

ALMOST

TV Dramedy Pilot

Written by

Carolyne Migneault

INT. CORRIDOR - RESTAURANT - MORNING

A door at the end of the hall. It shudders in its frame. Muffled thuds.

INT. RESTROOM - RESTAURANT - MORNING

Tight space. Dirty floor. A hand dryer on the wall, a leaking soap dispenser. A purse and a lunch bag on the floor.

TIM and CATHERINE mid-act. Tim wears a fast-food uniform: apron, hairnet, crooked cap. Catherine has her coat on, one leg of her pants around her ankle, the other bare. Her legs wrapped around his waist. Their bodies hit against the door.

His legs start giving out.

TIM
(out of breath)
I can't...you're gonna have to..

He sets her down, turns her around. Catherine braces her hands against the wall. He lifts her coat and continues.

His hand slips on the dryer button. It roars.

Catherine closes her eyes. Hair blowing.

She sighs.

TITLE CARD: ALMOST

INT. SUBWAY PLATFORM - MORNING

♪A high-energy rock track (e.g., Welcome to the Jungle - Guns N' Roses)

A distant rumble. Lights flicker across faces; commuters waiting.

The rumble grows. Wind whips through the tunnel.

SLOW MOTION

The train emerges from the dark, headlights.

Doors slide open. A rush of air lifts hair and paper off the floor. People burst out, but in slow motion, they look weightless, floating, and suspended in the chaos.

NORMAL SPEED

♪ The riff hits, the noise explodes.

Bodies collide, people running. A child falls and cries; his mother scoops him up.

EXT. DOWNTOWN CHICAGO - MORNING - CONTINUOUS

♪ Music continues

Cars honk, bus brakes squeal, a crowd in a rush. Wide shot of the street.

A stylish woman walks by. Tall, composed, flawless: red lipstick and red high heels. Camera follows her gait, her coat, her calm. This could be our lead.

Until, from the corner of the frame, Catherine bursts into view, half-running: coat flapping open, wrinkled blouse, scarf half-tied. Coffee drips down her hand, she licks it off. Her purse hangs off one shoulder, lunch bag swinging so low it nearly drags on the ground.

She stops at a red light, catching her breath, lost in the crowd. Beside her, the stylish woman towers, serene.

Catherine glances up. Just a quick look. Then down at her own outfit, making a small, self-aware grimace.

Behind, a bus shelter ad glows in the morning sun: ORUS™ - "Always there when you need it."

A hand grabs her arm, pulls her back just as a bus roars past. She barely blinks.

The light turns green. She squeezes through the crowd and crosses.

She rushes up the stairs of an office tower.

INT. ENERPOWER - OFFICE FLOOR - MORNING

Grey-beige cubicles. Lifeless vibe.

An informal meeting's underway. About thirty employees, some standing, others perched on desks or chairs.

Catherine bursts in, a little out of breath, trying to be discreet. A young co-worker, BEN, gives her a wink and a playful elbow. She slips off her coat and drops her bags onto a desk.

GILBERT
 Alright, folks, the annual
 EnerPower Golf Classic. Let's try
 to avoid last year's drama, please.

A loud crash from somewhere. Everyone turns. An employee, Henry, knocks over a pencil holder and scrambles to pick it up, while mumbling apologies. Catherine stares, her gaze fixed. He looks up. Their eyes meet. She looks away. Her colleague, ELIZABETH, whispers in her ear, smirks.

ELIZABETH
 I can hear your ovaries cheering
 from here.

Elizabeth gives her a hard look.

During the rest of the meeting, she sneaks glances at him. His neck. A small scar near his collar.

GILBERT
 (O.S.)
 Where was I... oh right. To promote
 moderation and to keep EnerPower
 from financial ruin, there will be
 no open bar this year. Let's make
 responsible choices, team. Have a
 good one everybody.

People drift back to their cubicles.

GILBERT
 Catherine, come see me in my
 office, please.

