

SING DON'T CRY

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. MEXICO - NIGHT

A freight train devours the desolate landscape, its wheels grating against the tracks in a deafening uproar.

EXT. FREIGHT TRAIN - MEXICO - NIGHT

MEXICAN AND CENTRAL AMERICAN MIGRANTS are tightly packed onto the roof. Their faces glisten with sweat, their expressions filled with fear. They clutch their possessions tightly, seeking some semblance of security. A few brave souls dare to sleep.

JOSE PAZ, (29), a Mexican migrant, lies on his back, gazing at the stars. Next to him, a battered guitar case bears the scars of his life journey. His deep brown eyes exude a glimmer of hope, defying the weight of the hardships he has endured. The gold cross around his neck catches the moonlight, glinting softly.

Suddenly, a piercing scream echoes 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

Excitement fills Jose's eyes as he takes in New York's vibrant billboards and soaring skyscrapers.

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, gathering his guitar case and bag with newfound energy.

EXT. PORT AUTHORITY - DAY

Under the blue skies and amidst the red leaves of a beautiful autumn day in Manhattan, Jose stands transfixed. He marvels at the endless traffic, the towering skyscrapers, and the stream of PEDESTRIANS absorbed in their phones.

INT. TAXI - DUSK

Jose sits in the backseat of a taxi, crossing the Williamsburg Bridge. The bridge is choked with cars, trucks, vans, and taxis, moving slowly amidst the bustling city traffic. He looks out of the window, his eyes fixed on the breathtaking NYC skyline, filled with a mixture of hope and determination.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - EAST NEW YORK - NIGHT

Jose steps out of the cab, arriving outside a crumbling apartment building in a graffiti-laden neighborhood. Across the street, a group of TEENAGE BOYS (15-18) and NATALIA, (16), a pregnant Hispanic girl, can be seen smoking and drinking beer from a brown paper bag. As they catch sight of Jose, they burst into laughter, mocking him from afar.

TEENAGE BOY #1
Oh, shit. Look at this clown!

TEENAGE BOY #2
Sing us a love song, faggot.

TEENAGE BOY #3
Another fucking freak.

Jose locks eyes with Natalia, a mixture of disappointment and concern on his face. He shakes his head, clearly disapproving.

NATALIA
 (to Jose)
 That's right. Just keep walking,
 you fucking loser.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Jose finds the door he's been looking for and knocks. The sound of loud music seep through the door. He knocks again, hoping to get someone's attention.

The door swings open to reveal MARIA, (35), exuding a Rita Hayworth-esque hairstyle. Her silky kimono drapes over her narrow hips, flaunting her long legs. She surveys Jose's Charro suit with a spark 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
 Where?

Unfazed, Maria shrugs. Her indifference is challenged when Jose produces an envelope, holding it out for her to see.

JOSE (CONT'D)
 This-- This is the only address I
 have for him.
 (MORE)

JOSE (CONT'D)

I-- I know no one in New York. I
have to find him, you see.

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's door slams shut, leaving Jose stranded in the hallway.

JOSE (O.S.)

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 expression morphs into a mixture of 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?

Jose reflexively 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, the Virgin Mary statue stands illuminated by a single flickering candle. Next to Maria's bed, a gold vanity with a three-sided mirror, cluttered with makeup and perfumes.

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

Dialogue in Spanish

MARIA

I can't believe you're really here.
I never thought I would see you
again.

JOSE

It's been so long.

MARIA

Seventeen years...

She tenderly reaches out and touches Jose's face.

MARIA (CONT'D)

I've missed you, Jose.

JOSE

Your letters... I saved every
single one.

Maria pulls out a wad of letters from a drawer, revealing the
depth of their connection.

MARIA

Me too... Your first kiss, your
struggles, your loneliness-- the
fall from the train... I hate those
damn trains. Show me your scar.

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'd you stop writing? Every
day, I'd hope for a letter that
never came.

