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HONESTY

A SHORT SCREENPLAY BY
DENNIS J. MANNING

HONESTY

LIFE IN 3 CHAPTERS

Written by

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A faint hum – something mechanical and childlike.

A teddy bear's glass eye glints in the mirror. His right eye sparkles. His left eye winks.

The reflection catches a flicker of light – like a heartbeat. A soft jazz chord underlines the silence.

FADE IN:

INT. GRANT'S APARTMENT – NIGHT (ROUND 1)

5:30 P.M. The sun slips toward the horizon.

ON SCREEN: *September 10 – The Invitation to Dance*

GRANT (37), a man of quiet confidence and gentle polish, sets a bottle of red wine in a bucket of ice. The bar gleams with vodka, gin, triple sec, vermouth.

GRANT

(thinking)

Cosmo or martini? Red wine or water?

Well—let's see what the night brings.

He wears a loose polo, easy jeans. A hint of gray at his temple that somehow works in his favor.

He glances at the mirror – adjusts his collar, tests a smile. Too wide. He softens it. Approves.

GRANT (CONT'D)

No need to give them everything the first go-around.

A KNOCK at the door. His heart ticks faster.

GRANT (CONT'D)

(to himself)

Easy, boy. Relax.

Another knock.

CARL (O.S.)

Hello? Grant?

Grant catches his reflection once more – confidence mask on.

GRANT

Be right there.

He opens the door.

INT. GRANT'S APARTMENT – CONTINUOUS

CARL (32), gym trainer and bartender, a man honed for his own pleasure.

Tank top, shorts, the swagger of someone born in mirrors.

He moves straight to the bar, scanning the bottles like it's home.

CARL

Grant, you're very easy to look at.

He shakes the martinis like a pro.

GRANT

Sure, I'll have a martini.

CARL

Good—'cause that's what we're having.

He pours.

CARL (CONT'D)

Alexa, play cool jazz.

ALEXA

Playing cool jazz.

Carl downs his drink in one go and pulls off his tank top.

Grant freezes – breath gone.

Carl turns, slowly. His body is art and arrogance.

GRANT

My God.

CARL

(laughing)
You like?

GRANT

(stammering)
Yes. I mean—yes.

CARL

This happens a lot.

He checks his watch.

CARL (CONT'D)
So, now or now. I prefer
now. Massage client at eight.

Carl drops his shorts. Grant is overtaken by the size of Carl's manhood.

GRANT
(stammering)
Oh my...

CARL
(smiling, proud)
Yeah, I know. He's beautiful.
(beat)
I call him.. Rex.

GRANT
You... named him?

CARL
Of course. He's big. He's loud. He
makes me roar.

Grant blinks - twice - trying to reset his Brian.

GRANT
(still processing)
Rex. Right. Of course. Does Rex...
talk?

CARL
(eyebrow up)
No, but he communicates.

Carl checks his watch - businesslike.

CARL (CONT'D)
I've got a massage client at eight.
We could do three, maybe four
rounds if you keep up.

GRANT
(nods, politely horrified)
Yes. Well. Endurance. Admirable.
(beat)
Dinner's out then?

CARL
Structured meal plan.

Grant's eyes dart to the mirror. He barely recognizes the man in it.

GRANT

Right. Well—you and Rex have a lovely evening.

CARL

(easy)

You sure? We could just go two rounds?

Grant nods, as if it's normal.

Carl pulls up his shorts.

Time seems to drag.

Carl slips his shirt back on and heads out the door without missing a beat.

Silence.

Grant stares after him.

GRANT

(to himself)

Rex. He calls him Rex.

(beat)

Next.

He exhales, glances in the mirror. The smile doesn't come back.

INT. GRANT'S APARTMENT — NIGHT (ROUND 2)

5:30 P.M. A light rain falls. Outside, the reflection of city lights trembles across the window — like the wink of something remembered. ON SCREEN: September 17 — The Invitation to Dance (Round 2)

Grant places beers in the fridge. A bowl of pretzels on the counter. TV ON — Food Network.

GRANT

Oops — wrong impression.

He flips to SportsCenter.

GRANT (CONT'D)

Fuck yeah! How about those Tigers?

He flexes in the mirror, half-mocking himself. The light is harsh, judgmental; the reflection in the window seems to watch him back.

GRANT (CONT'D)
Let the shopper know what's in the window.

A knock.

Grant pops a beer. Turns up the volume – armor up.

CLICK.

Door swings open.

BRENT (43), tall, ironed, controlled. Looks like he's never spilled anything in his life.

Grant leans against the doorframe, chugging a beer.

GRANT (CONT'D)
S'up?

BRENT
Pardon?

GRANT
Come on in, Bro. Got the game on.

Brent hesitates, steps inside.

The TV blares – too loud, too alive.

GRANT (CONT'D)
Whatcha drinkin'?

BRENT
White wine.

GRANT
(half shouting)
You want white wine?

The game blares even louder now.

BRENT
(leaning in)
What? I can't hear you—the game—

GRANT
Hell yeah, I keep that on all the time! Who do you like?

BRENT
What? Do I ride a bike? Can you
turn that down?

Grant drops the volume, proud of himself.

GRANT
There you go, Bro.

BRENT
It's Brent. My name is Brent.

GRANT
Sure, whatever.

Grant gets a beer and tosses it to Brent. Bad throw and a bad catch. The beer hits the floor and explodes.

SFX: Slow motion – beer explodes, foam baptizing Brent in pure chaos.

The sound dies. Just two men. One drenched. One confused. The game still plays somewhere in the distance.

SILENCE. 3 beats.

Brent freezes – poisoned by imperfection.

BRENT
I just ironed this shirt–

GRANT
You what?

BRENT
Ironed. You do know what that is?

GRANT
Duh–of course. But why?
(beat)
You wanna just skip to the naked
part?

Beat. Brent blinks.

BRENT
This is a first date. I'm not above
it–just not like this.

He turns and leaves.

Door shuts.

Silence.

Grant sighs. Crunches a pretzel.

GRANT
 (into phone)
 Hey Tammy, sushi or salad?
 Yeah, no—didn't work out.
 Guess we couldn't *iron out our
 differences.*

He switches the channel back to *Cooking Network.*

The hiss of sauté pans. A soothing rhythm.

Grant looks around – the mess, the foam, the emptiness.

GRANT (CONT'D)
 (scoffs softly)
 I don't even like beer. Give me a
 bag of chips any day.

He cleans up in silence. The clink of bottles. The towel on tile.

He starts to speak—stops. The reflection in the oven stares back.

GRANT (CONT'D)
 I throw shade way better than I can
 throw a football.

The apartment is too perfect. Too empty.

He laughs dryly.

GRANT (CONT'D)
 Well, that just sounded like sad
 melodrama. Maybe use that for
 Inspiration for the Spring line,
 "Sad in the Rain."

He fluffs the pillows on the couch.

GRANT (CONT'D)
 It's that I'm lonely, I am just
 tired of being alone. I want sex, I
 want quick, but I want Sunday
 mornings when you wake up together,
 and just get out of my head.

He goes to look out the window. The city lights below and above. The camera catches his reflection in the window.

GRANT (CONT'D)

I have lots of friends. And most of them all have that one, that I use to have with Roger. So I don't get out much, I have work, God I would love to not have a routine

Grant catches sight of a sketch – a woman beneath an umbrella, rain slanting like silver threads. A faint glimmer ripples across the glass frame – as if the reflection itself exhales.

GRANT (CONT'D)

Dinner? A show? No? Oh—you have someone.

He sets it down. The room hums – refrigerator, rain, heart.

SAD WOMAN IN THE RAIN

(swept, barely audible)

Go get lost.

Grant freezes.

He lifts the drawing. The ink glistens wet, though the page is dry. The woman's painted eye blinks – a wink caught in lamplight.

SAD WOMAN IN THE RAIN (CONT'D)

Go get lost. Go find yourself.

GRANT

(chuckling)

Now you've got opinions.

A faint Blue Hawaii chord drifts in from somewhere – just a whisper – and fades.

He checks his phone – *Tammy: "30 mins?"*

Mirror again. Candlelight softens his edges.

GRANT (CONT'D)

Let's just go with it.

Who do we pretend to be next time?

Prince Charming? The Wolf?

(pause)

How about... just Grant?

Beat.

GRANT (CONT'D)

Who the hell is he?

Lights off. He goes out the door.

GRANT (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 He calls him Rex!
 (he laughs) "Bro" what was I
 thinking?

GRANT (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 (from the hallway,
 muffled)
 REX! ROAR!

INT. GRANT'S APARTMENT – NIGHT (ROUND 3)

5:30 P.M. Light rain. ON SCREEN: September 24 – The
 Invitation to Dance (Round 3)

Grant hums along to salsa. A Cuban shirt. Capri khakis.
 Loafers, no socks. Two chains around his neck. He's feeling
 it – maybe too much.

GRANT
 Señor Frankie's gonna feel Papi's
 heat tonight!

He laughs. Checks the mirror – this time it smiles first. A
 faint shimmer of light crosses the glass, like a wink.

GRANT (CONT'D)
 Don't shop when you're hungry.

He grins at his reflection.

GRANT (CONT'D)
 Hungry? I'm starving for love.