Catherine rolls her eyes. Everyone's watching her. She grabs her coat, bag, and crooked lunchbox all at once, clearly overloaded.

CATHERINE
 (under her breath)
 Fuck.

She squeezes past her coworkers down the hallway, juggling her things, their eyes following her.

INT. ENERPOWER — GILBERT'S OFFICE — DAY

Catherine knocks on the door.

Inside: golf trophies, framed photos from corporate tournaments. On the desk, a pen topped with a giant plastic lightbulb.

GILBERT

Come in!

Catherine enters, still juggling her coat, purse, and lunchbox.

Gilbert stands by the desk, phone receiver in hand. When he sees her, he hangs up and sits.

GILBERT

You could've dropped your stuff off at your desk first.

(beat)

Unless you're moving in here.

He laughs. Catherine forces an awkward smile. She looks around for somewhere to set her things, a chair cluttered with a gym bag, stacks of files everywhere... nothing free. She sighs and sits, juggling her things on her lap.

GILBERT

(fingers steepled like a prayer)

Listen... I didn't call you in here just to talk about the Granger file.

(beat)

Let's be honest. You look like you're walking to the slaughterhouse every morning. That's not exactly the vibe we're going for at EnerPower.

(beat)

And your lateness... well, let's not even go there.

Catherine looks down. Her eyes fix on the bulb pen on the desk.

Gilbert's voice fades, becoming distant and monotone.

CLOSE ON: Catherine's face blank, hypnotized by the pen.

GILBERT

(V.O.)

But I want you to know, at Ener, we're a family. And if you ever need to talk... my door's always open.

Gilbert stopped speaking for a moment, waiting for her reaction.

GILBERT
You know what I mean?

Catherine snaps back to reality, nods.

GILBERT
Get involved. Come to the happy
hour. Be more like
(he searches, eyes
squint, then suddenly
brightens)
Like Nathan.

CATHERINE
(sarcastic, getting up)
Sure, Gilbert. I'll... try to shine.

Gilbert beams, proud.

GILBERT
See! That's what I like to hear.

As Catherine stands, everything slips from her arms. She bends down, clumsy, but Gilbert beats her to it. He picks up a small object, he realizes what it is, and hands it to her.

GILBERT
(flat)
Here. You dropped this.

Catherine sees what it is: a tampon. She blushes, forces a tight smile, grabs it quickly.

CATHERINE
Thanks.

She shoves everything into her bag, grabs her stuff, and hurries out.

INT. ENERPOWER — HALLWAY — DAY

Catherine steps out of Gilbert's office.

CATHERINE
(muttering)
Sure, Gilbert... I'll come to happy
hour. I'll even wear my EP T-shirt
and tattoo a lightbulb on my ass.

She heads down the hallway. NATHAN appears, corporate polo neatly tucked into beige khakis.

NATHAN
Hey, Cathy!
(MORE)

NATHAN (CONT'D)
(suddenly serious, tilts
his head)
Hey, are you okay? You seem...
different today.

CATHERINE
(caught off guard,
smiles)
I'm fine. Just tired.

NATHAN
(nods, accepting her
answer immediately)
Okay.
(switches gears,
enthusiastic again)
I'm going around to see who's up
for a softball team this summer.
If you're interested, come sign up
at my desk.

CATHERINE
I don't know a thing about
softball. But hey, my mom competed
in the state championships back in
the day. Who knows, maybe I'm a
softball prodigy.

NATHAN
(genuinely excited,
interlocking his
fingers)
That's awesome! Plus, it'd be great
for team bonding! And, Gilbert said
we might get EnerPower jerseys. How
cool is that?

CATHERINE
(forcing a smile)
Yeah... super cool.

NATHAN
(beaming)
Well! Let me know, we always need
motivated players.

CATHERINE
(polite, but clearly
wants him to leave)
I'll think about it

NATHAN
Have a good one, Ryne Sandberg!

He walks off, miming a batting swing and laughing. Catherine watches him go, frozen for a beat.

