. I heard a scream... She was just a girl. The officers ripped her clothes off.

He begins to cry.

JOSE (CONT'D)  
I'm a coward... a fucking coward. I should've stopped them.

Jane wraps her arms around him in a comforting embrace.

INT. JANE'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - MORNING

Jane watches Jose as he sleeps. He looks vulnerable in the soft morning light. She gently touches his face. He opens his eyes and places his hand on hers.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Maria lies in bed, awake and filled with worry.

INT. JANE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Jose slips on his boots as Jane enters the room, dressed for work. They exchange a nod, indicating they are both ready. Jose slings his guitar case over his shoulder and puts on his hat. They walk out together, closing the door behind them.

EXT. BUS STOP - MORNING

Jose and Jane lock eyes, unsure of what to say or do. The tension is interrupted by the loud rumble of an approaching bus. Panic sets in as they realize their time together is coming to an end.

JANE  
I won't forget your smile.

JOSE  
(in Spanish)  
Don't forget the song.

JANE  
I'd like it if you called me.

She quickly scribbles her number on a piece of paper and hands it to Jose, motioning to her ear.

JANE (CONT'D)  
Call me later.

She chuckles, slightly embarrassed.

JANE (CONT'D)  
Or tomorrow. Anytime is okay.

The bus pulls up.

JANE (CONT'D)  
I have to go...

In a sudden impulsive move, Jane plants a kiss on Jose's lips before boarding the bus. Caught off guard, Jose blushes.

INT. BUS - CONTINUOUS

Jane waves to Jose from inside the bus.

EXT. BUS STOP - CONTINUOUS

Jose waves back, watching until the bus disappears from view.

INT. BUS - CONTINUOUS

Jane settles into a seat, her lips curve ever so slightly, hinting at a smile.

EXT. BUS STOP - CONTINUOUS

Jose smiles and carefully tucks Jane's telephone number into his back pocket.

INT. TRAIN - MORNING

The train is packed with commuters, tightly squeezed together like sardines. Despite the cramped space, Jose's face beams with a constant smile. As the doors open at a station, the bustling crowd jostles and elbows their way inside.

Struggling against the crowd, Jose maneuvers through the tightly packed bodies, determined to reach the exit. Amidst the chaos, the piece of paper with Jane's number slips out of his back pocket, unnoticed by him.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - MORNING

Jane carries a large, vibrating bar chime as she walks down the bustling hallway. She comes across Mr. Cunningham, who greets her.

MR. CUNNINGHAM

Hello...

Jane stops and acknowledges him.

JANE

Hi.

Mr. Cunningham notices the chime in her hands and offers assistance.

MR. CUNNINGHAM

Do-- do you need help?

JANE

I've got it. Thank you.

MR. CUNNINGHAM  
What's it for?

JANE  
It's for my class.

MR. CUNNINGHAM  
Ah, right, right. Of course.

Jane pauses, her eyes lighting up with realization.

JANE  
You-- you teach Spanish, right?

MR. CUNNINGHAM  
Yes.

Jane seizes the opportunity and makes a request.

JANE  
I'm waiting for a call... um, in Spanish. Could you translate for me?

MR. CUNNINGHAM  
Okay. Sure.

An awkward pause ensues.

MR. CUNNINGHAM (CONT'D)  
I was actually wondering if, maybe, you'd like... Um, what are you doing this weekend?

JANE  
Oh, I... I have to, um...

MR. CUNNINGHAM  
Maybe we could do something together?

He offers Jane his business card.

JANE  
Why do you have a business card?

MR. CUNNINGHAM  
What do you mean?

JANE  
Uh, nothing.

Mr. Cunningham slips the business card into Jane's bag.

MR. CUNNINGHAM  
So, um, if you get bored, call  
me...

Jane smiles politely and continues on her way.

MR. CUNNINGHAM (CONT'D)  
Right. Okay, sure. So it's all set  
then. Maybe I'll see you this  
weekend?

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - MORNING

Jane's classroom is cluttered with records, sheet music, instruments, and decorated with pictures of Maria Callas, Beethoven, Mozart, Bach, and Patti Smith. Jane writes music notes on the blackboard as students shuffle in with their instruments.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Jose walks in. Relieved, Maria jumps up and holds him in a tight embrace.

Dialogue in Spanish.

MARIA  
Jose! Oh, Jose, you're alive! I  
thought you were-- I called every  
hospital.

Jose winces in pain.

JOSE  
Maria-- it's okay. I'm okay.

MARIA  
I was so scared.

JOSE  
I'm sorry. So sorry. I forgot you'd  
be worrying.

Maria notices the bandage above his eye.

MARIA  
You're hurt!

JOSE  
It's nothing.

MARIA  
What happened?

JOSE  
I was attacked. But then the most beautiful woman came to my rescue. She appeared like an angel sent from heaven.

Maria is more concerned about his wound.

MARIA  
Does it hurt?

JOSE  
I've had worse growing up in Mexico.

MARIA  
Are you sure?

JOSE  
I'm fine. Really.

MARIA  
Let me have a look. Stay still.

Maria checks the bandage.

JOSE  
Did you hear what I said? I met the most beautiful woman in the world. She gave me her number...

He searches his back pocket. The paper is nowhere to be found. Maria checks his forehead for signs of fever.

JOSE (CONT'D)  
She's real. I swear it!

MARIA  
I believe you.

Jose frantically checks again, but finds nothing. He sits down at the edge of the bed, melting away.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
Are you okay?

Jose shakes his head.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
Do you remember where she lives?

JOSE  
Of course!

EXT. STREET - BRIGHTON BEACH, BROOKLYN - DAY

Jose and Maria gaze up, stunned. Every building on the street appears identical.

Dialogue in Spanish.

MARIA  
You don't remember?

Jose shakes his head.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
What are you going to do?

JOSE  
Wait.

MARIA  
All day?

JOSE  
Yes.

MARIA  
You really like her?

Jose nods.

JOSE  
Do you think I'm crazy?