MARIA

I-- I'm sorry, but... I was afraid.
I didn't want you to be embarrassed
of me.

JOSE

How can you think that?

Maria's surprise lingers in the air.

MARIA
You don't care?

Jose shakes his head emphatically, his affection for Maria apparent.

JOSE
You've been like an older brother,
always looking out for me.

MARIA
I had to. You were always getting
into trouble. Remember when you
fell off the tree? You broke your
leg.

JOSE
You carried me home.

MARIA
You cried all the way. Such a
crybaby.

They share a genuine 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
bothers me anymore. It's not their
fault. They simply don't
understand.

A brief moment of contemplation passes.

MARIA (CONT'D)
I've come so far, and all on my
own. Not having a family...
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 seeps in, bathing the room in a silver glow. Maria lies in her bed, deep in thought, while Jose nestles on the couch.

MARIA
Sing me a song, just like when we
were kids.

JOSE
It's late, Maria.

MARIA
Please, it's been years since I
heard you sing.

Jose reaches for his guitar.

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

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

Abruptly, a 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.

He extends a cup of coffee towards her, which she graciously accepts.

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

Maria retrieves 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
Have you ever been with a woman?

MARIA
Yes.

JOSE
Did you like it?

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

Jose chuckles at her candid response.

JOSE
Is there someone special in your
life?

Maria shakes her head.

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

MARIA
All the time. Falling in love is
easy. Being loved back is the hard
part.

Maria sets down the syringe.

MARIA (CONT'D)
Let's eat!

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's always on the go,
as if waiting for something
exciting to happen.

MARIA
That's just anxiety.

They share a laugh.

MARIA (CONT'D)
This city can be harsh. Most people
don't make it. You'll need to be
stronger than you've ever been.

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's face breaks into a smile.

MARIA (CONT'D)
In the meantime, you might need to
find a job. What did you do in
Mexico?

JOSE
I used to sell snow cones on the
beach. But that didn't last. I kept
giving them away for free to the
kids, it was sometimes the only
food they had.

Maria smiles, not surprised by Jose's kindness.

MARIA
Restaurants in this city are always
looking for busboys, dishwashers--

Suddenly, a rock hurtles through the window, scattering
shards of glass everywhere.

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 BOYS (12-14) 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)
It's the 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
Then, what?

Jose pauses, not having considered that. Maria looks out through the shattered window, a resigned expression on her face.

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

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - DAY

Jose hums as he soaps himself.

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

Still humming to himself, Jose slips into his Charro suit and admires his reflection in the mirror. A smile forms on his face.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Jose emerges into the living room.

Dialogue in Spanish.

JOSE
I'm ready!

Maria looks him up and down, shaking her head.

MARIA
No, no, no, no. They will kill you!
Take it off! 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, Jose. I just don't want anything to happen to you. It isn't safe out there. Trust me.

Jose smiles, he knows she is 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 would like it very much.

JOSE (O.S.)

Why not? I promise to work really hard. Come on, 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'?
What kind of work is it?

Maria can't meet his gaze. He understands. There's an uncomfortable silence before he breaks it.

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

MARIA
No.

Jose digests this information for a few moments, then grabs his guitar case and cowboy hat. He never leaves without them.

JOSE
Okay.

MARIA
Okay?

JOSE
Yes.

Maria exhales deeply, relief washing over her.

MARIA
Start uptown and work your way
downtown.

JOSE
You're not coming with me?

MARIA
If they see me with you... you
won't have a chance. Can you manage
on your own?

JOSE
Yes. I'll be fine.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY STREETS - MONTAGE - DAY

-- Jose steps out onto the city streets, his eyes widening at the towering skyscrapers, bustling crowds, and ceaseless rhythm of New York. The sounds of honking cars, laughter, chatter, and the hustle of life fill the air.

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

-- We see Jose, silhouette against the harsh sunlight, 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, leaving Jose more lost than before.

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

EXT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

A snaking line winds its way around the corner of a flashy nightclub. Jose approaches a WOMAN (20s) waiting in line.