The camera glides across the room – the same spot where,
 weeks from now, a teddy bear will sit. For now it's empty,
 waiting. A soft trace of Blue Hawaii hums beneath the salsa –
 as if the future is already whispering.

A knock.

GRANT (CONT'D)
 Si, si! Coming!

He opens the door.

Heels. Skirt. Pearls. Blue eyes. *FRANKIE SANCHEZ* (30s)
 beams with warmth, a bottle of champagne in hand.

FRANKIE

Hi! I'm Frankie. Third date this month. Guess I'm persistent.

She twirls a strand of hair.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

There are so many strange men—some only want sex.

(laughs)

Listen to me. I'm rambling.

Grant just stares. Processing.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

Alexander McQueen capris? Love.

A silence. She signs gently:

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

Are you deaf? It's okay, I'm rusty at sign language.

Grant half laughs, lost.

GRANT

You're... Frankie?

FRANKIE

Yep. Born this way.

GRANT

I thought you were a man.

FRANKIE

Nope. Always been me. I mean, I'm not opposed to transgender—be who you are inside, right?

GRANT

I'm just... a little confused.

FRANKIE

Geeze, I'm sorry. Did I do something wrong? I loved your ad.

She pulls out her phone, reading it aloud with a grin.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

"Looking for someone who laughs easy, opens their heart and arms to new experiences, and asks the next person they meet—'What is your passion?'"

He softens.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)
So—what's your passion?

GRANT
Life.

She grins, hugs him unexpectedly.

FRANKIE
Good answer.

She eases him inside, both laughing.

EXT. GRANT'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

FRANKIE (O.S.)
Love the Latin music! I have no
idea what they're saying, but I
love it!

Their laughter trails off as the door closes. Fade out

TRANSITION: the faint sound of jazz dissolves into the hum
of city wind.

INT. GRANT'S APARTMENT - RISING ACTION

November 20, 5:30 P.M.

Outside, autumn leaves drift past the window.

Grant sketches alone, a quiet rhythm. His cell phone rings.
He puts it on speaker. He continues to work.

RASHONDA is Grant's manager at the design agency. She's
quick. Abrupt. Icy. All blade, no sheath.

RASHONDA (V.O.)
Darling.

GRANT
By tomorrow.

RASHONDA (V.O.)
Sweetheart.

GRANT
Ten A.M. Tammy will drop them off.

RASHONDA (V.O.)

Will I—

GRANT

—Love them? Please. No one warms the Ice Queen like I do.

RASHONDA (V.O.)

Talk dirty to me.

GRANT

Can't. Hangnail.

RASHONDA (V.O.)

You're cruel. I want to see you.

GRANT

I'll send a selfie. Bye, love.

RASHONDA (V.O.)

Ten A.M., darling. Don't make me send the hounds.

She laughs — sharp and gone.

A *text buzzes*: Cruella DeVil meme with "THE HOUNDS."

He smiles faintly, sets it down.

GRANT

So I had a love. He died.
Three years ago.
Everyone says "move on."
Yeah... not that easy. How do you
replace Roger?

A knock.

He sighs, opens the door mid-sentence—

GRANT (CONT'D)

(talking out to the room
the door knocker person)
I have no time for/

—and freezes.

TEDDY (30s), UPS uniform, green eyes, gentle smile, stands holding a teddy bear wrapped in plastic.

TEDDY

Hi, are you Grant Thomas? Or Thomas Grant? Happens all the time. They mix up the names.

(MORE)

TEDDY (CONT'D)
 (beat, smiling)
 I deal with it.

Grant nods, entranced.

Teddy gives wink. Snaps his fingers politely.

Grant seems in a dream state.

SFX. Go to Slow Motion

TEDDY (CONT'D)
 (sounding slow motion)
 Mr. Thomas? Mr. Grant you ok?

BACK TO Real-Time.

TEDDY (CONT'D)
 Just sign here.

He hands the scanner over. Their fingers brush. Electricity.

GRANT
 Who's it from?

TEDDY
 Box got destroyed. Maybe there's a
 note.

Beat.

Teddy gets close and inspects the package.

Grant breathes him in. Heaven.

TEDDY (CONT'D)
 Well on his little paw there's a
 brand name maybe you call and they
 can help you.

GRANT
 You wanna come in?

TEDDY
 (laughing)
 I get that a lot. Uniform thing.
 Fantasy, right?

GRANT
 No-sorry, I-

TEDDY
 All good. So you got your package
 and I am on the clock and got 10
 (MORE)

TEDDY (CONT'D)
more deliveries. You have a great
Thanksgiving

GRANT
When is it?

TEDDY
Tomorrow. Parade passes right by
here. Great view.

He starts to leave.

GRANT
Hey—what's your name?

TEDDY
Teddy. Like the bear.

He winks, goes. Teddy jangles keys in hand and hums "Blue
Christmas" by Elvis. Soft, off-key, perfect.

GRANT
You just never know.

Grant unwraps the bear. A tag: *TEDDYBEAR INC.*

He presses the paw.

THE BEAR
(mechanical)
ROOOAR! I'm Teddy!

Grant laughs. Finds a note on the tag:

> *Hey Grant. Nice to meet you. I like hugs.*

He smiles. Fades out.

INT. GRANT'S APARTMENT — THE CLIMAX

December 24, 5:30 P.M. — "Blue Hawaii" Theme.

Holiday lights. Tropical colors. Perfection.

GRANT
Martha Stewart would be proud. Blue
Hawaii, eat your heart out.

He looks in the mirror, approving his own audacity.

GRANT (CONT'D)
If you're gonna wear it—own it.

Music: *Elvis croons softly.*

A knock.

GRANT (CONT'D)
Too early for Santa.

He opens the door—

—and there's TEDDY. Same green eyes. Green shirt, black pants, Santa hat. Warm as sunlight.

TEDDY
Merry Christmas.

Grant smiles and then without thinking tears well up. In an instant Grant is swept up in a hug that is like a security blanket. Strong, comforting, not sexual, just love abounding.

TEDDY (CONT'D)
(softly)
Oh Grant, it's ok. Go ahead.

Grant softly weeps. He steps back.

GRANT
I don't know what just happened. I am not like this.

TEDDY
You just shared your passion, life.

Grant exhales — peace.

GRANT
Will you come in?

TEDDY
Yes.

They enter.

INT. GRANT'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

The 50's holiday music is playing. Several plates of festive holiday appetizers are scattered around the room.

Teddy spies a large tray of home-made holiday cookies.

Grant passes the mirror. For the first time, he doesn't check it. He catches his reflection by accident — and smiles anyway.

TEDDY
I Love to bake holiday cookies.

GRANT
You do? So do I.

TEDDY & GRANT
(in unison surprisingly)
I always baked with my mother.

They stop. Look. Laugh.

Teddy looks around.

TEDDY
I am sensing a theme.

GRANT
Oh I always do a theme.

Teddy looks like a detective spying for clues. He looks at Grant. Gives him the cue to "turn around" to see the entire outfit.

TEDDY
Blue Hawaii.

GRANT
(surprised)
Well, yes!

Grant looks at Teddy. He smiles

TEDDY
So what are your plans.

GRANT
Nothing, I have the entire evening open.

TEDDY
Ah, waiting for Santa?

GRANT
Well you do have the hat?

They both laugh. Teddy sits. Casual. Easy. Grant feels his sense of peace.

GRANT (CONT'D)
So it was you that gave me the
Teddy Bear.

Grant looks over and he has dressed the bear in a Blue Hawaii outfit.

TEDDY

Yes.

GRANT

Why? And Why did you just leave?
You really don't work for a
delivery company, right?

TEDDY

Caught me! I am an actor for one
trade and I put on a costume and
played a role.

GRANT

Ok, so?

TEDDY

I kept seeing you—outside the café,
crossing Eighth—always looked like
someone waiting for something.

GRANT

Rashonda.

TEDDY

She terrifies me.

GRANT

(laugh)
She scares everybody.

GRANT (CONT'D)

I am glad you found me.

TEDDY

Me, too. I want to make sure you
are following your passion.

GRANT

My passion?

TEDDY

Life.

GRANT

Oh that? So over-rated. I, a,
well, what's your passion?

TEDDY

Creating.

GRANT
 Hmm. So, what happens now?

TEDDY
 If I don't have one of those
 cookies right now, I will not
 forgive myself.

Grant gets up and gets the tray.

Teddy lingers over each one, there are several to select
 from. He lands on a peanut butter blossom.

He takes it. Smells it. Eats it and melts.

TEDDY (CONT'D)
 My God, that is so good.

Grant smiles.

GRANT
 Secret ingredient's "forgiveness."

The holiday music swells. The camera finds the Blue Hawaii
 theme all around the room.

They laugh, bake, dance. A warmth fills the room.

INT. GRANT'S BEDROOM - FALLING ACTION

Christmas Morning.

Snow light floods the room. The bed, a cloud of white
 comfort. Grant wakes. A lump under the covers.

GRANT
 Teddy? Merry Christmas.

GRANT (CONT'D)
 Teddy Bear. Wake up.

Grant reaches over to do a bear-hug and he hugs a pillow. He
 pulls back the sheet. Empty.

He looks down-naked. Shock.

GRANT (CONT'D)
 I never sleep naked.

