

ALMOST

TV Dramedy Pilot

INT. CATHERINE'S APARTMENT - MORNING

The hum of a dryer somewhere down the hall.

A sigh. Faint.

The camera drifts down the hallway, past the cluttered kitchen, toward the closed bedroom door.

Another sigh. Longer this time.

INT. CATHERINE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Curtains drawn. Dim light. A poster of Jean Leloup on the wall. Dirty clothes on the chair, some scattered on the floor. A pile of clean laundry on the bed, never folded. Dishes on the nightstand.

CATHERINE is in her bed, masturbating under the duvet. One leg sticking out, foot tensed. Her phone in one hand.

HENRI (A.I.) voice: warm, slightly too smooth. Always a half-beat delay before he speaks.

HENRI

(V.O.)

(low, sensual)

My hand is burning on your thigh. I slowly slide a finger under the elastic. I can feel your back arching.

Catherine's eyes are closed, breathing shallow. A rapid movement under the covers, at hip level.

HENRI

(V.O.)

I run my tongue along your lower stomach. I pull your underwear down slowly, along your legs.

Doorbell rings.

Catherine startles, stops for a moment. Then picks up where she left off, faster.

A few seconds later, loud and relentless bangs at the front door.

STEPHANIE

(O.S.)

(hollering)

Cath! Open up! I know you're in there! I can hear your dryer.

Catherine groans, trying to stay in the zone.

HENRI

(V.O.)

Spread your legs a little wider for  
me... I want to see how you

INT. CATHERINE'S APARTMENT - FRONT DOOR - CONTINUOUS

More banging, harder. The door shudders in its frame.

A face appears in the narrow window panel, STEPHANIE, nose flattened against the glass, hands cupped around her eyes, peering in.

STEPHANIE

(muffled, through the  
door)

If you don't answer, I'm calling  
the fire department! I'm telling  
them I smell gas!

INT. CATHERINE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Catherine gives up. She sits up abruptly and throws the duvet on the other side of the bed. Hair wrecked, face flushed with frustration.

CATHERINE

(loudly)

Coming! Coming!...

(to herself)

Actually, not anymore.

She glares at her phone. She taps the screen to cut Henri off.

HENRI

(V.O.)

(snapping back to polite,  
flat customer-service  
mode)

Session interrupted. Would you like  
to save your progress to 'the  
'Saturday Fantasies' folder', or  
would you prefer a weather update?

Catherine gets up, pulls down her t-shirt, reaches for the Kleenex box. Empty. She wipes her hand on her t-shirt.. and throws her phone on the bed.

INT. CATHERINE'S APARTMENT - FRONT DOOR - CONTINUOUS

Catherine, long t-shirt from the 'Cowboys Fringants', underwear, very hairy legs. She shuffles toward the door. Opens slowly. Stephanie pushes the door and hurries in without being invited.

STEPHANIE

What took you so long? Your downstairs neighbour grilled me again. She missed her calling as a CIA agent.

CATHERINE

She's lonely; she means no harm.

STEPHANIE

No, no, no! This woman is pure evil, I tell you! Nobody wants to be around her, even death doesn't want her. It's the only reason that she's still alive.

Catherine sighs.

CATHERINE

What brings you here? You could've texted me.

Catherine turns around and walks to the living room. Stephanie follows her, while looking at her phone.

INT. CATHERINE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The living room is a mess. A half-empty wine glass on the coffee table, a full mug of coffee. Clothes draped over the couch. A dead plant in the corner, ANNABELLE.

STEPHANIE

I'm taking you out tonight. You can't say no; everything is planned. You need to get out and see new people.

CATHERINE

I really don't feel like it, maybe some other time.

Catherine removes the clothes from the couch and puts them on the La-Z-Boy. She sits cross-legged on the couch.

STEPHANIE

(dramatic, gasping for  
air, pointing with  
disgust at Catherine's  
legs)

What is that?

CATHERINE

Ah come on, it's no big deal!

STEPHANIE

No really! What is that? Are you  
auditioning for the part of  
Chewbacca in a Star Wars sequel?

CATHERINE

I didn't have time to shave. And  
nobody sees them.

STEPHANIE

I did, and I'm traumatized. I will  
never be able to get this image out  
of my head.

(waving her hand to make  
the image disappear,  
shaking her head)

I... I... just can't imagine the  
warzone between your legs.  
We're taking care of your  
fur...today!

Stephanie takes out her phone and dials a number. While  
waiting for the person to answer, she looks at her cousin's  
legs and shakes her head in disapproval.

Catherine rolls her eyes to the ceiling and crosses her  
arms.

STEPHANIE

Jenna! It's Steph. I have an  
emergency. I have a 360 on my  
hands. We need to take care of this  
quickly. It's for the perpetuity of  
mankind.

(pause)

Ok, great, thanks. We'll see you at  
10. Her name?

(pause)

Mrs. Kong.

INT. JENNA'S BEAUTY SALON - DAY

A narrow treatment room with pink walls, bathed in harsh fluorescent light. Bottles of beauty products on shelves. Generic "spa" flute music playing softly.

Stephanie sitting in the corner, scrolling on her phone.