MARIA  
No.

JOSE  
It was just one day, but it felt like a lifetime.

MARIA  
Time means nothing. You can be with someone for years and never have that moment. Tell me about her. How did you spend the time?

JOSE  
We listened to music. Cooked dinner. Talked...



MARIA  
Talked? But you don't speak any  
English.

JOSE  
We still talked. And I sang her a  
song.

MARIA  
She heard you sing?

JOSE  
Yes.

Maria laughs.

MARIA  
You lack imagination.

JOSE  
Huh?

Maria gestures towards his guitar. Jose smiles, understanding  
her meaning.

MARIA  
I hope you find her.

Maria walks away.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY

Jane sits at her desk, her eyes fixed on her cell. MARGO,  
70s, a vibrant and lively presence, enters the classroom. Her  
warm smile and sparkling eyes reveal her caring nature. The  
lines on her face, frozen in time, hint of cosmetic surgery.

MARGO  
Are you hungry? How about joining  
me for dinner?

JANE  
Oh, I'm not sure. I'm waiting for a  
call.

MARGO  
Come on, I hate eating alone...

EXT. SIDEWALK - BRIGHTON BEACH, BROOKLYN - DUSK

As dusk settles in, the sky transforms into a canvas of warm, pastel hues. Jose sings "Cielito Lindo" beneath the towering high-rises.

A WOMAN, 60s, leans out of her window, annoyed.

WOMAN

Shut up! What do you think this is,  
"The Voice"!

Jose sees a security guard emerging from one of the buildings, quickly approaching him. He swiftly grabs his guitar case and flees.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

In a bustling restaurant, Margo eagerly gulps down her wine, while Jane repeatedly glances at her cell, seemingly preoccupied. Meanwhile, a young and handsome WAITER clears the table.

WAITER

Anything else?

MARGO

More wine, please.

As the waiter walks away, Margo blurts.

MARGO (CONT'D)

He's so cute!

The waiter smiles, and Margo winks back. The wine is starting to have an effect.

MARGO (CONT'D)

You know, I find myself thinking about sex all the time, probably more than when I was younger. When you're young, you think it'll always be there. But as you get older, you end up alone more often, eating alone, sleeping alone, even going to the movies alone. But you know what? Even at my age, I still crave intimacy. I still want to be touched.

The waiter brings a new bottle and pours Margo a fresh glass before leaving.

MARGO (CONT'D)  
Ah, thank you.

Margo turns to Jane.

MARGO (CONT'D)  
Are you seeing anyone?

JANE  
No.

MARGO  
Guess who's been asking about you?

Jane looks uninterested.

JANE  
Who?

MARGO  
Mr. Cunningham.

JANE  
Oh.

MARGO  
Why don't you give him a chance?

JANE  
He wears braces.

MARGO  
Good teeth are important.

Margo reveals her missing tooth.

MARGO (CONT'D)  
It fell out the other night, just  
like that. My whole damn body is  
falling apart!

JANE  
That's terrible.

Margo takes a gulp of wine.

MARGO  
I think you should at least go out  
on one date with him.

JANE  
Well, I actually met someone.

MARGO

That's wonderful, Jane! Who is it?

JANE

He's not really my type. I can barely understand him, but he sings so beautifully. I can't stop thinking about him. The whole time we were together, I wanted him to kiss me. It was the first time since, you know...

MARGO

It's great that you're feeling something again.

Margo raises her glass.

MARGO (CONT'D)

Let's make a toast.

Jane raises her glass.

MARGO (CONT'D)

Happy Birthday, Jane.

Jane looks surprised at the mention of her birthday. Margo smiles, and they clink glasses before Margo quickly drinks her wine.

EXT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Clearly drunk, Margo grips onto Jane for support.

JANE

You all right?

MARGO

Oh, Jane, do you think I'm too old for love?

JANE

No, Margo.

Jane hails a taxi for Margo.

MARGO

You know what I really need?

JANE

What?

MARGO  
More laughter.

Margo climbs into the taxi.

MARGO (CONT'D)  
No one laughs anymore.

Jane closes the door, and through the closed window's glass, their hands briefly touch before the taxi pulls away.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jose enters the apartment with a heavy heart. Maria sits on the couch, typing on an old laptop.

Dialogue in Spanish.

MARIA  
So, did you find her?

Jose shakes his head, his eyes filled with sadness.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
Look...

She gestures toward the computer screen.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
I enrolled you in an English class.  
It starts this weekend.

JOSE  
B-- but I can't afford it.

MARIA  
You can pay me back later.

JOSE  
What about work? I can't miss work.

MARIA  
The class is in the morning.

Jose embraces her, overflowing with gratitude.

JOSE  
Thank you, Maria.

MARIA  
You'd better speak English by  
Christmas.

Jose musters a smile, but the disappointment of not finding Jane still lingers.

INT. JANE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jane enters her apartment and is shocked to find vomit scattered across the floor. She glances at Kitty, who is peacefully asleep on the couch.

INT. JANE'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jane climbs into bed, checking her cell for any messages. Disappointed, she takes a pill and turns off the light.

INT. PET HOSPITAL - DAY

An elderly VETERINARIAN examines Kitty while Jane anxiously watches.

JANE  
What's wrong with her?

VETERINARIAN  
She's just old.

JANE  
Is there anything you can do to help her?

VETERINARIAN  
There isn't much I can do.

JANE  
But isn't there anything? Any way to make her better?

VETERINARIAN  
We all age, and in time, we all have to let go.

Jane's eyes well up with tears.

INT. JANE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Kitty snuggles up to Jane on the couch. Jane glances at her cell once again, finding no new messages. Suddenly, the sounds of moaning and thumping emanate from the apartment above.

Kitty awakens and slinks away, clearly disturbed by the noises. The moaning and thumping grow louder and more intense.

Jane's gaze falls upon Mr. Cunningham's business card, and she musters the courage to dial his number.

INT. MR. CUNNINGHAM'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Mr. Cunningham removes bits of food stuck in his braces while standing in his bathroom.