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

The woman shrugs, too wrapped up in her phone to answer. Jose turns to an ASIAN MAN, (20s), earbuds firmly in place, head bobbing to the beat of his music.

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

The Asian man pulls one earbud out.

ASIAN MAN
(in English)
What?

A HISPANIC MAN (20s) in the queue turns towards Jose.

HISPANIC MAN
(in Spanish)
It's a new club. They're holding
auditions-- looking for musicians,
performers, dancers. Anyone with
talent.

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. Come on, move
it!

With a broad smile, Jose steps up to the microphone and starts strumming his guitar, his voice ringing out in a heartfelt Spanish ballad. The manager looks on, captivated by the depth of his performance.

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

MANAGER (CONT'D)

Well, who are you? Where are you from?

JOSE

(in Spanish)

Would you like to hear another song?

The manager sighs.

MANAGER

Let me guess... No English, right? No papers? I wish I could help you out, but... 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

A pair of brash TEENS (15) strut up to a MUSLIM WOMAN (20s) wearing a hijab. Their faces are twisted into cruel smirks as they launch into a barrage of insults.

TEEN #1

Terrorist! Terrorist!

The first teen reaches out, yanking her bag.

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

MUSLIM WOMAN
Stop it! Leave me alone!

She scrambles in her bag, panic setting in. The second teen cackles.

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

Fumbling, she pulls out her cell and dials a number.

TEEN #1
Get that fucking rag off your head!

A subway train screams into the station, momentarily drowning out the chaos.

As passengers flood out, Jose spots the confrontation: the first teen trying to yank off the Muslim woman's hijab.

MUSLIM WOMAN
Leave me alone! Leave me alone!

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

In the struggle, she drops her cell, her hand flying up to protect her hijab.

The other commuters pretend not to notice, averting their gaze. But Jose steps up, putting his guitar case between the woman and the teens.

JOSE
(in Spanish)
Get back! Get back!

The teens laugh hysterically.

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

Suddenly, a POLICE OFFICER (30s) appears on the opposite platform.

TEEN #2
Five-0!

The teens scatter, disappearing into the crowd. Jose spots the officer and makes his own exit.

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? Did you find anything?

Jose shakes his head, dropping onto the couch in exhaustion. He starts to pull 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

Don't give up.

Maria gives him a small, reassuring smile.

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 down onto the counter of a local restaurant. He perches himself onto a stool, rubbing at his temples.

INT. FRANK RESTAURANT - KITCHEN - DAY

The kitchen is in full swing with FRANK, (60s), the owner, scowling at a pile of dirty dishes in the sink. ANTONIO, (50s), a Mexican busboy, short and fat, 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 being 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're making!

Dante looks over to Antonio.

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

FRANK
Oh, really.

DANTE
I'm an actor.

FRANK
No kidding. Any good?

DANTE
I'm the best in my class.

FRANK
Impressive!

DANTE
I got a call-back next week.

FRANK
Good luck. I 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 this.

FRANK (CONT'D)
Come on, move it! Out!

Tossing his apron onto the floor, Dante heads for the door.

DANTE
You'll see me on the big screen
soon, on billboards. I'll be a
star.

FRANK
Sure, sure.

With a fist raised in the air to Antonio, Dante heads out.

DANTE
(to Antonio)
Fight for your rights, man!

Frank glares at Antonio, who quickly drops his smile.

INT. FRANK RESTAURANT - DAY

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

FRANK
Make that 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. Anyone here speak English
anymore?
(switches to Spanish)
Looking for work?

Jose perks up at the Spanish.

Remaining dialogue in Spanish.

JOSE
Yes. You speak Spanish!

FRANK
I'm half Cuban.

Jose brightens up, thinking he's found an ally.

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's gaze drops to the floor. Frank nods, understanding.

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 maybe pay you
under the table.

Jose's face drops as he realizes what Frank is suggesting.