CATHERINE

Ryne, who?
 (under her breath)
 What a suck up.

She walks off.

INT. ENERPOWER — CATHERINE'S DESK — DAY

Catherine drops her stuff on her desk. A few papers pinned to the wall. A framed photo of her when she was younger, holding the hand of her father in front of the Rocher Percé, a massive rock arch in Gaspésie. She sits down.

A plate of date squares slides toward her.

MARLENE

So what did the office dictator want this time?

CATHERINE

He went on and on about my lateness. How it kills team spirit.
 (She opens her computer)
 I think he's hoping to lobotomize me so I'll turn into a good little soldier, like that "yes-man" over there.
 (She nods toward Nathan)

MARLENE

Take a date square. It'll cheer you up. (She pushes the plate closer with a kind smile.) Let me guess, you're morning pit stop?

Catherine's sly smile. Takes a date square. Crumbs rain down. She catches them with her hand, brushes off her desk.

CATHERINE

(mouth full)
 Mmm... they're amazing.

MARLENE

You know he's playing with you, right?

CATHERINE

Getting laid while The Wheel of Fortune is on is... not doing it for me.

Marlene gasps in mock outrage, snatches the plate back, and sets it beside her keyboard. On her desk: a photo of her and her husband on a beach, wearing sombreros, a parrot on his shoulder. A few tacky souvenirs.

MARLENE

Maybe, but Alan's in my bed every night.

They both laugh.

INT. ENERPOWER- CATHERINE'S DESK- LATER

Sitting at her desk, Catherine links paperclips together into a long chain. Henry walks by her cubicle. She spots him, panics, and shoves the chain into a drawer. Henry drops a thick file on her desk. She glances up, close enough to notice a small scar near his collarbone. For half a second, her breath catches. He looks up, a polite nod. He's already halfway.

CATHERINE

(quietly, desperate)
Thank you...

She realizes he didn't hear. She leans forward, elbows on the desk, and covers her face with her hands. Marlene pats her on the back.

INT. ENERPOWER- CATHERINE'S DESK- LATE AFTERNOON

Close-up on Catherine, staring blankly at her screen. A small startle, she realizes the office is emptying out. People are packing up, chairs rolling back.

Catherine gathers her stuff, shuts down her computer, and slings her bag over her shoulder.

CATHERINE

(to Marlene, in passing)
See you tomorrow, Marly.

Marlene's on the phone, waves without looking.

Catherine stops by a shared cubicle. Two nameplates read: Brandy Donovan - Analyst Level 2 and Elizabeth Winslow - Analyst Level 3.

BRANDY methodically stacks papers and locks a drawer. Elizabeth, already standing, shuts down her screen and grabs her designer purse.

The three of them head to the elevator.

EXT. ENERPOWER - FRONT OF BUILDING - LATE AFTERNOON

Elizabeth lights a cigarette. Brandy puts on her sunglasses. Catherine scrolls through her phone.

Nathan exits the building a few steps behind them, adjusting his bag. He glances at his phone, clearly lingering.

BRANDY
So... big plans tonight?

CATHERINE
(distracted, still on her
phone)
Hmm... yeah. A date.

Nathan slows down. He's pretending to look at his phone, but he's obviously listening.

BRANDY
Show us.

Nathan glances over, just for a second. His face falls slightly—then he catches himself, looks away, keeps walking. Catherine notices him. Their eyes meet for a brief moment.

CATHERINE
(to Nathan, polite but
guarded)

Night, Nathan.

NATHAN
(too cheerful,
overcompensating)
Night, Cathy! Have a great evening!

He walks off, a little too fast. Catherine watches him go, frowning slightly.

Catherine hands her phone over. Brandy lifts her sunglasses to squint. Elizabeth exhales smoke upward, head tilted back, cigarette poised between two fingers like a movie star. She leans in to see the screen.

ELIZABETH
(blurting out)
Oh, fuck me...