INTERCUT PHONE CALL:

MR. CUNNINGHAM

Hello?

Jane takes a deep breath, preparing herself.

JANE

Hi, it's Jane.

MR. CUNNINGHAM

Oh, hi. Hi.

JANE

It's Jane from school.

MR. CUNNINGHAM

Yes, I know. How are you?

Jane hesitates, momentarily second-guessing her decision.

MR. CUNNINGHAM (CONT'D)

Jane? Are you still there?

Jane raises her cell back to her ear, determined to continue the conversation.

JANE

Um, would you like to have lunch tomorrow?

MR. CUNNINGHAM

Yes, of course! I have a morning class, so we can meet afterwards.

JANE

Okay.

MR. CUNNINGHAM

Let's meet at school...

INT. JANE'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - MORNING

Jane snorts a line of coke, then reaches for a tube of lipstick. She applies it to her lips, then stars at herself in the mirror for a moment. She changes her mind and grabs a tissue to wipe off the lipstick.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - MORNING

Jose's eyes sparkle with excitement as he walks briskly toward the school entrance.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - MORNING

Jose eagerly takes a seat in the front row, observing the diverse group of students in the room. Mr. Cunningham enters the classroom, exuding energy.

MR. CUNNINGHAM  
(in Spanish)  
Good morning, everyone. My name is  
Mr. Cunningham.

He proceeds to write in English on the blackboard, displaying the phrase "What Is Your Name?"

MR. CUNNINGHAM (CONT'D)  
(in Spanish)  
I'd like each of you to introduce  
yourselves. Tell me your name...

He nods towards Jose and points to the blackboard and slowly says.

MR. CUNNINGHAM (CONT'D)  
(in English)  
What is your name?

Jose looks at the blackboard, taking his time to think, his words emerge slowly.

JOSE  
(in English)  
My name is Jose.

Mr. Cunningham smiles and extends a warm greeting.

MR. CUNNINGHAM  
(in English)  
Nice to meet you, Jose.

A bright smile spreads across Jose's face.



EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Under a bleak gray sky, rain teeters on the brink. Jane, with purposeful strides, draws near the school, determined to go through with her decision.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Jose traverses the corridor, descending the staircase, and heads toward the main entrance.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

At the precipice of the entrance, Jane's resolve wavers. With a sudden change of heart, she pivots and runs away.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - MOMENTS LATER

Jose steps out of the building, inadvertently heading in a direction that's entirely opposite from Jane's.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY

Seated at his desk, Mr. Cunningham steals a glance at his watch with a sense of anticipation.

EXT. PARK - DAY

A dark thunderhead hovers ominously overhead, the rain just starting to patter down. Jane sits alone on a bench, her gaze fixed on an unoccupied swing.

INT. JANE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Stepping inside, soaked to the skin, Jane immediately notices a blotch of blood-tinged urine on the floor.

JANE

Oh, Kitty...

She quickly scans the room.

JANE (CONT'D)

Kitty? Kitty? Where are you?

The ringtone from her cell breaks the silence. It's Mr. Cunningham. Ignoring the call, she turns off her cell and proceeds to the bathroom.

INT. JANE'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Pulling back the shower curtain reveals nothing. Jane's concern deepens.

INT. JANE'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Searching further, Jane peers under the bed to find Kitty lying there.

JANE

Kitty...

No response.

JANE (CONT'D)

Kitty, come on! Kitty!

She nudges Kitty gently a couple of times.

JANE (CONT'D)

Kitty, please! Come out!

The grim reality hits Jane. She buries her face in her hands as silent sobs shudder through her body.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Jose makes his way toward Natalia, who stands puffing on a cigarette.

JOSE

(in Spanish)

You shouldn't be smoking.

NATALIA

(in English)

Fuck you.

JOSE

(in Spanish)

It's bad for the baby.

NATALIA

(in English)

Really? What are you, my dad?

Jose heads away.

NATALIA (CONT'D)

(switches to Spanish)

Hey, gotta a ten?

Jose freezes in his tracks as Natalia rubs her belly.

Remaining dialogue in Spanish.

NATALIA (CONT'D)  
The baby needs to eat.

JOSE  
So, you do speak Spanish?

NATALIA  
Of course, my grandmother is from  
El Salvador. A five will do.

Jose holds up a five-dollar bill.

JOSE  
Only if you put that cigarette out.

NATALIA  
They cost thirteen new. I can't be  
throwing them out like matches.

JOSE  
Put it out.

Natalia stubs out the cigarette, quickly snatching the bill.

NATALIA  
Thanks.

JOSE  
What's your name?

NATALIA  
Natalia.

JOSE  
Jose.

Natalia eyes his guitar case.

NATALIA  
My dad used to sing "La Cucaracha"  
when he got drunk.

Jose plucks a few strings and begins to sing "La Cucaracha."  
Natalia laughs.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY

Jane enters, finding Mr. Cunningham visibly upset and waiting  
for her.

MR. CUNNINGHAM  
I waited for two hours.

JANE  
I-- I'm sorry. Something came up.  
I...

MR. CUNNINGHAM  
Oh, okay. Let's try again this weekend.

JANE  
The-- the truth is... I changed my mind.

MR. CUNNINGHAM  
Okay. Sure. I see. So, why did you call me?

Jane, unsure of what to say, averts her gaze, avoiding eye contact. Mr. Cunningham's gaze drops to the floor, his anger palpable.

MR. CUNNINGHAM (CONT'D)  
Who do you think you are?

JANE  
What--

MR. CUNNINGHAM  
You think you're better than me?

JANE  
No. I...

MR. CUNNINGHAM  
But you do.

Jane tries to exit, but Mr. Cunningham blocks her path.

MR. CUNNINGHAM (CONT'D)  
I pity girls like you. Always waiting for the perfect guy. But guess what? He doesn't exist! You'll just end up alone. Waiting till your hair turns gray and--

JANE  
Please, stop!