He scrambles for boxers, robe, Winnie-the-Pooh slippers.

GRANT (CONT'D)
 Teddy?

Silence.

He retraces steps – glasses, cookie tray, the window.

Nothing.

GRANT (CONT'D)
 Guess Christmas is for children.
 You wait for that day, you open the
 pretty box and "SURPRISE" (pause)
 Oh thank you just what I've always
 wanted.

He glances outside – snow drifts gently down.

SFX. The room freezes and he looks around. Only his head
 moves. Clues seem to be everywhere. He clocks the empty
 blossom tray... then freezes—the bear now wears a green shirt,
 black pants, Santa hat.

BACK TO REAL
 TIME

He picks up the tray and looks.

TEDDY (V.O.)
 The peanut butter blossoms are my
 favorite.

Not a single Blossom cookie left.

Grant picks up the Bear. He presses the paw.

THE BEAR
 (mechanical)
 I want to make sure you're
 following your passion.

He laughs, near tears.

GRANT
 You and me both.

At the window, his breath fogs the glass – reveals a faint
 heart.

He doesn't see it. Turns away.

GRANT (CONT'D)
 Teddy? Who am I calling to?

He slumps on the couch.

He tosses the bear aside. Gets up. Paces.

GRANT (CONT'D)
I mean I smell him on me (he
sniffs) Well, I think I do.

He goes to the bar and pours a strong drink.

CARL (V.O.)
(easy, forward)
Grant, you are very easy to look
at. Say hello to Rex!

SFX. The sound of Carl shaking the gin martinis in the
shaker.

He puts the drink down, untouched.

GRANT
Ok maybe I am just going crazy. It
happens all the time. People just
go, batshit crazy for no reason.

Grant appears to be hyperventilating. He runs to the fridge.

POV. All the beer in the fridge.

GRANT (V.O.)
You wanna just skip to the naked
part?

Grant screams in shame.

GRANT
Oh, My God, I said that? You wanna
just skip to the naked part?

Grant laughs.

He does the sign language:

FRANKIE
Are you deaf? It's okay—I'm a
little rusty with my sign language.

He goes to the window. Sees the snow. He sighs a few times.
His breath fogs the window. As he turns he misses what the
fog reveals. The Camera catches just the glimpse of the shape
of a heart.

He turns off the music. He slumps on the couch. Teddy, the
bear, is on his back and seems to be smiling.

GRANT
Oh sure you get to smile. Me.
What did I learn?

He looks over at his sketches.

GRANT (CONT'D)

(snaps)

And if you, Miss Rain-in-Spring,
start talking, I will rip you to
shreds.

Tears fall down his face.

GRANT (CONT'D)

I just wanted..I needed to feel
again. Something. Except not
afraid and not alone. And not on
Christmas.

Tears come. He rubs his eyes. He sighs. He rubs his temple
and the room blurs for a moment.

INT. FRONT DOOR OF GRANT'S APARTMENT

In the blur the front door opens.

POV. Just a pair of men's boots with snow, quietly coming in.
Grant is unaware.

The room comes back into focus.

INT. GRANT'S APARTMENT

Grant rubs his head.

GRANT

I thought Teddy was real. (laughs)
It turns out he's just a bear.

He pulls the bear close to him.

The man in the background doesn't move or make a sound.

Grant looks to the window and the interior fog wisps away. He
thought he saw something.

He darts to the window and breaths again. There it is.

POV. On the window fog a HEART is drawn and inside the word:
LIFE.

GRANT (CONT'D)

That's my passion. But I haven't
been passionate for 3 years. What
am I doing? Wasting time on these

(MORE)

GRANT (CONT'D)
 dates. Trying to be someone I'm
 not. I don't want to be locked in
 this cell anymore.

SFX: The jingle of keys.

He doesn't react.

Another breath on glass – a *second heart* appears. Inside
 it: *CREATE.*

GRANT (CONT'D)
 Who put that there?

A soft voice – behind him.

TEDDY
 I did. Merry Christmas.

Grant turns – Teddy stands in the doorway, snow-dusted, arms
 open.

They meet halfway, embrace – the *best Teddy-bear hug ever.*

INT. GRANT'S APARTMENT – DENOUEMENT

Montage – Christmas Day.

* Grant and Teddy make breakfast.

* Cookie crumbs, milk moustaches.

* They unwrap gifts for no one and laugh: *"It's just what I
 wanted!"*

* They fall back into bed.

Later-jackets, Santa hats.

They step out into the snowy city, hand in hand.

The door closes.

The apartment glows in *Blue Hawaii* light.

The camera glides:

– Two hearts on the frosted window.

– Empty cookie tray.

– The Teddy Bear on the chair.

A faint shimmer lands on his nose. Silence.

THE BEAR
 (soft, old-soul)
 This is your life.
 Do what you love and do it often.

A faint jingle of keys – a door opening. Light spills into the room. The bear's eye catches it, gleaming once, then–

THE BEAR (CONT'D)
 (soft, old-soul)
 This is your life. Share it.

Grant rushes in, breathless, still smiling from the hallway. He scoops the bear into his arms.

GRANT
 You're coming with us.
 No one should be alone on Christmas
 Day.

He hugs the bear – warmth, joy, belief – then turns for the door. Light flares behind them.

The bear looks back over Grant's shoulder, winks. A flicker in its glass eye, as if recording every second.

MUSIC: "Blue Hawaii" (instrumental reprise)

Their hands clasp. The door closes softly.

CUT TO BLACK.

THE BEAR (V.O.)
 (magical)
 This is your life. Share it.

The image holds.

Light spills from the doorway, glowing brighter... until it floods the frame.

Colors bleach toward white.

DISSOLVE TO:

BLACK-AND-WHITE GRAIN FADES IN – 1953 – THE MERRY-GO-ROUND

A woman's laughter. A radio croons faintly.

SUPER: September 10, 1953 – The Merry-Go-Round

INT. FRANCISCO & SHIRLEY'S APARTMENT – NIGHT (ROUND 1)

5:30 P.M. The sun slips toward the horizon.

Everything in crisp black and white – a perfect magazine world.

Francisco opens the shades. The same melody drifts from the radio – a scratchy, mono version of “Blue Hawaii.”

He sets out deviled eggs and a cheese ball, humming as he works.

FRANCISCO

Shirley, my love, just a few more touches and we're ready!

He exits to the kitchen.

Shirley enters, framed in the mirror – a red cocktail dress that the audience can't yet see in color.

She studies herself, unsatisfied.

Her reflection sticks out its tongue – a playful, rebellious wink.

SHIRLEY

Don't you start with me.

SHIRLEY'S REFLECTION

(snippy)

Just keep up appearances. If you don't like the dress, change it. Maybe a pantsuit?

The mirror surface ripples – light flickers across it like a heartbeat.

COLOR BEGINS TO BLEED IN – first the red of her dress, then the gold of the lamplight – until the entire room blooms into rich 1950s Technicolor.

MUSIC widens from mono to lush stereo. The past comes alive.

SHIRLEY

Well, you can't wear it if I don't wear it.

SHIRLEY'S REFLECTION

But I wear it so much better than you.

Shirley scoffs – the sound brittle against the syrupy music.

She crosses to the window, ****snaps the shades shut****, trapping the color inside the room.

A shadow falls over the deviled eggs and the perfect cheese ball.

She stares at them – symbols of domestic bliss – and something in her ***cracks.***

She sweeps the deviled eggs off the counter. They splatter like pearls on linoleum.

Then she kneels beside the cheese ball, adjusts its angle, almost tenderly..

and collapses on it, as though fainting into her own performance.

****SQUISH.****

The cheese ball flattens beneath her red cocktail dress – a tragicomic splash of color on the spotless floor.

SHIRLEY
(yelling, dramatic)
Ohhhh!

****Footsteps – fast, panicked.****

FRANCISCO rushes in, tie loosened, panic smoothed over with charm.

FRANCISCO
Shirley, my love! What happened?
Are you hurt?

Shirley looks up from the floor, lipstick perfect – a single smear of cheese like war paint across her cheek.

Her red dress glistens with crushed deviled eggs and tragedy.

SHIRLEY
(feigning tears, high drama)
Oh Francisco, my sweet, loving husband. I slipped – right on your St. Mary's Church Supper, grand-prize winning cheese ball. All that work.. ruined! Smashed like a bug on the floor.

FRANCISCO
No, no, honey, don't worry. The important thing is – are you okay?

SHIRLEY

And as I was falling – it felt like an eternity – I reached for the tray of deviled eggs. Your Auntie Jean's recipe. The one you make religiously – the first Friday of the third, sixth, ninth, and twelfth month every year. Now we have to wait until December.

She "cries" into his shoulder. He hugs her, pure devotion.

FRANCISCO

Oh my precious love. Let's not worry about family recipes or prize-winning food. Come – let's get you up. Make sure you've got your sea legs.

He helps her to her feet. She dramatizes the effort.

SHIRLEY

Ohhh.. ohhh, my back. I've ruined the night. Our special night!

FRANCISCO

Shirley, I left the restaurant early to celebrate this nothing-special day with you. Ben's covering for me. I'll close the restaurant tomorrow.

SHIRLEY

(whimpers, milking it)
Oh what a clumsy fool I am
– you leaving your
restaurant early for me
and– (a sharp gasp)
OWWW! Oh, the pain! I've ruined the evening!