Elizabeth coughs mid-drag, trying not to choke. Brandy's eyes go wide. She elbows her. Tilts her head toward Catherine.

BRANDY
You can't say that!

ELIZABETH
What? It's an expression, darling.

Catherine still standing there, awkwardly smiling.

Elizabeth grabs the phone again, looks at the photo, then hands it back.

ELIZABETH
He looks sweet, bless him. A tad boring, but sweet.

BRANDY
Oh my god.

ELIZABETH
What?

BRANDY
(reassuring)
He looks perfect for you.

Catherine forces smile, pockets her phone, and exhales quietly.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Wood-fired oven. Empty dining room, everyone's on the patio. Waiters hustle back and forth with trays.

Catherine and William sit in the middle of the empty restaurant.

William is sweating profusely but doesn't seem to notice.

WILLIAM
Your profile picture doesn't do you justice; you're prettier in person.

He lifts his glass to toast. Caught off guard, she grabs her glass and clinks it with his.

WILLIAM
I love this place. Cheap, and the pizza's done in a wood oven. Plus, it gives a warm, romantic vibe.

CATHERINE
For sure, it's getting hot in here. Maybe we should sit on the patio?

WILLIAM
Too crowded. We'll have more
privacy inside.

A waitress appears with a pitcher of water.

WAITRESS
Would you like something to drink
while you look at the menu?

WILLIAM
(too busy talking,
doesn't glance at the
waitress)
We'll just stick with water. You
can leave the pitcher.

The waitress and Catherine both blink. Catherine smiles
awkwardly at the waitress.

CATHERINE
(to the waitress)
Thank you.

The waitress gives her a sympathetic half-smile and leaves.

Catherine glances at William. Beads of sweat cling to his
earlobes and drop onto his shoulder.

He gulps down his glass of water in one go, refills it.

INT. RESTAURANT - LATER

Their plates are nearly empty. William pours himself yet
another glass of water.

WILLIAM
So yeah, after that... Tania left me.

CATHERINE
Is it too personal to ask why?

She sips her water.

WILLIAM
Well... I started taking
antidepressants, and I couldn't get
it up anymore.

He takes a bite. The waitress walks by, hears him, and
snorts with laughter. Catherine chokes on her water,
coughing into her glass.

CATHERINE
 (trying to keep a
 straight face)
 Oh wow... William, I'm so sorry. That
 must've been hard.

A beat. She freezes.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)
 ...Bad choice of words. I mean,
 difficult. Emotionally.
 (beat, low)
 God. I'll shut up.

William doesn't react, still eating, self-absorbed.

WILLIAM
 I don't blame her. She's actually
 the reason I found Orus.
 She's kinda like my girlfriend. She
 gets me better than anyone.
 (beat)
 Hey, mind if I use your restroom
 real quick?

Catherine gestures toward it, forcing a smile.

The waitress swings by again, refilling William's glass,
 clearing plates.

WAITRESS
 (laughing, already
 walking away)
 Two separate checks?

CATHERINE
 Yep!

EXT. OUTSIDE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

William and Catherine stand on the sidewalk. He's still
 drenched in sweat.

WILLIAM
 I had a great time tonight. Didn't
 think I'd find someone after Tania,
 but here we are.

CATHERINE
 Yeah... that's, uh, rare these days.

He holds up his phone.

WILLIAM

Here, let's sync our contacts.

He grabs her phone from her hand and presses it against his. Catherine caught off guard.

WILLIAM

There. I've got your number, you've got mine. It's like our phones just had sex.

A beat. Catherine forces a laugh.

CATHERINE

Careful, I might end up pregnant.

He chuckles, leans in for a hug.

WILLIAM

Talk soon, sweet Catherine.

They walk in opposite directions. Catherine glances back; he's waving at her enthusiastically. She forces a small smile. When he's out of sight, she wipes her cheek.

CATHERINE

I think I just spent the evening with a camel.