MR. CUNNINGHAM  
Falls out. Because it will. You'll be old, bald, and alone!

Mr. Cunningham storms out of the room, leaving Jane in shock.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - FACULTY BATHROOM - DAY

Jane bursts into the bathroom, hastily locking the door behind her. She fishes out a plastic vial from her bag. A sudden knock at the door startles her, causing the vial to slip from her grasp and disappear down the sink drain. She recoils, closing her eyes tightly.

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - STREET - DAY - FLASHBACK

Jane approaches the school, but her path is obstructed by a chaotic scene. Police cars, an ambulance, and a mangled car fill the sidewalk. Amidst the commotion, she catches sight of a single boy's sneaker lying at the edge of the sidewalk. She releases a horrified scream.

INT. HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - FLASHBACK

Jane crumples to the floor, sobbing uncontrollably. Her HUSBAND, 40s, stands frozen, his grief tinged with anger.

HUSBAND

I don't understand-- Where were you? Why were you late? He was waiting for you! He was fucking waiting for you!

Jane mumbles to herself, in a state of shock.

JANE

I was on my way. I was on my way. I was on my way.

HUSBAND

No one can count on you!

He walks away, his body shaking with sobs.

END FLASHBACK

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - FACULTY BATHROOM - DAY

Jane's breathing becomes erratic, her body trembling uncontrollably.

JANE

Oh God, I can't-- I can't--

The room falls into an eerie silence.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - NURSE'S OFFICE - DAY

Jane lies on a bed, with Margo keeping a watchful eye on her.

MARGO

Jane? Can you hear me?

Jane slowly opens her eyes.

MARGO (CONT'D)

It's okay, Jane. I'm here with you.

JANE

Where am I?

MARGO

You're in the nurse's office. What happened?

JANE

Kitty is gone.

MARGO

What?

Tears well up in Jane's eyes.

JANE

My cat. She's dead. I'm alone again.

MARGO

Oh, Jane, I'm so sorry.

JANE

I'm such a mess. I'm pathetic.

MARGO

No, Jane. Losing someone you love... it's never easy.

EXT. CEMETERY - NIGHT

Margo and Jane bury Kitty near a headstone that reads: "In Loving Memory of Our Son, Jack Karlowksi. June 17, 2019."

JANE

What am I supposed to do now?  
They're all gone.

Margo responds in a reassuring voice.

MARGO

You can love again, be a wife, a mother... You can find happiness, Jane.

Jane's despair overflows as she shouts.

JANE

I want to die! I just want to die!

Without warning, Margo slaps Jane.

MARGO

It wasn't your fault! It wasn't your fault!

Jane breaks into uncontrollable sobs.

JANE

I didn't mean to be late!

Jane lets out an anguished scream, pounding her fists against the ground.

JANE (CONT'D)

I can't do this anymore! I just can't, Margo! I can't!

Margo pulls Jane into a comforting embrace.

MARGO

Please, don't give up. I won't let you give up. Everything will be okay. I promise you. It'll get better, Jane.

CUT TO:

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - DAY

A freezing wind whistles through the city on a cold, gray winter day.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Jane sits on a bench. As the sun breaks through the clouds, she turns her face toward it, with her eyes closed, feeling its warmth.

INT. BUS - DAY

Jose rests his head against the window. A sudden shaft of sunlight spills over him, causing him to close his eyes.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Christmas decorations abound. Jose and Antonio approach a table of OLDER WOMEN. Jose now speaks English.

JOSE  
Would you like to hear a song?

OLDER WOMAN #1  
Yes, something romantic.

OLDER WOMAN #2  
And not too sad...

Jose murmurs something to Antonio, who commences a melody. Jose sings "Bésame Mucho," but his thoughts are elsewhere.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

Jose's serenade plays over this scene.

A school dance in full swing, Jane stands alone, watching students dance.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Jose reaches the end of the song. The older women burst into applause. Older Woman #2 offers Jose a flirtatious smile.

As Antonio scoops up the tips, he nudges Jose, signaling him to acknowledge the attention. Jose, uncomfortable, averts his gaze.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

Jane spots Mr. Cunningham by the punch bowl, his face newly shaved. She takes a deep breath, steeling herself, and approaches.

JANE  
Hi.

MR. CUNNINGHAM  
Hey.



JANE  
I'm sorry.

MR. CUNNINGHAM  
Me too.

JANE  
You must think I'm a horrible  
person.

MR. CUNNINGHAM  
A total bitch.

A brief moment of tension passes before Mr. Cunningham cracks a smile. Jane, surprised, mirrors it with a relieved grin. He pulls out a mini vodka bottle and pours a generous amount into a plastic cup. Jane accepts the cup and drinks it in one go.

MR. CUNNINGHAM (CONT'D)  
More?

Jane nods. He refills her cup.

JANE  
You shaved your beard.

MR. CUNNINGHAM  
My mother insisted.

JANE  
Your face is nice.

Mr. Cunningham stammers a bit, caught off guard.

MR. CUNNINGHAM  
Thank you.

A sudden silence between them. They let their gaze wander.

MR. CUNNINGHAM (CONT'D)  
It's Christmas again.

JANE  
It just reminds you of everything  
you've lost.

Jane finishes her second drink.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Antonio counts the night's tips while Jose carefully packs away his guitar.

ANTONIO

That woman, she wasn't so bad.

Jose dismissively shakes his head.

ANTONIO (CONT'D)

This is the loneliest time of the year. Everybody needs someone. I miss my wife so much.

JOSE

Wanna grab a beer?

Antonio looks up, surprised.

ANTONIO

Yes!

INT. MR. CUNNINGHAM'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jane and Mr. Cunningham awkwardly make out on the bed, accompanied by Leonard Cohen's haunting music. They abruptly stop and burst into laughter.

MR. CUNNINGHAM

Let's never do this again.

JANE

Can we just be friends?

MR. CUNNINGHAM

I'd like that.

They settle back onto the bed, listening to the music, completely absorbed.