FRANK (CONT'D)
Four dollars an hour, okay? I'm
putting my neck out for you.

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 and nods.

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 and 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 is it called a trio?

ANTONIO

Uh, I don't know. It 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 preps 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, enhancing her already striking eyes.

-- 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. You don't want to go hungry while watching others enjoy their meals.

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

MARIA (CONT'D)

How do I look?

JOSE

You look beautiful, Maria.

A warm smile graces Maria's face before she 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 singing partner. Interested...?

Jose looks up, his eyes alight with interest.

JOSE

Really?

ANTONIO

Yeah, we can't make ends meet with what Frank gives us. He grabs what hangs from the cat!

They share a laugh.

ANTONIO (CONT'D)

So...?

Jose's eyes twinkle with eagerness.

JOSE

Yes!

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

ANTONIO

Great! 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 absolutely 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 Virgin
Mary 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, (mid-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, the stage lights shimmering off the polished surfaces of the instruments.

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 requiem "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 to his praise.

MR. CUNNINGHAM (CONT'D)

Jane, are you all right? Jane?

Ignoring his question, 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

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 must 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! Not the police!

JANE
Okay, okay, take it easy. No police. Just don't try any funny stuff, 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?
(MORE)

JOSE (CONT'D)

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 Karlowski. That's me...

Jose examines the ID.

JOSE

Jane...

He struggles with the surname.

JOSE (CONT'D)

Karlowski.

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 often spoke about going on a
trip. But we never found 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. This was
before she got sick.

She smiles gently.

JANE
It's a beautiful picture.

JOSE
(in Spanish)
She passed away when I was seven.
Life wasn't the same after.

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.

Her eyes and his eyes meet, a sense they understand each other.

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 song over and over
again...

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 in the
morning until late at night. I used
to hate it, 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 countless times when I've wanted to end it all since the accident.

JOSE

(in Spanish)

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

JANE

I don't feel anything anymore. It's hard for me to get up in the mornings. Do you ever wake up hoping to be 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 every once in a while.

JOSE

(in Spanish)

Today is almost over. I would like to see you again. Would you like that? Will you remember me after 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 will 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 softly 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 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 remembers Mr. Cunningham is a Spanish teacher.

JANE

You teach Spanish, right?

MR. CUNNINGHAM

Yes.

Jane seizes the opportunity and makes a request.

JANE
I'm waiting for a call. Could you
translate for me?

MR. CUNNINGHAM
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
Never mind, it's nothing.

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

MR. CUNNINGHAM
So, um, if you get bored, feel free
to 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 endured worse beatings growing up in Mexico.

MARIA

Are you sure?

JOSE
I'm fine. I'm fine.

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.
And 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. She is. I swear it!

MARIA
I believe you. I do.

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 everything.

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, (40s), 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 even more than when I was younger. When you're young, you think there will always be plenty of it, but as you get older, you find yourself 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 want to be touched, you know.

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 recently.

MARGO

That's wonderful, Jane! I'm proud of you. Who is it?

JANE

Well, he's not really my usual type. I can barely understand what he's saying. But he sings so beautifully. I can't stop thinking about him. The entire 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 expression filled with sadness.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Look...

She gestures towards 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 better start speaking 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 simply showing signs of old age.

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 eventually pass away, Jane.

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 towards 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 Spanish)
Nice to meet you, Jose.

A bright smile spreads across Jose's face, embracing the new learning journey ahead.

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 towards 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 - SAME 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, tears streaming down her face. Her HUSBAND, (40s), filled with a mix of grief and anger, looks at her.

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? Are you feeling sick?

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

Look at me. I'm such a mess. I'm so pathetic.

MARGO

No, Jane. Animals aren't afraid to love. They show you so much love, even when you've hurt them.

EXT. CEMETERY - NIGHT

Margo and Jane bury Kitty near a headstone that reads: "In Loving Memory of Our Son, Jack Karlowski. July 13, 2015." Jane speaks with a defeated tone.