FRANCISCO

Shirley, we've had twenty years of evenings. Wonderful evenings! And a lifetime more to come.

Shirley rolls her eyes. He doesn't see.

FRANCISCO (CONT'D)

Would anything help?

SHIRLEY

(flat)

A double gin martini and three aspirin should start to ease my worries.

Francisco moves to the bar, humming a cheerful tune. Shirley catches her reflection in the side mirror.

The glass ripples.

SHIRLEY'S REFLECTION

(quietly, wicked grin)

Oh, aren't we the clever little housewife?

SHIRLEY

(hisses)

Shh. Hush now.

FRANCISCO

Here you go, my darling. Sip this. Can you sit up? Oh - the dress is staining Mother's vintage couch with the cheese and egg.

SHIRLEY

(over the top)

Owww! Oh, the pain!

She downs the martini in one gulp. Hands him the glass.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

(flatly)

Another. Quickly.

FRANCISCO

Of course, dear. Maybe you can change out of that dress while I treat the stain before it sets.

She rises, "struggling," sighing, stopping twice to whimper for effect.

SHIRLEY

(high drama)

Owwwweeee!

She presses a hand to her forehead and staggers toward the bedroom like Garbo at curtain call.

SHIRLEY (V.O.)
Cisco, call Dr. Jenkins... OWWWW!

SHIRLEY'S REFLECTION
(sotto, amused)
Maybe she over-acts just a smidge.

FRANCISCO'S REFLECTION (V.O.)
You two gonna be all right for the
next card game?

The two reflections catch sight of each other across opposing mirrors.

They grin – conspirators in a private joke – and lift their martinis.

BOTH REFLECTIONS
Cheers.

They clink through the glass, laughter echoing as the image ripples and soft-fades to silver.

FADE OUT.

INT. FRANCISCO & SHIRLEY'S APARTMENT – NIGHT (ROUND 2)

5:30 P.M. A light rain falls.

ON SCREEN: *September 17 – The Merry-Go-Round (Round 2)*

Everything glows again in deep Technicolor.

Shirley enters in a striking silver, glittery dress, hair in a precise French twist.

She smokes like Bette Davis and sips her cocktail the same way.

She throws open the windows with a flourish.

SHIRLEY
Oh, I want air in this room! I
want lights!

SHIRLEY'S REFLECTION
I want to dance! I want the
theatre!

Shirley's gaze hardens toward the mirror.

SHIRLEY
 (venom dripping)
 Darling, remember – if I don't go
 out on the town, neither do you.

SHIRLEY'S REFLECTION
 God, you can be so mean!

SHIRLEY
 (smiling)
 I know. And that's where we differ.
 I'm mean. You're just the
 reflection of mean.

The reflection scoffs.

Shirley crosses to the radio, flips the dial.

BIG-BAND MUSIC blooms – brass, swing, sparkle.

She begins to dance, hips loose, cigarette trailing smoke
 like punctuation.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)
 Cisco, darling – we leave in just a
 few minutes! I'm going to put on my
 Chanel No. 5!

She glides toward the bedroom, dissolving into the perfume
 and the music.

Francisco enters – pajamas, slippers.

He notices the open windows and crosses to them.

FRANCISCO
 Brrr. That's how you catch a nasty
 fall cold.

He shuts the first window – **SNAP. The color drains to black-
 and-white.**

He closes the second – **the sound dulls, the warmth
 disappears.**

The radio still plays; he reaches over and clicks it off.

Silence.

FRANCISCO'S REFLECTION

(approving, gravelly like
a mob boss)

Thank God one of us has the chops
to take charge around here.
Good man.

FRANCISCO

(teasing)

Now don't you start.

FRANCISCO'S REFLECTION

Hey, Sport—get with it!

Francisco chuckles, ignoring him. He straightens a cushion,
admires the tidy room.

FRANCISCO'S REFLECTION (CONT'D)

(low, warning)

Listen, pal—don't make me the only
one playin' hardball.
You forget the night out?

Francisco freezes, looks down at his pajamas.

FRANCISCO

What was I thinking? Long days at
the restaurant—
I must've lost track.

FRANCISCO'S REFLECTION

Ouuuf. That's not gonna go down
easy.

(he claps twice)

Chop-chop, kid. Get dressed.

Francisco bolts offscreen.

COLOR floods back in as SHIRLEY enters — glitter dress
gleaming.

She stops cold, sees the closed windows, the silent radio.

The room feels smaller. Staler.

A whisper slides out of the mirror—

SHIRLEY'S REFLECTION

(sarcastic, singsong)

It was him. He did it.

The sound lingers, like perfume and guilt.

Shirley's eyes narrow – she knows exactly which *him* that means.

SHIRLEY

Of course it was him.
After twenty years, ten months, and
four days, you think I don't know
who irritates me more than bad
breath?

SHIRLEY'S REFLECTION

(toasting the air)
To halitosis – and holy matrimony.

She opens the windows wide; **warm light rushes in.**

She turns the radio back on – **big-band swing bursts to life.**

SHIRLEY'S REFLECTION (CONT'D)

Pedestrian. That's what it is.
You want *Vogue* and you get *Life*
magazine. How do you stand it?

SHIRLEY

You don't know.
Well – I mean, you do, to some
degree.
But you don't have him touching
you.
Calling you "Honey" every day.
The same predictable sex every
Saturday at 9:15 p.m.
Seven minutes.
Like clockwork.
(beat)
Like mercy killing.

For the first time, her reflection says nothing. Even the radio hesitates – the needle crackles.

She flings her drink toward the window – **SMASH.**

SFX: *Slow motion.*

The glass explodes into a thousand jeweled shards.

Each fragment catches her reflection – a kaleidoscope of the woman she's become.

Glass blooms outward, suspended in air – a glittering constellation of frustration.

The exhale of her cigarette fills the silence, long and deliberate, like punctuation.

****BACK TO REAL TIME.****

Francisco enters.

Still in pajamas. Calm, almost cheery.

He takes one look at the wreckage and immediately begins to clean.

Sweeping. Blotting. Vacuuming.

An entire marriage summarized in gestures of tidying.

Shirley watches him – as if seeing this man for the very first time.

SHIRLEY

Where did that come from?

FRANCISCO

(easy)

Oh, honey – you're such a teaser.

SHIRLEY

No, seriously.
We have a vacuum?

FRANCISCO

Of course. Hall closet. Bought it when Eisenhower was president. Ramona puts it there after she comes in to clean for you every Tuesday and Thursday.

SHIRLEY

Speaking of that Rita.

FRANCISCO

Butternut, it is Ramona.

She glares. Then catches her reflection silently mouthing ****"Butternut."*** It makes her laugh – a brittle, perfect laugh.

SHIRLEY

Yes, Ramona, I need her 6 days a week. She can have off on Wednesdays.

In the mirror, Francisco's reflection mouths – ****"Six days? WTF?"*** His brows shoot up.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

Yes, I am tired of cooking and doing the laundry. I need my nails done and she can help with the shopping.

Francisco's reflection now **shakes his head "no" - slow, deliberate, cigar clenched between his teeth.

A puff of smoke rolls across the glass.

FRANCISCO

(gently, resigned)

Certainly. Six days a week will be perfect.

Great idea, sweetheart.

The reflection exhales - long, theatrical. He throws up his hands, leans back, and lets the cigar hang from his lips like a man at the end of the world.

Shirley looks Francisco over - the pajamas, the slippers - and gives him a look of exquisite disapproval.

SHIRLEY

Cisco, you are not wearing *that* tonight are you? Please the Jones' would make a mockery of me.

Francisco looks down, embarrassed.

FRANCISCO

No and thank you for always keeping me fashion forward. Did you see I got that stain from the cheeseball that was on Momma's couch.

SHIRLEY

Of course. You're invaluable. Now just wear the black jacket and we're good to go.

Francisco brightens - actually excited. His reflection raises his arms in victory.

FRANCISCO'S REFLECTION

Yes! We're going out!

He disappears down the hall.

Shirley takes a long drag on her cigarette.

Without thinking, she presses it into the couch cushion -

a faint hiss. A small burn.

Smoke curls upward.

SHIRLEY
(startled)
Oh my!

Footsteps.

She flips a pillow over the hole just as Francisco returns – black jacket buttoned neatly **over his pajamas.**

She looks him over.

Exhales.

The silence is unbearable.

FRANCISCO
(softly, knowing)
I won't blend well with the
Joneses, will I?

SHIRLEY
It's always easier when you realize
your shortcomings rather than
having me point them out every
time.
Yes – you should stay home.

FRANCISCO
Right. What would I even have to
talk about?
The restaurant.

SHIRLEY
God, no. Who wants to hear another
chapter from *Tales of the Greasy
Diner*?

A beat of silence. Shirley steps off to the powder room.

Then – across the room, in the mirror – **his reflection reacts.**

FRANCISCO'S REFLECTION slow, deliberate, removes his tie. Kicks off his shoes. The mirror ripples. Lets them thud against the wall.

He slumps into an invisible chair, eyes heavy, cigar already lit.

A long drag.

FRANCISCO'S REFLECTION

(low, muttering)

Every king needs a kingdom.
I just got stuck with the kitchen.