JANE

I still can't believe he's gone.

MR. CUNNINGHAM

I used to pass off Cohen's lyrics as my own to my foreign students.

JANE

Why?

MR. CUNNINGHAM

I don't know. I guess I wanted them to respect me, think I was cool.

JANE

Did it work?

MR. CUNNINGHAM  
They knew I was full of shit.

They gaze up at the ceiling, lost in their own thoughts.

INT. DIVE BAR - NIGHT

The bar is desolate, with only a handful of forlorn souls drowning their loneliness during Christmas. Jose and Antonio sit at the bar, sipping their beers.

JOSE  
You think your sister could make me  
a dress?

Antonio looks at Jose, puzzled.

ANTONIO  
A dress?

JOSE  
Yes.

ANTONIO  
I didn't think you were that type  
but--

JOSE  
No, it's not for me. It's a  
Christmas gift.

Relieved, Antonio laughs.

ANTONIO  
Oh.

JOSE  
I'll pay her, of course.

ANTONIO  
Okay, sure. I'll talk to her.

Jose gazes at his beer, seemingly far away.

ANTONIO (CONT'D)  
What's wrong? Money problems?

JOSE  
No.

ANTONIO  
No? That's everyone's problem. What  
is it, then? Love...?

Jose nods slowly. Antonio wraps an arm around him.

ANTONIO (CONT'D)

It's always a matter of timing. If you're too early, it's no good. If you're too late, it's no good.

EXT. BOARDWALK - BRIGHTON BEACH, BROOKLYN - NIGHT

Jane walks along the boardwalk, deep in thought.

INT. DIVE BAR - NIGHT

Visibly drunk, Jose and Antonio continue nursing their beers until suddenly:

JOSE

I love Jane!

Antonio lets out a deep sigh.

ANTONIO

I know, I know. You've said it a million times.

JOSE

No, I really mean it. I truly love her.

ANTONIO

You love her, I love her, everyone loves Jane.

Jose jumps up from his stool, determined.

ANTONIO (CONT'D)

Hey, where you going?

JOSE

To find Jane!

Jose heads toward the exit while Antonio raises his beer.

ANTONIO

To Jane!

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Jose walks the streets aimlessly, as if he's been wandering forever. He looks up at the moon and starts singing "Deja Que Sale La Luna" by Pedro Infante.

EXT. BOARDWALK - BRIGHTON BEACH, BROOKLYN - NIGHT

Jose's voice carries over the scene as Jane gazes up at the same moon.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Jose finishes the song and spots a WOMAN across the street.

JOSE

Jane!

He rushes into traffic, narrowly avoiding a car.

JOSE (CONT'D)

Jane! Jane!

The woman turns around, but it's not Jane.

JOSE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, I'm sorry.

Jose hurries off, disappointed.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - STAIRWELL - DAY

Natalia, in the final stages of pregnancy, struggles to haul a large box up the stairs.

NATALIA

Stupid, stupid elevator!

Jose enters the stairwell and immediately rushes to help, grabbing hold of the box.

NATALIA (CONT'D)

I got it! I got it!

JOSE

Let me help you. Is the elevator stuck again?

NATALIA

I'm sick and tired of it constantly breaking down. Those idiots can't fix it. I swear they're trying to kill me!

JOSE

What's inside the box?

NATALIA  
The crib for the baby.

INT. NATALIA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Jose carefully sets the box down and sees an old record player. He smiles, thinking of Jane.

JOSE  
Do you need help putting it together?

NATALIA  
Well, um...

Jose opens the box before Natalia can respond.

JOSE  
You live with your parents?

NATALIA  
Just my grandmother. No father. My mother passed away.

JOSE  
Same here.

NATALIA  
So we're both orphans.

Jose shakes his head.

JOSE  
I have Maria.

NATALIA  
I don't know you very well... but you seem like a normal guy.

JOSE  
What do you mean?

NATALIA  
Your friend... it's not normal. What's wrong with *him*?

JOSE  
You don't even know *her*. Why are you so afraid of her?

Natalia thinks for a moment.

NATALIA

I-- I don't know-- I'm so sorry.  
I'm so stupid. I have a big mouth.

JOSE

It's all right.

NATALIA

It's just... I don't have any real  
friends. No one to tell me what's  
right or wrong.

She chews her lip.

NATALIA (CONT'D)

Now that we're neighbors, um...  
maybe we could... What do you think  
about us becoming friends?

JOSE

Friends?

NATALIA

Yeah.

JOSE

I thought we already were.

Natalia smiles.

INT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

Flashing lights and blaring music. Male go-go dancers  
entertain the crowded dance floor, filled with mostly young  
black and Latino men, along with a sprinkling of white men.

Maria dances with ROB, 20s, a cocky college type, her face  
beaming with exhilaration.

Jose sits at the bar, watching Maria, a smile tugs at the  
corners of his mouth as he observes her joy. The BARTENDER, a  
seasoned drag queen, hands him another beer.

BARTENDER

You're Maria's friend, right?

JOSE

Yes.

BARTENDER

She's amazing. She taught me how to  
do my make-up.

JOSE  
It looks nice.

The bartender laughs.

BARTENDER  
She saved my life.

Jose's face lights up.

JOSE  
She saved mine, too.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

A cold winter night, with the towering New York City skyline looming in the background. Jose tightly wraps his worn-out jacket around himself for warmth.

MARIA  
You really need a better coat.  
You'll catch pneumonia in that thing!

JOSE  
So, I saw you dancing with some guy.

Maria responds with a calm and composed demeanor.

MARIA  
Who?

Jose looks at Maria, a mischievous smile playing on his lips.

JOSE  
Come on, you know exactly who. The guy who's been following you around like a puppy all night.

Maria shrugs nonchalantly.

MARIA  
Oh, he wants to take me out to dinner.

JOSE  
And...?

MARIA  
It's just... I mean, who am I kidding? Look at me.



Jose steers her towards a glass storefront.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
What are you doing?

JOSE  
Look.