JANE

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

Margo responds in a reassuring voice.

MARGO

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

Jane's despair overflows as she shouts.

JANE

I just want to die! I 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 don't know how to go on anymore!

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 will 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 towards 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
How about something romantic?

OLDER WOMAN #2
And not too sad, please.

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 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 shared moment of tension... then Mr. Cunningham cracks a smile. Jane, surprised, breaks into a relieved smile of her own. He pulls out a mini vodka bottle, and pours a hefty amount into a plastic cup. Jane accepts the cup and downs the contents in one swift move.

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

This is a disaster. Let's never try 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

Do you think your sister could make
a dress for me?

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 towards 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 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
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 know anything about *her*. What has she done to make you so afraid of her?

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. You know, no one to tell me what's right and wrong. Now that we're neighbors, um, maybe we could... What do you think about you and me, becoming friends?

JOSE
Friends?

NATALIA
Yeah.

JOSE
I thought we already were.

Natalia smiles.

INT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

Flashing lights and blaring music create a vibrant atmosphere. 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 Danny, (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, (late 30s), 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 incredibly
brave.

Maria smiles gently.

EXT. BAR - DAY

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

JANE
Is this supposed to help?

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

EXT. BROOKLYN 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
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 to buy 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 is the same as yours.

MARIA
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 an
old record player.

JOSE

You sure your grandmother is 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, overcome with
sadness.

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.

INT. SCHOOL - ADMINISTRATION OFFICE - DAY

Maria enters the office, her hair now a vibrant red resembling Rita Hayworth's iconic style.

CARMEN, (50s), the school secretary, gives her a judgmental look, tinged with hostility.

CARMEN

Can I help you? What are you doing here?

MARIA

I want to sign up for the GED class.

Carmen scowls and slides the application forms on a clipboard toward Maria. Maria eagerly fills out the forms. Carmen flips through the application.

CARMEN

Can I see 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 your name is Maria.

MARIA

That's correct.

CARMEN

But...

Carmen points to the green card.

CARMEN (CONT'D)

Here, it's says Mario.

MARIA

It's an old card. It's not easy to get a new one--

CARMEN

Please leave.

MARIA

I just want to take the class.

CARMEN

This is not the streets.

MARIA

Jesus! What's your problem?

CARMEN
There are children everywhere.
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, his face lighting up with a smile.

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 but delighted.

JOSE (CONT'D)
Open it...

Natalia eagerly unwraps the gift, revealing a silver star mobile for the crib. A smile spreads across her face.

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?

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 will 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 black dress. She tries to apply eyeliner, but her hand slips, leaving a smudge on her eye.

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

MARIA
I'm so clumsy.

DANNY
Its okay.

Maria looks at Danny, impressed.

MARIA
Thank you.

INT. DANNY'S CAR - NIGHT

Danny 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 such a wonderful time tonight.

DANNY
Oh, I'm glad to hear that.

EXT. VACANT LOT - NIGHT

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

INT. DANNY'S CAR - NIGHT

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

MARIA

What are we doing here?

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

MARIA (CONT'D)

Stop it. Please, just stop.

Maria turns away, disgusted.

DANNY

Just relax.

MARIA

I... I thought you liked me.

Danny laughs dismissively.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Don't laugh at me. Please.

DANNY

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.

DANNY (CONT'D)

They say you're very good. Show me...

He forcefully pulls Maria's head into his lap.

DANNY (CONT'D)

Oh, that's nice...

And with that, Maria's frustration reaches its breaking point. In a swift motion, she bites Danny. He lets out a piercing scream of pain.

MARIA

Don't fucking laugh at me!

Maria quickly opens the car door and runs out.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jose lies on the couch, wide awake. Maria enters the apartment, her expression distant and dazed.

JOSE

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

Maria walks past him and sits on the edge of the bed, her gaze fixed on the floor.

JOSE (CONT'D)

Maria, what happened? Are you okay?

MARIA

What am I doing wrong?