He stares out from the mirror – eyes colder now. Straightens his collar.

Rolls the cigar between his fingers like he's weighing an idea.

FRANCISCO'S REFLECTION (CONT'D)

Alright, Cisco. Enough dishes.

Francisco looks over to him.

FRANCISCO'S REFLECTION (CONT'D)

Enough apologies.
You wanna run a restaurant, fine –
start with the menu at home.

He rises in the reflection; the real Francisco still sits, small and still.

The mirror version begins pacing, plotting.

FRANCISCO'S REFLECTION (CONT'D)

(like a drill sergeant,
pacing)

Step one: stop asking for
permission.

(more intense)

Step two: serve her a taste of her
own damn sauce.

(beat, half-smile)

Step three: make the lady remember
who built the table she's eatin'
at.

He flicks ash against the glass; it sizzles and fades.

A faint shimmer runs across the surface, as if his will is beginning to bleed through.

FRANCISCO

(off, quiet)

So do I do something?

FRANCISCO'S REFLECTION

(softly, to himself)

Not yet.

He adjusts his tie again in the reflection – crisp, confident, transformed – while the real FRANCISCO still sits slumped, unaware that somewhere behind the glass, a plan has already begun.

SHIRLEY re-enters.

Her reflection, in a smaller hand mirror, admires herself – pouting, preening, already half-gone.

Shirley holds out her hand.

Francisco sighs, reaches for his wallet, and places a twenty in her palm.

She doesn't move.

Still gazing at her reflection.

He adds another twenty.

Nothing.

FRANCISCO
Oh – yes, you'll need cab fare.

Francisco's Reflection pacing, blowing cigar smoke.

The Real Francisco slides a third bill into her hand.

This time she folds them neatly, drops them into her purse without looking up.

Her reflection winks and blows a kiss – all sparkle, no soul.

FRANCISCO
Should I–

SHIRLEY
Don't wait up.
Not quite sure when I'll be home.
Perhaps on the wings of the
sunrise.

She leans in, kisses his forehead – perfunctory – and glides out.

Francisco's reflection punches his fist into the mirror from the inside.

SFX: a sharp, internal CRACK. A hairline fracture spreads.

CLICK. The door closes.

Francisco stands in the hush. Looks around – photos, trinkets, framed smiles.

Every object hums with memory. He sinks into the chair.

Silence breaks. Tears start rolling down.

FRANCISCO
 (convincing himself)
 Who'd want to hear *Tales of the
 Greasy Diner* anyway?

A brittle laugh. He lets the tears fall.

In the mirror, his reflection stiffens. He sets down the cigar, rubs the hand that struck the glass.

Furious. Helpless. Then—change—up.

FRANCISCO'S REFLECTION
 (steady)ing)
 Aw, come on, pal. Don't do this.
 It's not so bad. We got the
 evening to ourselves.

He stands, brushes ash from his lapel.

Straightens his tie – sharper now. Light in the mirror hardens to chrome.

FRANCISCO'S REFLECTION (CONT'D)
 (low, decisive)
 Alright. Enough crying over
 leftovers.
 You fed her twenty years – now it's
 our turn to eat.

Francisco looks up, a smile beginning.

FRANCISCO'S REFLECTION (CONT'D)
 That's the spirit. We can play
 solitaire.
 Shadow box. Fold the laundry.

Francisco rises, chuckling.

FRANCISCO'S REFLECTION (CONT'D)
 But we forgot one detail.

He nods toward the standing mirror. Francisco understands.

He fetches a sheet from the closet.

SHIRLEY'S REFLECTION
 (from within)
 No-no, come on, don't do that.
 It's not my fault-

He drapes the sheet over the mirror.

Muffled protests fade to stillness.

FRANCISCO'S REFLECTION
 (proud)
 Attaboy. You wanna box? I got a
 mean left hook. Ha!

Francisco starts to spar playfully with the covered mirror.

They laugh together.

FRANCISCO
 That the best you got?

FRANCISCO'S REFLECTION
 Yeah, pal - come closer, I dare ya!

Behind the fabric, muffled sobs linger.

The camera drifts through the sheet.

INT. MIRROR SPACE - CONTINUOUS

Shirley's reflection sits alone in a bare room - a single
 lamp without a shade.

Her tears glint in the dim light.

The bulb flickers once.. twice.. then flares bright white -

the light swells until it fills the frame.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. FRANCISCO & SHIRLEY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT (ROUND 3)

5:30 P.M. A light rain falls.

ON SCREEN: *September 24 - The Merry-Go-Round (Round 3)*

The white light resolves into the soft glow of **string
 lanterns and tiki torches.**

The reflection's loneliness morphs into Shirley's manic
 cheer.

She's wearing a festive grass skirt, flowers in her hair, a bikini top she can almost—but not quite—pull off.

Bare feet. The living room is now a full LUAU fantasy.

Island music plays, Mai Tai drinks glitter with paper umbrellas.

Shirley twirls, humming.

SHIRLEY

Oh, I love a good party.

SHIRLEY'S REFLECTION

(excited)

Where are we going? God knows no party has been in this room for nineteen years.

SHIRLEY

Now, you hush. We are going to play nice for a change.

As Shirley turns away, **the reflection begins to change** — a paper lei drapes across her shoulders from nowhere, a flower appears tucked behind her ear.

Each prop seems *handed in* from the edges of the glass.

SHIRLEY'S REFLECTION

Sweetie, sit down. You okay?
I mean, if you die, I die — and I want to be dead.

Shirley pays no mind to her reflection, swaying to the music.

The reflection keeps acquiring bits of the "island" motif — coconut drink, sunglasses, a gaudy hibiscus garland — until she's an exaggerated, ghostly twin of the real Shirley, a parody of escape instead of the real thing.

Shirley dances in glowing color — tiki lights, flowers, island joy.

SFX: DOORBELL.

She freezes mid-spin, looks toward the door.

CUT TO: THE DOORKNOB TURNING – SNAP!

The color drains in an instant. The world collapses into black-and-white.

Only the faint sound of rain and the hum of the fridge remain.

The door opens. Francisco stands there – grayscale, tired, drenched.

The lei around her neck is now dull gray, the tiki lights cold and lifeless.

SHIRLEY

(cold)

Cisco, you're home early.

FRANCISCO

Just closed up shop.

He steps inside; his reflection in the mirror watches silently, disapproving.

Everything feels frozen in a photograph.

Beat.

Then Shirley smiles – small, dangerous.

SHIRLEY

Dance with me!

SFX: Needledrop – faint ukulele strum.

Color bleeds back in, starting from her lei, spreading to her dress, to the room, until the world blooms in full technicolor again.

The island song swells. She takes his hand and spins.

Francisco's clothes? Still black-and-white at first – but as he gives in and dances, color flickers across his tie, his shirt – hesitant at first, then full saturation when he finally *smiles.*

It's as if she's painting him back to life.

Francisco looks around. Now seeing the details.

Shirley laughs, spinning under the colored lights.

In the mirror, her reflection dances – and now Francisco's reflection joins in.

At first, he's just a shadow. Then: a bright lei materializes around his neck.

He glances down, amused – a flower behind his ear now, a grin breaking through.

FRANCISCO'S REFLECTION
(in the mirror, grinning)
Guess the islands got room for one
more.

Color seeps into him – skin warming, shorts brightening, maracas materializing.

He shakes them lazily, rhythm finding him.

The real Francisco, still gray, watches his reflection party without him.

FRANCISCO
Shirley, what is all this?

SHIRLEY
Vacation – in the living room! If
we can't be in Hawaii, let's
pretend.

She presses a Mai Tai into his hand, spins.

He glances at the mirror: his reflection wears the lei, the shorts, the sunglasses,

a cigar glowing between his teeth.

FRANCISCO
We don't even smoke.

FRANCISCO'S REFLECTION
In here we do. We *fucking* light it
up, brother.

FRANCISCO
Hey! Language.

His reflection waves him off and drinks the Mai Tai.

FRANCISCO (CONT'D)
Shirley, what is happening?

Shirley comes up and dances with him. She leads him along.

SHIRLEY
Come on, Cisco, you lead.

FREEZE.

The room holds. Their eyes lock.

A single spark of magic bursts – visible, like heat off the floor.

UNFREEZE.

Francisco tears off his shirt – down to an A-shirt.

Kicks off his shoes. Drops his pants to boxers.

Shirley laughs, clapping like a girl at the fair.

A DISCO BALL appears overhead. Lights fracture – spinning galaxies across the walls.

Francisco downs his Mai Tai.

Then – THE TANGO.

He leads. Tight. Close. Electric.

They move as if the room itself breathes with them.

He dips her. Spins her. Twirls her.

Music swells – color and sound rising until the walls seem to pulse.

The energy that's been shut down for nineteen of their twenty years erupts.

Paradise explodes.

The camera swirls – fragments of a lost Eden flicker in and out: a beach, a breeze, laughter under palms.

They drink. They laugh. They LOVE.

Falling onto the couch –

Passion, once embalmed in etiquette, comes roaring back to life.

In the mirror, Francisco's Reflection claps once.

The light bursts white. The light blooms—pure, blinding, endless. Then it begins to drain of color.

SOUND MUFFLES. The white drains to gray..