Maria looks puzzled.

MARIA  
Look at what?

JOSE  
Look at yourself...

Maria gazes at her reflection in the glass.

JOSE (CONT'D)  
You're beautiful... and the bravest  
person I know.

Maria smiles gently.

EXT. BAR - DAY

Margo and Jane stand outside the bar, contemplating whether to go in.

JANE  
Is this really gonna help?

MARGO  
Oh, come on. It's happy hour. Come  
on. You deserve a break. Just one  
drink...

EXT. STREET - DAY

A deafening bulldozer crashes into an old church, which is being transformed into condominiums. Jose and Maria, carrying grocery bags, pass by the construction site.

MARIA  
Soon we'll be pushed out onto the  
streets. Maybe we should move to an  
island. Is Miami an island?

JOSE  
We can't leave!

MARIA  
Are you still hoping to find her?

Jose looks down.

JOSE  
Do you think I will?

MARIA  
You'll see her again.

JOSE  
It's a big city.

MARIA  
It's not as big as people think.

Maria's eyes widen in alarm as she spots two swastikas painted on the side of a condemned building.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
Jesus!

JOSE  
What's wrong?

Jose doesn't notice the swastikas. Maria hides her fear and quickly responds.

MARIA  
I forgot the hair dye. Can we stop by a pharmacy?

Jose chuckles.

JOSE  
Yeah, sure.

Jose's gaze drifts across the street, where he spots something that makes him smile.

INT. RECORD STORE - DAY

Jose searches through the records, growing increasingly frustrated.

MARIA  
What are you looking for?

JOSE  
Uh, she sings opera. Her name's the same as yours.

MARIA  
Um, Maria Callas?

JOSE  
Yes, yes!

Maria flips through a few records and pulls one out, showing it to him.

JOSE (CONT'D)  
That's it!

MARIA  
But we don't have a record  
player...

A flicker of excitement appears in Jose's eyes as a thought crosses his mind.

INT. NATALIA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Natalia holds the door open as Jose walks out, carrying the old record player.

JOSE  
You sure your grandmother's okay  
with this?

NATALIA  
She can barely hear anything.

JOSE  
Thank you.

NATALIA  
I hope it still works.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Jane's head rests on the bar, surrounded by empty beer bottles. Margo gently strokes Jane's hair.

MARGO  
Jane, are you okay?

Jane places a hand over her heart.

JANE  
It's broken.

Jane rests her head on Margo's shoulder, sobbing.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Maria Callas' "Un bel Di Vedremo" plays on the old record player. Jose gently rubs red dye into Maria's hair.

JOSE  
It's so sad.

MARIA  
It's from "Madame Butterfly."

JOSE  
"Madame Butterfly"?

MARIA  
It's about a Japanese woman who falls in love with an American officer. He goes back to America and promises to return one day. Butterfly, never gives up hope. She believes he will come back for her...

JOSE  
And?

MARIA  
He marries someone else. She kills herself.

Jose looks saddened by the story. Maria drifts off, deep in thought. The song comes to an end.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
I had this crazy idea...

JOSE  
What is it?

MARIA  
I've been thinking about taking the GED.

JOSE  
That's great!

MARIA  
Do you really think so?

JOSE  
Yes!

MARIA  
I wasn't so sure.

JOSE

It's hard starting over. Most never  
find the courage to do so. I'm  
proud of you, Maria.

They share a smile.

INT. SCHOOL - ADMINISTRATION OFFICE - DAY

Maria enters the office, her hair now a vibrant red  
resembling Rita Hayworth's iconic style. CARMEN, the school  
secretary in her 50s, shoots her a judgmental look, tinged  
with hostility.

CARMEN

Can I help you? What are you doing  
here?

MARIA

I wanna sign up for the GED class.

Carmen scowls, sliding a clipboard with the application forms  
toward Maria. Maria eagerly fills them out. Carmen flips  
through the application.

CARMEN

Your ID?

Maria hands over her worn-out green card. Carmen examines it  
and then glances at the application, her eyes narrowing.  
Maria bites her lip nervously.

CARMEN (CONT'D)

It says Maria.

MARIA

Yeah.

CARMEN

But...

Carmen points to the green card.

CARMEN (CONT'D)

Here, it's says "Mario."

MARIA

It's not easy getting a new one  
card when--

CARMEN

Please leave.

MARIA

I just want to take the class.

CARMEN

This isn't the street.

MARIA

Jesus! What's your problem?

CARMEN

There are kids here. They'll get confused!

MARIA

You don't know anything about me.

CARMEN

It's against God--

MARIA

Stop using God as an excuse to hate me.

CARMEN

You need an exorcism!

Maria bursts into laughter, unable to contain herself.

CARMEN (CONT'D)

What's so funny?

Maria continues laughing, collapsing on the floor, clutching her stomach.

CARMEN (CONT'D)

Stop it, stop it!

Maria laughs even harder, tears streaming down her face, mingling with the smudged mascara.

MARIA

It's better than crying.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Natalia steps off the bus and spots Jose with a large shopping bag filled with gifts.

NATALIA

Jose! Jose!

Jose turns, smiling.

NATALIA (CONT'D)  
I just came from the clinic.

She tenderly touches her stomach.

NATALIA (CONT'D)  
We're both healthy.

JOSE  
That's great!

Jose reaches into the bag and hands Natalia one of the gifts.

JOSE (CONT'D)  
Merry Christmas.

Natalia looks surprised.

JOSE (CONT'D)  
Open it...

Natalia eagerly unwraps the gift, revealing a silver star mobile for the crib.

NATALIA  
It's beautiful, Jose.

Natalia gives him a warm hug.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Jose stashes the shopping bag under the bed as Maria breezes out of the kitchen, carrying two TV dinners.

MARIA  
I hope you're hungry.

They settle down in front of the television, where a Spanish TV channel is playing a telenovela.

JOSE  
How did it go?

MARIA  
What?

JOSE  
The GED class...

Maria shrugs nonchalantly.