EXT. LIQUOR STORE - NIGHT

Catherine is about to step inside when her phone buzzes. Incoming FaceTime from Brandy. Brandy appears on screen, washing her face, hair up in a messy bun.

BRANDY

So? How'd it go?

CATHERINE

Let's just say he was hot.
(pause) Not in the way you'd hope.

Brandy bursts out laughing. Call ends.

INT. LIQUOR STORE - NIGHT

Ding! Catherine steps in, wandering the aisles. She scans the bottles, reads a few labels, lost in thought.

A clerk approaches, all smiles.

CLERK

Can I help you find something?

CATHERINE
I'm looking for a red wine.

CLERK
And what will you be pairing it
with?

CATHERINE
Something that will complement
bitterness with a hint of regret.
(pauses, smirks)
Actually, anything under ten bucks
that gets the job done.

CLERK
(chuckling)
That kind of night, huh? Right this
way, I think I've got the perfect
bottle.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Catherine exits the store, slips the bottle into her bag,
and walks down the sidewalk, still half in her head.

A kid on a bike suddenly shoots out of an alley, nearly
clipping her. Her bag drops.

CATHERINE
Jesus!

She quickly grabs it, checks the bottle, still intact.

CATHERINE
(relieved, to the bottle)
You and me, baby, looks like it's a
date.

She walks off.

EXT. FRONT STAIRS - CATHERINE APARTMENTMENT BUILDING- NIGHT

An older woman rocks gently on her balcony, mug of coffee in
hand, robe loosely tied. A small TV sits outside, blaring a
late-night talk show. She spots Catherine down the street
and waves.

MRS. X
Hey! Look who's alive!

CATHERINE

(V.O.)

That's my neighbor. No one knows her real name; everyone just calls her Mrs. X. Her favorite hobby: watching traffic and trash-talking her neighbors with a smile.

CATHERINE

Evening, Mrs. X! How are you?

Catherine reaches the steps of her building, wine bottle tucked under one arm.

MRS. X

Well, look at that, still among the living. Haven't seen you in a while. Thought maybe you went off to therapy too.

CATHERINE

What do you mean by "too"?

MRS. X

(leans in,
conspiratorial)

You didn't hear? That Patterson girl, the slow one.

(blank stare from
Catherine)

You know, big fish eyes, lives at 1440?

CATHERINE

Ah... right.

MRS. X

Well, her mom told me she checked into rehab. Painkillers. Shame. Her mom's a good person. Kids these days don't have any backbone.

(beat)

Anyway, glad you're not dead.

CATHERINE

Nope. Just... busy.

MRS. X

Busy keeps the demons quiet. Let me guess, a guy, huh?

She winks.

CATHERINE
(frozen smile)
No... not really. Good night, Mrs. X.

Catherine starts up the stairs, bottle in hand.

MRS. X
Hold on. The mailman screwed up
again. I've got your mail.

Catherine sighs silently, steps back down.

Mrs. X hands her a beige envelope. First Lancaster Bank logo visible.

MRS. X
Doesn't take a genius to read an
address, huh?

Catherine forces a tight smile, takes the envelope and tucks it under her arm with the bottle.

CATHERINE
Thanks. Have a good night.

MRS. X
(eyes the bottle)
Oh, and sweetie, don't drink too
much of that cheap wine. I use that
stuff to unclog the sink. Night!

Catherine climbs the stairs and disappears inside.

INT. CATHERINE'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Sunlight spills over the mess. Catherine, in pajamas, walks out of her bedroom with a pile of clothes in her arms. She opens the washer.

CATHERINE
(sighs)
Ah, tabarnak...

She drops the clothes to the floor, sniffs a damp shirt, grimaces, tosses it back in. Adds detergent. Starts a new cycle.

She heads to the kitchen. Dishes piled in the sink and on the counter, recycling overflowing onto the floor.

She starts making coffee. Her phone rings. She hunts for it under papers. She moves a stack, an envelope slip to the side of a fruit bowl.