INT. FRANCISCO & SHIRLEY'S LIVING ROOM - A LITTLE LATER

Both naked beneath a tangle of blankets - 1953 modesty intact.

Two bodies, warm again after nineteen cold years.

FRANCISCO'S REFLECTION

(proud)

That's my boy.

SHIRLEY'S REFLECTION

(snickering)

It won't last. He'll be a wet dishrag in twenty minutes.

FRANCISCO'S REFLECTION

Give him nineteen of happiness. I'm proud of myself.

SHIRLEY'S REFLECTION

(scoff)

Told her this was a bad idea. Now he'll think she loves him.

FRANCISCO'S REFLECTION

(challenging)

Hey, what's not to love?

SHIRLEY'S REFLECTION

Oh, you... I *could* love you.

His eyebrow lifts. A low growl.

FRANCISCO'S REFLECTION

Hey, Mama... come here.

SHIRLEY'S REFLECTION

(direct)

Focus.

On the couch, the real Francisco and Shirley are lost to the world.

FRANCISCO'S REFLECTION

Can't we let them have this one night?

SHIRLEY'S REFLECTION

(mean)

No. He covered me with a sheet. Shut me out. He'll pay for that.

FRANCISCO'S REFLECTION

Easy, Doll. I'm sure he didn't mean it. I never would.

SHIRLEY'S REFLECTION

Stop playing nice. She doesn't love him.

SHIRLEY

Cisco, I love you.

They kiss.

SHIRLEY'S REFLECTION

(screaming)

How could she *say* that?!

FRANCISCO'S REFLECTION

My boy can dance, huh? That tango was-hot!

SHIRLEY'S REFLECTION

One dance and they're in the sheets.

FRANCISCO'S REFLECTION

Worked on you once, Doll.

SHIRLEY'S REFLECTION

Stop calling me "Doll." You're getting me off track.

SHIRLEY

(soft)

Cisco, I'm sorry.

SHIRLEY'S REFLECTION

NO! Never say that!

Her fists hit the mirror. It wobbles-then teeters.

Francisco jumps up, catching it before it shatters.

He and Shirley stare at it, shrug.

He wraps his shirt around her, leading her toward the bedroom.

SHIRLEY

Oh, Francisco... me like when you take charge.

CLICK. The bedroom door shuts.

The room quiets. The camera pans slowly across Luau wreckage—leis, overturned glasses, a record still spinning.

In the mirror:

FRANCISCO'S REFLECTION lounges like a king — cigar lit, Mai Tai in hand.

He belches. Grins. Winks.

A faint TV glow flickers behind him — a phantom image of a 1950s detergent ad:

“Because every home deserves a
happy husband.”

He raises his glass toward it.

FRANCISCO'S REFLECTION
(to the ad)
Damn right it does.

SHIRLEY'S REFLECTION pretends not to notice.

Another belch; laughter.

She can't help but smile.

The glass ripples with heat.

SHIRLEY'S REFLECTION
Men. They can be such fun.

Smoke drifts across her face. She winks.

“BLUE HAWAII” echoes faintly.

Waves lap the edges of memory.

Somewhere—soft, distant—

THE BEAR (V.O.)
This is your life. Share it.

..The reflections pause, listening.

The ripple of smoke turns to light.. then to water.

OVER THIS — faintly — the echo of a child's giggle.

It swells into real laughter.

FADE THROUGH:

EXT. CENTRAL PARK — EARLY AFTERNOON (LOOPING)

Rippling water fills the frame. A duck glides through –
breaking the mirror surface.

OFFSCREEN – the faint laughter of children.

A squeak of a carousel. A distant bark.

And then, *fainter still,*

SHIRLEY (O.S.)
Cisco.. let's have a baby.

The laughter swells – real, alive.

*2:30 P.M. The sun past the midday point of an Indian-summer
day.*

ON SCREEN: *September 10 – Looping.*

BRIAN (57) thinning blonde hair, still wears it too long.
Forehead shows more age than grace. Tall with slight pouch of
a belly. Not as good as he once was. Not as bad as it could
be.

He has cool sunglasses on. Brian was always cool. He vapes.

On the park bench he has two backpacks. One his, one his
daughter, Wisteria's. She is 3. A cooler sits on the ground.

One petal from a lei drifts by the Park bench.

Brian looks out to kids playing that we don't see.

BRIAN
(father-like but not
really)
Wisteria, don't go too far, daddy
is right here. I got to be able to
see you and you see me.

He does the "two-finger-I-see-motion" and a child's laughter
is heard off screen.

He pulls a large covered plastic bottle with a plastic straw
to his lips and drinks. Long and slow.

He vapes. His eyes close. He sighs.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
(sadly)
How the hell did I ever get to this
point?

Leaves fall under footsteps. Easy. JOE (57) enters. Sandals, tank top. Good shape. Good head of black hair. Scruff. Laser-blue eyes. Joe and Brian have been friends since 15.

JOE

The Park? Seriously. God you look like shit.

They laugh. Brian reaches into the cooler and pulls out a large, covered plastic cup that is similar to his. Green Bay Packers logo. He hands it to Joe.

JOE (CONT'D)

(scoff)

I think I'll pass on the sports drink.

Brian nods to him to take a sip. Joe rolls his eyes and takes a big sip.

Joe coughs.

JOE (CONT'D)

Jesus! Vodka and Cranberry?

BRIAN

If you want a Screwdriver I got that too.

They laugh again.

JOE

Aren't you on duty.

Brian taps two fingers under his again and smiles. Wisteria laughs just off screen.

WISTERIA

(child of 3 voice)

I see you daddy!

He gives her a "Thumbs Up" and Joe follows suit and gives a "Thumbs up."

They sit there in easy silence. Brian vapes again.

JOE

That shit'll kill you.

BRIAN

God I hope so.

JOE

(laughs)

You won't wanna die of cancer, not like Tommy's wife. God that was a sin. Suffered like a bastard.

BRIAN

Yep. He got through it. We always do. Three of us always get through.

Joe looks out. Far away.

Kids laughter heard.

JOE

I never would have been a good father.

BRIAN

Fuuuuck That. You would be a great father. Still time.

They laugh.

JOE

My friend do the math. We are 57.

BRIAN

You're older.

Joe squints—busted but smiling

JOE

(continues)

So we are both *around 57* so when Misty

BRIAN

It's "Wisteria"

JOE

Is 18 you will be 72.

BRIAN

Look at me! In top form.

Brian vapes. Lets it out slow.

JOE

72! Nobody in my family lived that long. Ever.

BRIAN
You got shitty genes. Life sucks
for you. My Grandma is 94. She
smokes. She drinks.

JOE
She's miserable. Always
complaining. Always asking that
same damn question.

BRIAN
(imitates Grandma)
*Joey when you are gonna get
married? Get a girl. What's the
problem?*

JOE
Kill me tomorrow.

BRIAN
(smartass)
Why not today?

Joe hits him on the back of the head like they were 15 again.

JOE
Because, dumbass, I am here with
you.

Brian kisses Joe on the cheek, playful.

BRIAN
Joey, I didn't know you cared. You
mean you like me? Can we go
steady.

Easy silence again.

JOE
What's in your cup?

BRIAN
(flat)
Jack 'n' Coke. I like the caffeine
buzz.

Joe takes and sips. Chokes. Hands it back.

JOE
Christ, that stuff'll kill you.

BRIAN
Look at that: two for two.

Brian vapes. Smiles.

EXT. PARK BENCH - AN HOUR LATER

The September sun is warm and gentle as two old friends talk on half-truths, old memories and future possibilities.

The kids are playing off in the near foreground. A ball rolls in. Brian gets up and gives it a soft kick back.

The ball rolls back in, this time to Joe. He just looks at. Brian gives him the look like, "Come on, play"

WISTERIA (O.S.)
(little girl voice)
Uncle Joe, kick it!

Joe gets up and without much fanfare gives the ball a light kick.

KIDS (O.S.)
YAY!

BRIAN
(calling out to Wisteria)
Ok have fun. Uncle Joey and I just hanging out, watching you.

Brian looks over at Joe and just smiles. Joe looks at him.

JOE
What?

BRIAN
You will be a great father.

JOE
(scoff)
Be? What timeline are you on?

The sound of tired feet, rustle through leaves. Feet that have been worn down, broken. Moving but without much purpose.

TOM (56) in Faded jeans, Keds sneakers, a T-Shirt that says "Impeach Nixon" and a Yankees Baseball cap. He is a slight build. 6' tall. He stands stilted, erect. Like a gentle wind would break him.

TOM
(questioning)
Same park as always?

JOE
(jumping right on that
line)
That's what I said.

Joe gets up and gives Tom a big hug. Brian does the same. Brian grabs a yellow plastic cup with Sleeping Beauty on it—clearly part of the set. He hands it to Tom.

TOM
No thanks, Brian, I was hoping for
a stronger drink.

JOE
(sipping)
Oh just drink, what kind did you
get?

Tom looks. Not convinced. Takes a big sip. Chokes. Coughs.

TOM
Jesus!

BRIAN
Screwdriver. Has a lot of "Screw"
and I did fresh squeeze the OJ.

Brian smiles. Tom and Joe shake their heads.

WISTERIA (O.S.)
Daddy! Come play!