MARIA  
Oh, fine.

JOSE  
Did you sign up?

MARIA  
They're filled up for this semester.

JOSE  
You'll try again next semester, right?

MARIA  
Yes, of course. Now shut up and eat!

Jose starts eating his TV dinner while Maria drifts off, deep in thought.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Maria lies in bed, smoking a cigarette. Jose is on the couch, looking at her with concern.

JOSE  
That'll kill you.

Maria glances at the vintage poster of Rita Hayworth in "Gilda" hanging on the wall.

MARIA  
All the great movie stars smoked.

JOSE  
It's bad for the heart.

MARIA  
Love is too. But we still fall in love.

Jose's gaze drifts upward, staring at the stars through the window.

INT. JANE'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jane lies in bed, her eyes fixed on the same stars, lost in her own thoughts.



INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Maria sits in front of the vanity, dressed in a simple yet elegant dress. She tries to apply eyeliner, but her hand slips, leaving a smudge on her eye.

MARIA

This is stupid. I don't know why  
I'm so nervous.

Maria sighs in frustration and drops the eyeliner. Jose, watching her with empathy, moves closer.

JOSE

Everyone gets nervous, Maria.

Jose reaches for a tissue and gently wipes away the smudged eyeliner.

JOSE (CONT'D)

Just be yourself.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Maria and Rob are comfortably seated in a booth, enjoying their meal and each other's company. Rob attentively refills Maria's wine glass. As she reaches for the glass, her hand accidentally knocks it over, spilling wine onto her dress. Rob quickly reacts, grabbing a napkin and gently dabbing at the stain.

MARIA

I'm so clumsy.

ROB

Its okay.

Maria looks at Rob, impressed.

MARIA

Thank you.

INT. ROB'S CAR - NIGHT

Rob is behind the wheel, focused on driving. Maria sits beside him, gazing out of the window with a smile on her face.

MARIA

I had a great time.

ROB  
I'm glad.

EXT. VACANT LOT - NIGHT

Rob's car comes to a stop, parked in a vacant lot.

INT. ROB'S CAR - NIGHT

Rob turns off the engine, creating a moment of silence. Maria looks completely puzzled.

MARIA  
What are we doing here?

Rob suddenly unzips his pants, his right hand starts moving up and down.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
Stop it. Please, stop.

Maria turns away, disgusted.

ROB  
Just relax.

MARIA  
I... I thought you liked me.

Rob laughs.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
Don't laugh at me. Please.

ROB  
You're just a prostitute. Did you really think this was a real date?

Maria's gaze drops to the floor. She falls silent, feeling helpless and frozen.

ROB (CONT'D)  
They say you're very good. Show me...

He forcefully pulls Maria's head into his lap.

ROB (CONT'D)  
Oh, that's nice...

Maria snaps and bites Rob. He lets out a piercing scream.

MARIA  
Don't fucking laugh at me!

Maria yanks open the car door and runs out.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jose lies on the couch, wide awake. Maria enters the apartment, dazed.

JOSE  
How did it go? Did you have a nice  
time?

Maria walks past him and sits on the edge of the bed, looking down.

JOSE (CONT'D)  
Maria, what happened? Are you okay?

MARIA  
What am I doing wrong?

Jose moves closer, worried.

JOSE  
Nothing.

MARIA  
Tell me. I really need to know.

Jose doesn't know what to say, he simply holds her hand.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
I just want to be happy... like  
everyone else.

Jose watches her, helpless.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

The restaurant is closed. Jose mops the floor, humming "Cielito Lindo."

EXT. MOTEL - NIGHT

Jose's humming continues over the scene. Maria lights a cigarette and spots a Christmas tree in the window of an apartment, evoking a sense of longing in her eyes.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Jose is doing his homework, still humming the same tune. Maria hauls a large Christmas tree inside, and Jose excitedly helps her with it.

MARIA  
It's not Christmas without a  
tree...

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jose and Maria stand side by side, anticipation and excitement filling their faces as they add the final touches to the tree.

MARIA  
It's ready!

Jose flips the switch, and the Christmas tree springs to life, casting a magical glow over everything. They share a smile.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
Champagne!

She pours two glasses of cheap champagne.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
To a new beginning.

They clink glasses, and she disappears into the closet, returning with a large gold box.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
Merry Christmas...

Jose eagerly unwraps the box, revealing a classic US Navy pea coat. He runs his hands over the sleeves and buttons.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
Put it on.

Jose slips into the pea coat. Maria raises the collar and smooths his hair back.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
Perfect.

Filled with excitement, Jose reaches under the bed and pulls out a wrapped gift.

JOSE

Your turn...

Maria's eyes light up as she unwraps the gift, revealing a black dress reminiscent of the one worn by Rita Hayworth in the Gilda poster.

MARIA

Oh, Jose. I love it!

Maria holds the dress against her body and twirls.

INT. JANE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jane and Margo watch the end of "It's a Wonderful Life."  
Tears roll down Margo's face.

MARGO

It always makes me cry.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jose lies on the couch. Maria lies in bed, gazing at the black dress hanging on the closet door.

MARIA

I can't wait to wear it. We should go to the opera. We'll see "Madame Butterfly."

JOSE

I'd like that.

He looks at the lit Christmas tree.

JOSE (CONT'D)

I've never had anything, until now.  
Look where we are. This is it.  
We've made it, Maria.

MARIA

You deserve it.

Jose looks at her, beaming with affection.

JOSE

We deserve it.

Maria smiles gently.

JOSE (CONT'D)

We're blessed.

INT. JANE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jane covers a sleeping Margo with a blanket.

JANE  
Good night, Margo.

INT. JANE'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - DAY

Jane stares at her reflection in the mirror.

She inhales deeply, her hands shaking, and gathers the prescription bottles and vials of cocaine.

She steps toward the toilet, holding her breath, heart racing, as she drops the pills and empties the vials into the swirling water.

She watches them disappear.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Jose puts on his Charro suit while Maria applies her makeup.