CATHERINE

Hey, Mom!

CATHERINE'S MOTHER

Hi princess! How are you? You wouldn't happen to have my big blue bowl, would you? I've been tearing the house apart looking for it. We're having dinner at your Aunt Lucy's, and I told her I'd bring my Greek salad, you know how she loves my salad. So I'll swing by to pick it up.

CATHERINE

Blue bowl? Doesn't ring a bell.

In plain sight on the counter: the blue bowl, filled with fruit. The envelope from First Lancaster Bank sits beside it. Catherine glances at it, picks up the envelope absently, flips it around while her mom rambles.

CATHERINE'S MOTHER

Well, I must've left it at your sister's then. By the way, aren't you supposed to be at work?

CATHERINE

I took the day off. Dentist appointment. Figured I'd take it easy.

CATHERINE'S MOTHER

You must be a gold mine for dentists with all your cavities.

Catherine rolls her eyes.

CATHERINE

Okay, Mom, gotta go. Breakfast is burning.

She hangs up fast, drops the envelope next to the fruit bowl, right back where it was. Grabs a bowl from the cupboard, pours cereal, takes her coffee from the machine, and heads to the living room.

INT. CATHERINE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

TV on. Catherine sets her bowl on the coffee table and sinks into the couch with her mug. A news anchor's voice plays over footage of a hot-dog-eating contest.

NEWS ANCHOR

(V.O.)

The annual Coney Island hot-dog-eating contest nearly turned tragic yesterday when a 42-year-old contestant choked on his 37th hot dog. Thankfully, a quick-thinking rival saved his life. The competition was briefly paused, but the winner still managed to down 63 hot dogs and vowed to train even harder for next year.

Catherine shakes her head, takes a sip.

CATHERINE

Just when you think people have hit rock bottom, some manage to dig even deeper. Sixty-three hot dogs. That's not a record, that's a slow suicide with ketchup.

She glances at the dead plant beside her.

CATHERINE

What do you think they do after that, Annabelle? Do they puke or just... let nature take its course?

She stares at the plant.

CATHERINE

You know what I like about you, Annabelle? You don't talk back. Bon appétit, bella.

She pours coffee into the plant's pot. Slow zoom on the plant.

EXT. CATHERINE'S STREET - MORNING

Catherine exits her apartment, coffee in hand. Locks the door, heads down the steps. She spills a few drops on her hand, winces, wipes it on her jeans, keeps walking.

She sidesteps an overflowing recycling bin, lets a jogger pass in the opposite direction. He flashes her a smile, she forces one back.

She keeps walking, purse bumping her hip. The camera follows a few steps... then cuts to the bus stop.

EXT. BUS STOP - MORNING

Catherine waits, bag on her shoulder. She boards, sits down, scrolls through videos on her phone.

A pop-up appears: "ORUS™ - A voice. A friend. Always here." She hesitates... then taps it. The loading circle spins, the logo flashes.

An older man comes and sits beside her.

OLD MAN

Chilly morning, huh? They're saying we might get rain later.

Catherine smiles politely, nods, puts her phone away.

OLD MAN

I always say rain in the morning, sorrow's a-borning. Rain at night, hope in sight.

CATHERINE

(forcing a smile)

Never heard that one.

CATHERINE

(V.O.)

Smile. Deep breaths. He's nice. Probably lonely.

(pause, the panic rises)

Why does small talk make me feel like I'm having a mild stroke every damn time?

His voice fades into a dull mumble. Catherine stares ahead, nodding absently.

INT. DENTIST'S OFFICE - WAITING ROOM - DAY

Magazines, a kids' play corner. An old man, a woman, and her son sit waiting.

The bell over the door dings as Catherine enters.

RECEPTIONIST

(overly sweet, almost baby-talk)

Well, hello, Ms. Lasnier! How are we today?

CATHERINE

I'm good, thanks.

RECEPTIONIST

Wonderful. The doctor's running
just a bit behind... Oh, and I heard
about your father. My condolences.