Brian looks. Sighs. Gets up.

BRIAN
Guys give me 5 minutes to tire her
out.

TOM
(dry wit)
She's gonna run you ragged.

BRIAN
No fucking way, I got this.

WISTERIA (O.S.)
Daddy you said a bad word!

Brian shakes his head. He heads off to WISTERIA and the kids.

Joe and Tom, clink their cups together.

JOE & TOM
(informal, a little
awkward)
Cheers.

The sit in silence. Not as easy as it was with Brian and Joe. Old pains don't go away completely.

TOM
You been watching the Series?

Joe gives Tom a wisecrack look. Shakes his head "no."

A squirrel comes up. Sniffs at Tom and then goes to Joe. Jumps up and sniffs his hand. Tom looks and smiles.

JOE
Animals like me.

The squirrel seems to kiss Joe's hand and then hops away.
Silence.

You can feel the tension.

TOM
(abrupt)
So where the fuck did you go?

JOE
We're doing this now?

TOM
Well we didn't do it the last 20 years. So yes. Why?

JOE
That's a big ask.

TOM
So tell me Shakespeare what happened.

JOE
Shakespeare? God, you haven't called me that in years.

TOM
(frustrated)
Because I couldn't find you for years. I mean you just vaporized. Did you leave?

JOE
It's a big city. Easy to get lost
in it.

TOM
I don't buy it. Get lost, you're a
piece of shit.

Silence. Maybe truth?

Brian come back. Winded. He plops on the bench. Takes a
big sip of his Jack & Coke. Closes his eyes and vapes. The
smoke comes out of his mouth and nose. Brian looks at peace.

TOM (CONT'D)
That stuff will kill you.

BRIAN
Hope so. Something will, so why
not this.

JOE
Brian!

BRIAN
Oh, Tom, I mean, Christ, I'm sorry.
I didn't mean any disrespect about
Louise. Her cancer and all.

JOE
You are such a dick, Bri.

TOM
(flatly)
Louise never smoked. Never. Not
ever.

BRIAN
Tom, I'm sorry.

TOM
No, no, it's all good.

Tom drinks. He looks at the other two. They all nod and do
a "Cheers" and the plastic cups "Clink" as the air hangs
heavy.

Kids voice playing can be heard. A light breeze blows in.
The "Winds of Acceptance."

EXT. PARK BENCH - A LITTLE LATER

Brian's cell phone "dings" he looks. Reads. Sighs.

TOM
What's up?

BRIAN
Sheena picked up a double. I've got
Wisteria all day and night. I hate
being alone.

TOM
Sheena? Last I heard it was Gloria
or Charlene.

JOE
Oof-Charlene. That mouth on her.

TOM
You knew Charlene?

JOE
(laughs)
And Frank.

Silence. Tom blinks.

TOM
Wait-Frank?

BRIAN
(shrugs)
Exploratory phase. Figured I'd try
Joey's route. Frank was fun. Just..
too needy.

JOE
(chuckling)
Frank too needy? That says
everything.

TOM
How the hell did I not know Frank?

JOE
You and Louise were wrapped up with
Rita.

BRIAN
She was your whole world for years,
Tommy.

TOM
What?
(quietly)
God, I needed you guys.
(MORE)

TOM (CONT'D)
 Rita's 32 now. Louise is gone.
 My focus.. is gone.

Brian looks at Joe and gives him a "go on, talk" look.

JOE
 Tommy.

Tom puts a hand up. Stop.

TOM
 Shakespeare just don't. Leaving me
 all those years. And what now,
 you're gay? How could you not tell
 me? Louise adored you.

Joe's heart is heavy.

JOE
 I know and I

TOM
 No, you don't get to say "I know."
 Fuck you.

BRIAN
 Hey, hey, let's all relax.

WISTERIA (O.S.)
 Dad! I heard language again. I am
 telling Mom.

BRIAN
 Ok. Ok, honey I will tell the guys
 to watch their language.

TOM
 (quietly to Joe)
 Fuck you.

The sound of kids playing swells.

Tom shakes his cup as it is empty. Joe does the same. Brian reaches into the cool and pulls out another SLEEPING BEAUTY and a GREEN BAY Packers set of cups and hands them to the guys. Tom takes the GREEN BAY from Joe and hands him the SLEEPING BEAUTY cup.

TOM (CONT'D)
 Here. You be the princess for
 awhile. But I guess you're used to
 that.

BRIAN

Ok, Ok, now we are all friends here.

TOM

I still am I just got work through, Shakespeare cutting me and Louise off for 30 years. Me I could give a shit, 'cause, well we all go way back, but hurting my Louise, that's gonna take awhile.

Joe looks down. Tom looks at him. Joe looks up with years of hidden truths in his eyes.

A tear slips down Tom's cheek. Joe gets up and pulls Tom into a strong bear hug. Tom cries.

TOM (CONT'D)

(through tears)

I needed you. You know I did. You know my Louise did. How could you just not see her.

JOE

I did. I did see her.

Tom pulls away. Abrupt.

TOM

What did you just say? When did you see her? Where?

JOE

My studio a few times. Coffee over the years.

TOM

Where the hell was I?

JOE

She loved you, Tom. But she felt invisible. Said you were always somewhere else—even when you were right next to her.

Brian is getting nervous.

BRIAN

How about we pack up and go back to my place? All of us. I can cook we can hang out.

TOM
Not just yet. Mr. Joey has some
things to get out first.

Tom gives him a hard push on the left shoulder.

JOE
(calm)
Don't.

TOM
Don't you, Mr. Joey?

Tom shoves Joe—harder.

JOE
(calm, last warning)
Tom. Stop.

TOM
Or what? Sleeping Beauty's gonna
wake the fuck up?

BRIAN
Guys, guys, stop. I got my kid
around.

Tom pushes even harder. Joe hauls off and lands a right hook
on Tom's eye. Tom flies back and lands on the ground.

WISTERIA (O.S.)
Daddy!

Joe looks toward her—guilty, steady—then offers Tom his hand.

Tom takes it. Old friends reset.

BRIAN
Jesus, not in front of my kid.

Brian steps off-screen.

BRIAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
It's ok. Uncle Joe was just
playing. They are pretending. You
know how you and Daddy pretend? I
play the monster and you scream and
laugh? Just like that.

Tom looks up from the ground. Joe gives him a hand to help
him up. Tom takes it. They find their place on the bench and
sip their drinks. Old friends can do that.

EXT. PARK BENCH - CONTINUOUS

Brian comes back. Tom has the cup on his eye. Joe is rubbing his hand.

BRIAN

(stern)

You two gonna settle down? I mean it.

TOM

(quietly, raw)

I thought... I really thought I was doing everything right.

They all look at each other and nod in agreement. Like old friends do without ceremony or guidance. Joe stands up and extends his right hand. Tom takes it and squeezes just a little too hard (That is the had Joe used for the punch). Joe starts to raise his left arm into a first and Brian gives him a look.

Tom smiles from ear-to-ear.

A dog runs over and immediately goes to Joe. The dog sniffs at Tom, turns back to Joe and laps up all his attention.

Brian looks at Tom, like "this always happens.

BRIAN

Animals like him. I told him he is gonna be a great Dad.

JOE

Seriously, stop saying that.

They all laugh.

TOM

So let's do this, Shakespeare.

Joe sighs.

JOE

Where do you want to start.

BRIAN

If we are going all the back to high school, we just don't have that much time!

TOM
All I got these days is lots and
lots of time.

JOE
Rita? Doesn't she have a family.

TOM
Yea, two kids, boy and girl. Don't
really know them too well.

Brian and Joe look puzzled.

JOE
Your whole life was about Louise
and Rita.

TOM
(hard truth)
Maybe it was Louise. Not Rita.
Louise understand my work. I was
there. I wasn't present.

BRIAN
Ouch.

JOE
I didn't know.

TOM
(sadly)
I know. Neither did I.

That truth hangs like a final leaf waiting to drift, slowly
to the ground.

Nobody knows what to do with that honesty.

JOE
It's not too late, right.

TOM
You tell me?

WISTERIA (O.S.)
Uncle Joooooooooey! Come kick the
ball and twirl me around!

BRIAN
Thank God, you're up.

Joe gets up. Eyebrows go up and down.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
Don't make her throw up!

JOE
(quietly)
Can't promise that.

He darts off.

JOE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Who's ready for Flying Saucers?

Kids all scream with delight!

KIDS (O.S.)
ME! ME!

JOE (O.S.)
Ok one at a time. Wisteria you're
first. Let's show them how it's
done.

WE hear Joe talk like a space Martian "Danger Danger" then he whirls them around.

In Brian's sunglasses we see the action. Brian's face smiles as he watches and the view we have of the scene in his sunglasses.

TOM (O.S.)
He would have been a great Dad.

Fade.

EXT. PARK BENCH - LATE AFTERNOON

About 430 P.M.

The park sprawls with dogs, kids, parents, lovers, loners all in same space. The camera turns and on the bench, Brian has a played-out-fast-asleep Wisteria on his lap, her legs across Joe's. Tom smiles.

BRIAN
She can sleep through anything. And
when she wakes up, BAM she is ready
to go. Me, I am not like that.
Must take after her mother.

TOM
Speaking of that, how old is she?