JOSE  
I can't believe you're working on  
Christmas Day.

MARIA  
There are a lot of lonely hearts  
tonight...

EXT. ROOSEVELT AVE - ALLEY - NIGHT

The night is cold and quiet. A solitary street lamp casts a feeble glow, barely lighting the darkness.

Maria stands alongside MILDRED and GABBY, two young, vibrant transgender women of Black and Hispanic descent. Maria's eyes fall upon Mildred's patent-leather, nine-inch heels.

MARIA  
Girl, look at those heels!

Maria spins around, sashaying down the alley like a runway model, showcasing her enduring charisma.

GABBY  
Still reigning, darling!

MILDRED  
Legendary!

Maria flips her hair back.

MARIA  
Show's over girls.

Maria walks off.

GABBY  
See you in paradise, Queen!

Maria smiles.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Maria walks along a desolate street, clutching her coat tightly for warmth. The silence is shattered by a sudden car honk. She looks over her shoulder, but the street remains empty. Her pace quickens, a hint of danger creeping in.

A car careens around the corner, screeching to a halt just inches away from Maria. It's Rob behind the wheel.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Antonio strums his guitar. Jose's voice fills the room as he sings "Silent Night."

JOSE  
*Silent night, holy night  
All is calm, all is bright  
Round yon Virgin Mother and Child  
Holy Infant so tender and mild  
Sleep in heavenly peace  
Sleep in heavenly peace.*

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

The moon bathes the sky in an eerie glow. Maria lies motionless on the ground, face down, surrounded by shards of broken glass.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Maria lies in the hospital bed, her face bruised and battered. The room is filled with the steady beeping of machines. Tubes and wires connect her to life-sustaining equipment. Jose sits beside her, holding her hand.

INT. HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - NIGHT

A POLICE OFFICER talks to Jose.

POLICE OFFICER  
Can I see your ID?

CUT TO:

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - MORNING

The city wakes to a bright spring morning. The sun casts a warm glow over the busy streets. The sky is clear and blue, framed by green leaves and cherry blossoms. Birds chirp overhead.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Jose is fast asleep. The sound of incessant knocking jolts him awake. He rubs his eyes, still groggy, and makes his way to the door. Opening it, he finds Natalia standing there, her face weary and holding her crying baby.

NATALIA  
She won't stop crying.

Natalia gently passes the baby into Jose's arms. He cradles the infant with care, his voice softening as he begins to sing a soothing Spanish lullaby. Gradually, the baby's cries transform into a smile.

INT. SCHOOL - ADMINISTRATION OFFICE - DAY

Maria confidently enters the office.

INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

Maria walks out of the administrative office, smiling. Jose stands and smiles back.

INT. TAXI - NIGHT

Jose and Maria sit side by side in the backseat. Jose is dressed in a black suit, while Maria wears the elegant black dress he gifted her. They look ahead, anticipation in their eyes.



INT. METROPOLITAN OPERA HOUSE - LOBBY - NIGHT

Jose and Maria ascend the grand staircase, their excitement palpable.

INT. METROPOLITAN OPERA HOUSE - STAGE - NIGHT

On the stage, the tragic scene unfolds as Butterfly, consumed by heartbreak, plunges a dagger into her own heart. The audience is captivated by the emotional performance.

INT. METROPOLITAN OPERA HOUSE - BALCONY - NIGHT

Jose and Maria, hand in hand, are deeply moved by the performance. A tear falls down Jose's face.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY

Jose looks out the window. Mr. Cunningham stands in front of the class.

MR. CUNNINGHAM  
You all must be excited, it's your  
last day...

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

Jane walks past Jose's classroom.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jose writes in his notebook, unaware of Jane passing by the door.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - AUDITORIUM - DAY

A chorus of students fills the auditorium, singing "Ave Maria." Jane and Margo sit side by side, deeply moved. Tears well in Jane's eyes. Margo reaches out, taking Jane's hand. Despite the tears, a serene smile graces Jane's face as she finds a moment of peace.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY

The sound of "Ave Maria" drifts in from the auditorium, capturing Jose's attention. He smiles.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Jane hurries across the street, heading toward the bus stop.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - SECONDS LATER

Jose steps out of the school building and is greeted by Maria, who is waiting for him outside. She embraces him warmly.

MARIA  
You did it!

In that moment, Jose sees Jane boarding the bus.

JOSE  
That's her...

Maria turns to look at Jane, then back to Jose.

MARIA  
What are you waiting for? Go!

Jose springs into action, chasing after the departing bus.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Jose races after the bus.

JOSE  
Jane! Jane! Jane!

INT. BUS - CONTINUOUS

There is a sudden, jarring crash. Jane looks out the window, where she sees a HAITIAN BIKE MESSENGER picking himself up from the ground, cursing in French.

Jose is face down on the ground. After a few seconds of stillness, he hauls himself up.

Jane's heart races as she finally spots Jose. Overwhelmed with urgency, she rushes to the front of the bus, anxiously awaiting the opening of the doors.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Jane jumps out of the bus and rushes towards Jose. Their eyes meet, the intensity of their connection palpable.

JANE  
I can't believe you're really  
here...

Jose is stunned, unable to speak.

JANE (CONT'D)  
I was hoping you'd call, but that's  
okay.

She spots blood on Jose's palms and quickly wipes it with a  
handkerchief from her bag.

JANE (CONT'D)  
You still don't understand a word  
I'm saying...

Jose smiles as their eyes lock in an intense gaze, as if  
there is no one else in the whole world.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - NIGHT

A beeping sound pulls Jose back to reality. The Police  
Officer stands before him.

POLICE OFFICER  
Hey! Hey! Speak English? ID?

EXT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Jose is held by the Police Officer, his body tense with fear  
as an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) van rolls up.

INT. ICE VAN - NIGHT

Distraught and crying, Jose kicks the door.

JOSE  
Let me out! Let me out! Maria!  
Maria! No! God! Help me, God!

FADE TO BLACK.