CATHERINE

That's kind of you. Thank you.

Catherine starts toward the waiting area.

RECEPTIONIST

And how are your mother and sister?

CATHERINE

They're... fine.

RECEPTIONIST

Tell them I said hi!

Catherine rolls her eyes, finally sits.

A kid zooms around the room making gun noises. His mother
doesn't look up from her phone. He knocks magazines off the
table with his toy gun, then points it at Catherine.

Catherine forces a smile, bends to pick them up.

The boy climbs next to his mother and bonks her on the head
with the plastic gun.

THOMAS MOTHER

Thomas, ge-entle! That hurts Mommy,
sweetie.

He makes a face. She laughs. Then she looks at Catherine.

THOMAS MOTHER

He's such a little clown. Just like
his dad. He's my little thunder.

CATHERINE

Yeah... looks like you've
been...thunderstruck.

♪ A driving hard rock track e.g. **"Thunderstruck"** by AC/DC
starts faintly, just the opening guitar riff, like it's
playing in Catherine's head.

Catherine chuckles. The mom doesn't get it.

THOMAS MOTHER

Do you have kids?

CATHERINE

God, no!
 (coughs, recovering)
 I mean... not yet.

A HYGIENIST enters.

HYGIENIST

Thomas! Your turn, buddy.

Thomas starts screaming, running laps around the room. His mom catches him, carrying him to the doorway. He clings to the frame like a feral cat.

He looks back at Catherine.

♪ The guitar riff builds, louder, synced with the chaos.

She mimes a gun, pow! Blows imaginary smoke from the barrel, gives him a grin.

CATHERINE

(whispering)
 So long, motherfucker.

♪ **"Thunderstruck"** blasts full volume as the door slams shut behind them.

She takes a sip of her coffee, stone-faced.

Hard cut to silence.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Catherine exits the clinic, holding the small white bag.

She passes a crowded terrace: laughter, clinking glasses, mimosas glowing orange in the sun.

A man smiles at her, handsome, effortless. She tries to smile back... but her face is still half-frozen from the anesthesia.

Her mouth twitches weirdly, one eye blinks too slowly.

She keeps walking, expression stuck somewhere between a grin and a stroke.

EXT. RESTAURANT - PATIO - DAY

Busy downtown street. People laugh over drinks on a restaurant terrace.

Catherine sits alone, staring at the small white plastic bag on the table. She takes out her phone, opens the Orus app, and types: "Who invented dental floss?"

The app replies: "The inventor of dental floss is..." She doesn't read the rest. Her attention drifts.

BEN, tech-hipster with a sarcastic edge, arrives. They greet with a kiss on the cheek. He sits down.

CATHERINE

Well, look who decided to show up.
So, who made you lose track of
time?

BEN

(grinning, finger up)
Not who. What.

CATHERINE

Okay, I'm gonna need subtitles for
that.

BEN

I was chatting with Orus.

CATHERINE

Oh, not that damn thing again. My
date last night wouldn't shut up
about his virtual girlfriend.

BEN

Yeah, but the difference is I don't
need her to get off.

(swigs his drink)

I still prefer flesh over code.
She's like my therapist, my
financial planner, and my life
coach.

CATHERINE

Your life coach? Ah, come on! You
spend your life in your underwear,
gaming, and drinking beer. What's
she coaching you on? How to squat
without leaving your beanbag?
That's pathetic. You can't even
decide without her now.

BEN

Oh, please. You still Google stuff
like it's 2005. You book trips
based on "Karen from Naperville's"
hotel review.

(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)

Orus gives me the best spots... to find girls.

CATHERINE

You're pathetic. Tell your life coach to find you one girl, just one, who can stand you for more than three days. When that happens, I'll buy the premium version.

BEN

(snickers)

What about you? Any new prospects?

CATHERINE

(sarcastic)

Oh yeah, tons. Last night I went on a date with a guy who sweated through his shirt and told me about his erectile dysfunction

BEN

(laughing)

Jesus!