BRIAN
 (easy)
 Wisteria is 3.

TOM
 No your wife.

BRIAN
 They're not married.

TOM
 What?

BRIAN
 Committed. I would have done it but
 Sheena said/

Tom laughs

TOM
 Sheena? Like in Easton?

JOE
 Now that's a memory. "Morning
 Train."

JOE & TOM
 (lightly sings)
*"My baby takes the morning train,
 he works from 9 to 5 and then"*

They all laugh.

BRIAN
 Her mother, SHEENA is 22.

TOM
 Holy

Brian give Tom that DAD LOOK "No swearing"

TOM (CONT'D)
 Sugar Pops! 22.

JOE
 She's fierce. Don't underestimate
 her.

TOM
 You know her? Like a lot?

JOE
 Yes. She's been to my studio.
 Wants to put some of her art there.

TOM
She paints?!

BRIAN
(easy)
She *expresses herself*. I don't
really understand it.

JOE
She's a natural.

TOM
I've never been to your studio.

Silence. Brian and Joe look down.

TOM (CONT'D)
What?

They look. Then they all know.

TOM (CONT'D)
She was there, wasn't she. My
Louise. She was at your studio?

Joe and Tom look. Tom knows.

TOM (CONT'D)
Was it a thing with you two? Were
you lovers?

BRIAN
(laughs)
Joe and Louise? Nope different
teams.

TOM
I am not following.

BRIAN
Tom, come on, no big deal. I'm very
open minded, my friend, I need you
to know that. I accepted Joe with
open arms.

Tom Looks. Trying to catch up.

JOE
I'm gay. Always have been.

TOM
Yeah I just figured that out. Did
Louise know?

JOE
Of course. For years.

Tom gets up. Walk around. Brian looks at Tom and gives him the "Calm Down" look.

TOM
(leans in, angry whisper)
Why the hell am I the last to know?

MOTHER (O.S.)
Brian do you want me to take
Wisteria with me? I am taking my
girls home. She can hang out there
for the evening. I talked with
Sheena.

Brian looks at the guys. He is a go-with-the-moment- kind-of-guy.

BRIAN
Sure. Sure. That would be great.

He gets up and off-screen hands off Wisteria to the mom.

MOTHER (O.S.)
She can sleep over if you want.
Looks like you guys have some stuff
to talk through. Sheena told me.

BRIAN (O.S.)
Well, Ok. Great. Thanks.

Brian comes back. He sits. Closes his eyes and take a deep vape. He blows it out slow.

TOM
Just like that you hand off you
child? I would be sick with worry.

BRIAN
Oh God no. Wisteria is so easy
going. That she get's from me.

They all nod and "CHEERS" with their plastic cups. Joe tips his back, then signals "empty." Tom does the same.

Brian lines up three plastic cups: SLEEPING BEAUTY, GREEN BAY, TEDDY BEAR.

He hands SB to Joe, GB to Tom, keeps TB.

A beat. He swaps GB back from Tom. Tom smirks, steals TB, passes SB to Brian.

Result:

- Tom holds SLEEPING BEAUTY.
- Brian has GREEN BAY.
- Joe ends up with TEDDY BEAR.

They clock the absurdity. Old rhythm returns.

They claim victory. Joe takes a sip from a Teddy Bear cup and does an over-the-top expression.

JOE
 (like great sex)
 MMMM. OHHH. MMMM.

TOM
 What is it?

JOE
 Black Russian!

They settle back and enjoy the late afternoon sun. A leaf falls and gently lands on Brian. He smiles.

BRIAN
 12-months of happiness coming my way!

He puts the leaf in his pocket.

EXT. PARK BENCH - A LITTLE LATER

The sun is starting her decline. The park is glorious with color. Brian still wears his sunglasses, cool guy that he still is.

A man off-screen walks by.

MAN (O.S.)
 Hey Brian. You still playing in the band tomorrow.

BRIAN
 Sure thing. I'll have my bass all set and see you at 9:45.

Brian says this with no pretension. He gets up and walks off screen.

BRIAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Hey would you take a quick picture
 of us. We are old friends and I
 want to capture this.

MAN (O.S.)
 Sure, my pleasure.

Brian returns. He sits in the middle. Joe on his right. Tom on his left. They all hold up their cups. Arms wrapped around shoulders. The easy silence of 42 years is wrapped around them like a blanket of love.

MAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Ready?

CLICK.

The photo just taken fills the screen. Joe's warmth, Tom's frailty and Brian's easiness flows.

Brian pops Tom on the back of the head.

BRIAN
 Tommy lighten up. OK one more.

Tom takes off Brian's sunglasses and puts them on. They all smile. Cups in hand.

CLICK.

Now that's a keeper. Brian's blue eyes draw you in and the sunglasses on Tom mask to pain. Joe radiates joy.

Brian takes his sunglasses back. He walks off screen.

BRIAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Thanks and see you tomorrow.

He comes back and they view the pictures. All glow.

JOE & TOM
 Send it to me.

Brian nods and sends it. Joe's phone "dings."

TOM'S PHONE
 (Louise's Pre-recorded
 Voice)
 Tom, you have a text, take a look.

They all stop.

JOE
Is that Louise?

TOM
She set that up so I wouldn't miss anything. I love to hear her voice. I don't get a lot of messages.

Joe takes out his phone and texts.

TOM'S PHONE
(Louise's Pre-recorded Voice)
Tom, you have a text, take a look.

They all let that moment settle on them. A duck walks by slowly and stops in front of Joe. The duck comes over and nuzzles on his leg. Then waddles off.

They all look, nothing needs to be said. Animals love Joe.

TOM
Brian what bar are you playing at tomorrow? I am retired so a 10 o'clock show is fine by me.

BRIAN
St. Luke's.

JOE
Our old parish?

TOM
You play church gigs now?

BRIAN
Feels like home. Rule's the same: love everybody.

They all look at each other. Not a surprise, really.

TOM
(to Joe)
You still go?

JOE
No, I didn't really fit in. They don't want people like me.

BRIAN
Of course ,the fuck, we do.

JOE
 (laughs)
 Can you even say it like that?

They all smile.

Brian's phone buzzes. He checks. Smiles

BRIAN
 Ah yes. Score! Wisteria is staying over night and they will bring her to church in the morning.

TOM
 Dinner still on at your place.

BRIAN
 Sure! But first one thing.

TOM
 This isn't the "group hug thing" is it?

BRIAN
 (sly)
 Nah, that comes later.

JOE
 Ok what are we doing?

Brian is in the middle. He puts a hand on Joe's leg and a hand on Tom's. He nods like "Your turn" and they each put a hand on Brian's hand.

BRIAN
 Eyes closed. Breathe. Just listen.

The park becomes a symphony—leaves, dogs, kids, city wind.

In Brian's sunglasses we see the three men reflected, younger for a heartbeat.

JOE
 We're gonna get mugged.

TOM
 We're gonna get laughed at.

The camera pulls back.

BRIAN
 Eyes closed. Breathe. Just listen.

The park becomes a symphony—leaves, dogs, kids, city wind.

In Brian's sunglasses, the three men reflect—young for a heartbeat.

The camera sees the park and the colors in the reflection of Brian's glasses.

SMASH CUT:

EXT. PARK BENCH — 20 YEARS LATER

The same park, the soundscape older, thinner.

Joe (77) sits with eyes closed, breathing easy.

BRIAN (V.O.)
 (like angels in the
 distance)
 Shh. Now eyes closed. Just
 Breathe. Listen to all the life
 around you. Listen to every sound.

In his mind we see the picture of that day on the bench with the three of them: Tom, Brian and Joe.

The camera looks up to the sky.

Wisteria (23) is off-screen.

WISTERIA (O.S.)
 (faintly like a dream
 voice)
 Uncle Joe.

Her hand is seen gently scratching his cheek. He leans into it.

WISTERIA (CONT'D)
 Uncle Joe?

He wakes up. Gets his bearings.

JOE
 Wisteria. My you've grown to be
 such a beautiful woman. You dad
 would be so proud.

A leaf floats and falls onto Joe's lap. He smiles. A 2nd leaf falls and Wisteria catches it. She takes the two leaves and puts them in Joe's shirt pocket. They both remember Brian in that moment.

WISTERIA

Oh, Uncle Joe! 12-months of good
luck.

JOE

(pause)

Awesome. Want to share it with me?

Wisteria's son Little Joe (3) is heard.

LITTLE JOE (O.S.)

Mom is Uncle Joe ok? Will He do
Flying Saucers with me.

Joe's face lights up.

JOE

Oh you bet I will.

He goes off. Not Runs but goes.

WISTERIA (O.S.)

Now, Uncle Joe, don't make him
sick. Easy.

JOE

(MARTIAN VOICE)

DANGER. DANGER.

Little Joe screams with delight.

The camera blurs and shows Joe doing the whirling spaceship
with little Joe. They all laugh.

Camera pushes in on the faded bear decal; the cup looks used
and loved.

:The bear's eye twinkles; the mouth curls—alive.

THE BEAR

(soft, old-soul)

This is your life. Share it.

SILENCE. Beat.

A little hand reaches in and grabs hold of the cup.

LITTLE JOE (V.O.)

(little boy voice)

I'm thirsty.

The bear winks.

THE END