Jose moves closer, concerned.

JOSE

You're not doing anything wrong.

MARIA

Tell me. I really need to know. Why does it always end like this?

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

MARIA (CONT'D)

All I want is to live my life like everyone else... to be happy.

Jose watches her with a mix of empathy and helplessness, seeing the pain she is going through.

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, her eyes filled with pain and disappointment. She inhales deeply, her hands shaking, as she collects the prescription bottles and vials of cocaine.

With a blend of determination and fear, she takes a step towards the toilet. She holds her breath, her heart racing, as she drops the pills one by one and empties the vials into the swirling water. She watches intently as they vanish.

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 illuminating the darkness.

Maria stands alongside MILDRED (20s) and GABBY (20s), two vibrant transgender women of black and Hispanic descent. Maria's gaze falls 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 interrupted by a sudden car honk. Maria instinctively looks over her shoulder, but the street remains empty. Her pace quickens, sensing a hint of danger.

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

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Antonio strums the guitar, setting a gentle melody. 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, his eyes filled with worry and love. He tenderly takes Maria's fingers, holding them gently in his palm. He studies her fingers, tracing the lines on her skin. His fingers tremble, mirroring the turmoil within him.

Maria's fingers begin to move within his palm. Her eyes slowly open. Tears well up in Jose's eyes.

CUT TO:

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - MORNING

The city awakens to a breathtaking spring morning. The sun shines brightly, casting a warm glow over the bustling streets. The sky is a vibrant blue, framed by lush green leaves and cherry blossoms. The sound of chirping birds fills the air.

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, catching Carmen off guard with her return.

CARMEN

What are you doing here?

MARIA

I'm here to sign up for the GED class.

CARMEN

You don't belong here!

MS. THOMPSON, (40s), the school principal, hears the commotion and steps out of her office.

MS. THOMPSON

What's going on here?

Maria shifts her attention to Ms. Thompson, maintaining a steady and composed voice.

MARIA

All I ask is for the same
opportunities as everyone else.

Maria's accusatory gaze shifts to Carmen.

MARIA (CONT'D)

This woman won't allow me to sign
up for the GED class.

Ms. Thompson's gaze shifts from Maria to Carmen, her
expression stern.

MS. THOMPSON

We are here to teach, not to judge.

Carmen squirms under Ms. Thompson's scrutiny, realizing the
gravity of the situation, and nods.

CARMEN

I-- I didn't mean to cause any
trouble. It's just--

Ms. Thompson cuts her off, exchanges a tense glance with
Carmen.

MS. THOMPSON

That's enough. Where are the sign-
up forms for the GED class?

Carmen slides the forms across the desk. Ms. Thompson takes
them and hands them directly to Maria.

CARMEN

I... I apologize if there has been
any misunderstanding.

Maria gives Carmen a piercing look, then turns to Ms.
Thompson.

MARIA

Thank you.

INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

Maria walks out of the administrative office with a radiant
smile. Jose stands up, his eyes filled with pride.

JOSE

I'm so proud of you!

They smile at each other.

INT. TAXI - NIGHT

Jose and Maria sit side by side in the back seat. Jose is dressed in a black suit, while Maria wears the elegant black dress he gifted her. They gaze forward with 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 powerful and poignant performance unfolding before them.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY

Jose gazes out the window while 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, her eyes fixed ahead.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jose sits at his desk, writing in his notebook, unaware of Jane gliding past the door.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - AUDITORIUM - DAY

A chorus of students fills the auditorium with the beautiful melody of "Ave Maria." Jane and Margo sit side by side, deeply moved by the music. Tears well up in Jane's eyes. Margo reaches out and takes Jane's hand.

Despite the tears, a serene smile graces Jane's face as she finally finds a moment of peace.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY

The sound of "Ave Maria" drifts in from the auditorium, capturing Jose's attention. A smile spreads across his face.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Jane hurries across the street, heading towards 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 would 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.

FADE OUT.