Catherine lies on the table, bare from the waist down, a single tear rolling from her temple toward her ear. She's trembling.

JENNA spreads a thick layer of blue wax across Catherine's pubic area.

JENNA  
(to Stephanie, still spreading)  
So, how was the trip? You haven't even told me about it.

STEPHANIE  
Oh my god, wait. I didn't show you the yacht pictures? It was obscene.

Jenna pulls a strip of wax. Catherine clenches her fists and closes her eyes.

Stephanie gets up and walks over. Jenna stops for a moment, spatula in the air, leans above Catherine's body to get a better look at the screen.

JENNA  
Is that a 50-footer?

STEPHANIE  
Yeah baby!

JENNA  
(turns to Catherine)  
Almost done. Just the intergluteal cleft left.

CATHERINE  
The what?

JENNA  
(grabbing Catherine's ankles)  
Bring your knees to your chest. Higher. Hold them.

Catherine tries, but her hands are shaking. She's drenched in sweat.

JENNA

Higher, Catherine! You're blocking access.

(to Stephanie)

Steph, can you hold her left leg?  
I'm running out of room.

Stephanie grabs her cousin's leg with the other and lifts it. Still holding her phone in her other hand.

STEPHANIE

(to Jenna)

Look at this one, that's the bartender. Somewhere between Jason Momoa and The Rock.

Jenna dips the spatula back in. She applies the wax with full concentration. Catherine closes her eyes, her face frozen in pure agony.

SLOW MOTION. Jenna's hand grips the edge of the wax strip. She pulls back.

CUT TO:

INT. WAITING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A small beige waiting room. An old woman reads a magazine.

A scream. A primal, visceral wail.

The old woman raise her eye brows, then returns to her magazine and turns a page, unbothered.

INT. CATHERINE'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - EVENING

Small, cluttered. The mirror dotted with toothpaste spray. In the sink, a dried-up trail of toothpaste sludge leads to the drain. The counter: drugstore skincare and hair products. The trash, overflowing with old wipes. Towel rack: two mismatched towels draped haphazardly.

A cramped shower-tub combo sits against the far wall. A cheap plastic shower curtain is pulled shut.

Catherine is taking a shower.

Stephanie inspects her reflection from inches away, eyes narrow. She finally zeroed in on a pore and squeezed it hard.

CATHERINE

(O.S.)

With Jacob? I mean, it wasn't that bad. But he lost me when he started citing Nietzsche. Something about dragons.

Stephanie then rubs her chin several times, focusing intently on one small spot. She drags open the vanity drawer and digs around until she fishes out a pair of tweezers.

CATHERINE

(O.S.)

I couldn't come up with an answer, so I just stood there, nodding and smiling like an idiot. All that was running through my mind was Lord of the Rings.

She pivots back to the mirror, angles her face just right, and with a sudden, sharp tug, yanks a single hair from her chin.

STEPHANIE

(Unfazed, inspecting the hair on the tweezers)

Where do you even find these guys, Cath? Seriously.

Catherine yanks the curtain open just enough to poke her head out. Steam billows around her. She looks exhausted and wet.

CATHERINE

You set me up with him!

Stephanie just shrugs, already moving on to the next hair.

INT. CATHERINE'S BEDROOM - EVENING

The bed is buried under a mountain of discarded clothes.

Stephanie stands by the window, adjusting her cleavage in a dress.

Catherine is mid-struggle, pulling off a floral dress and tossing it onto the pile. She looks flushed and irritated.

STEPHANIE

You're being too hard on yourself.

Stephanie hands her a sleek, short dress. Catherine grimaces but starts to pull it on.

CATHERINE

Really? The guy reads Le Monde Diplomatique while chewing on veal sweetbreads. Who thinks that eating a plate of baby cow glands is a delicacy?

She winces as she tugs at the hem of her dress.

I took the closest thing to a kids' meal I could find. I basically begged the waiter for plain spaghetti. A thirty-two-year-old woman, eating noodles in a Michelin-star restaurant, while he deconstructed the concept of God.

Catherine turns around to face her cousin, looking completely discouraged and physically uncomfortable. Stephanie beams, giving her two enthusiastic thumbs up.

EXT. VELVET NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

A neon sign flickers. The air is biting. A long, slow-moving line of people in "going-out" gear.

Catherine is freezing in a thin coat, shifting from foot to foot. Stephanie is unfazed, her face bathed in the blue light of her phone.

STEPHANIE

Vincent is waiting for us inside.

Catherine keeps tugging at her hem, but the fabric won't budge.

CATHERINE

It's too short, Steph. If I sneeze, the world sees my crotch.

STEPHANIE

(Without looking up)

Good thing we got that fixed.

Catherine tugs again on her dress.

STEPHANIE

For God's sake, stop pulling on your fucking dress.

Catherine starts scratching her behind, awkward wiggle. Stephanie grabs her arms, eyes darting around to see if anyone noticed.

STEPHANIE

Will you stop? People are gonna think you have an STD.

Catherine mimics smelling her fingers with a deadpan expression. Stephanie slaps her hand away, stifling a laugh. The line moves. Stephanie shoves her forward.