Catherine's phone vibrates on the table: Unknown number.

CATHERINE

(pointing at the screen)

Well, speak of the devil. Must be him calling to 'satisfy' me.

BEN

You gonna get that?

CATHERINE

Nope.

Catherine ignores the call, laughs. A few seconds later, the phone rings again. Same unknown number.

CATHERINE

Wow, I really must've been unforgettable.

She answers, half-joking.

CATHERINE

Hello?

COLLECTION AGENT

Hello, may I speak with Ms. Catherine Lasnier, please?

CATHERINE

Speaking.

COLLECTION AGENT

This is James from the First Lancaster Bank Collections Department. We've sent three letters regarding the 2024 Hyundai Elantra loan. We haven't received payment for the last three months.

Catherine freezes. She turns slightly away from Ben, lowering her voice. Ben pretends not to listen, sipping his drink.

CATHERINE

Wait, that loan's not mine. It's my ex's. I just... co-signed to help his credit. It was supposed to be paid off.

COLLECTION AGENT

The vehicle was written off. The insurance was cancelled in February. We can't reach him, and you're the guarantor on file.

Catherine stiffens. She stands up abruptly, motions to Ben that she'll be right back. Walks off the terrace, phone to her ear.

CATHERINE

You've gotta be kidding me.

COLLECTION AGENT

I'm afraid not, ma'am. You're responsible for the remaining balance: nineteen thousand four hundred twenty-eight dollars. Would you like to set up a payment plan?

Catherine drops onto a bench, stunned.

CATHERINE

(after a long beat)

Nineteen thousand bucks?!

(beat)

I've got seventy-eight dollars in my account... I can't pay that.

(beat, muttering)

Do you take kidneys?

COLLECTION AGENT

...Excuse me?

CATHERINE
I'll call you back.

She hangs up. Let the phone drop beside her. Her hands grip the bench, breathing shallow.

A HOMELESS MAN passes, shaking a cup. Without thinking, she gives him her change.

HOMELESS MAN
Thanks, miss.

She smiles faintly. The homeless man keeps walking.

CATHERINE
Maybe one day you'll lend me some.

She exhales slowly. Reaches into her bag, pulls out two unopened envelopes from the First Lancaster Bank. Slide them back inside. Grabs her phone, walks back to the terrace.

Ben watches her, eyebrow raised.

BEN
Everything okay?

CATHERINE
(forced smile)
Just... an ex problem.

She tosses some cash on the table.

CATHERINE
Sorry, gotta run.

They hug. She holds him too long.

BEN
You sure you're okay? This isn't
just an ex thing.

He rubs her arms gently, trying to comfort her.

CATHERINE
(quietly)
I'll be fine.

She grabs her bag and leaves.

EXT. STREET - LATE AFTERNOON

Catherine walks down the sidewalk, shoulders slumped, clutching her bag. Traffic hums. The light turns red.

A car pulls up beside her, windows down. The passenger belts out at full volume:

♪ Upbeat 80s pop e.g. 'Walking on sunshine'

PASSENGER

I'm walking on sunshine... Wooooah!

Catherine stares at the car. The light turns green, they speed off.

Her eyes fall on a nearby billboard: ORUS™ "Need someone to talk to?"

She stands there, frozen for a moment. She hesitates, pulls her phone out of her bag. Opens the application. The ORUS icon flashes.

A text box appears: "Hi Catherine. What's on your mind?"

Her thumb hovers over the keyboard. The crowd rushes past her.

CATHERINE

(Typing)

Is bankruptcy the new sexy in the dating world?

She stares at the message. Her thumb hovers over SEND. A beat. She hits it.

Catherine puts back her phone in purse and start walking.

The camera slowly pulls back. She gets smaller and smaller in the crowd.

Wide shot, the entire street bathed in sunlight. The music swells.

♪ I'm walking on sunshine... yeah! ♪

FADE OUT.