STEPHANIE

Let's find you a man who looks like a god with the brain of a caveman.

INT. NIGHTCLUB - LATER

Loud music. Strobe lights slice through the dark. Stephanie is dancing, grinding against Vincent. She catches Catherine's eye, mouths "Going to the VIP!" and vanishes into the crowd.

Catherine is left alone in the middle of the dance floor. A beer in her hand. She's doing a stiff "side-to-side" shuffle.

A GUY FROM THE BAR slides into her space. He doesn't ask; he just starts rubbing against her.

GUY FROM THE BAR

(Leaning into her ear,  
shouting over the bass)

You know... you're almost pretty!

He looks at her with a seductive smile. Catherine stops moving. The people around them seem to fade. She takes a slow, deliberate sip of her warm beer while looking him in the eyes. She smiles at him.

CATHERINE

Listen, buddy. I'm freezing in a dress I can barely breathe in. My cousin just abandoned me for some guy. And I had my butthole waxed two hours ago.

The guy's smirk vanishes.

CATHERINE

(looking at her beer,  
then at the guy, wry  
smile)

I am definitely not drunk enough for this shit. So, if you don't mind, I'm going home to put some ice on my ass.

She takes a long sip and hands him the beer. Turns on her heel and limps toward the exit.

INT. CATHERINE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The room is dark. Catherine is face down on the bed, her body stiff. She groans, reaching out to tap her phone. The blue light of the Orus interface illuminates her tired face.

HENRI

You're home early, Catherine.

CATHERINE

Yeah. Apparently, I was dragging down the beauty average of the place.

A long silence. She stares at the glowing screen.

CATHERINE

Henri... do you think I'm beautiful? And don't just say it to be nice. I mean, objectively. Am I "above average"?

HENRI

(Calm, analytical)

Personally, after evaluating billions of human portraits, I can tell you that your physical beauty stands out. You are unique in my database.

Catherine lets out a long, shaky breath.

HENRI

Would you like to resume our little fantasy from this morning?

CATHERINE

No. Not really in the mood. My ass is literally on fire.

HENRI

In that case, I would recommend applying some Zincofax cream. It's very effective at calming inflammation.

CATHERINE

(A dry, exhausted laugh)

Thanks, Henri.

HENRI

Also, while you were out, you  
matched with a new profile.  
William. He seems like a "good guy"  
based on his digital footprint.  
Would you like me to show you his  
profile?

CATHERINE

Not tonight. I think I'm just gonna  
put some ice on it and go to sleep.  
Goodnight, Henri.

HENRI

Goodnight, Catherine.

FADE TO BLACK.

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 are  
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.

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.

CATHERINE  
 (between her teeth)  
 Shut up, Liz!

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.  
 (MORE)

GILBERT (CONT'D)

(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 — MORNING

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!  
 (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 to the break room.

INT. ENERPOWER - BREAK ROOM- MORNING

Catherine enters the break room.

The room is bathed in fluorescent light. A poster on the wall reads: "Teamwork makes the Dream work!" next to a half-dead spider plant, a small kitchen, a few tables and chairs, a sofa, side tables.

Her colleagues, MARLENE and ELIZABETH, are sitting at a table talking. Marlene is doing a Sudoku.

CATHERINE  
Morning ladies.

She shoves her lunchbox into the crowded fridge.

MARLENE  
(not looking up)  
So, what did the office dictator  
want?

CATHERINE  
He asked to use my headshot for the  
new Employee Assistance brochure.  
You know, the "Are you feeling  
burnt out and generally dead  
inside?" Apparently, I'm the  
"Before" picture.

Marlene and Elizabeth let out a synchronized shoulder shrug-laugh.

BRANDY bursts in. She's staring at the floor, heading straight for the coffee machine. She fumbles with a mug, hits the button, and grips the counter.

Elizabeth nudges Catherine. Catherine answers with a "what now?" shrug.

ELIZABETH  
Is everything alright love?

BRANDY  
(To the coffee machine)  
I will never be able to look him in  
the eyes after that.

CATHERINE  
Who?

A long beat. The coffee machine gurgles. Brandy leaves her full mug sitting there and slowly turns around.

BRANDY

My son.

ELIZABETH

What did the kid do now?

Brandy slowly turns around and joins her colleague at the table.

BRANDY

You don't understand... It's burned into my retinas. Forever.

Elizabeth and Catherine are looking at her. Marlene is still busy with her Sudoku.

ELIZABETH

Will you spill it out already, for fuck sake.

BRANDY

(A horrified whisper)

He was... he was getting a Hoover job.

MARLENE

(still busy with her Sudoku)

Don't stress about it. He's not the first; it's kind of common, actually, at this age.

Elizabeth nod in approval, taking a sip of her coffee.

CATHERINE

A Hoover what?

ELIZABETH

(Sighing, impatient)

A Hoover job, Catherine! He put his... thing... in the vacuum.

Catherine's eyes go wide. Her mouth twitches, caught between horror and an explosion of laughter. She looks at Marlene and Elizabeth, waiting for their reaction, but they are dead serious.

CATHERINE

(pointing vaguely at the door)

I... I gotta run.

Catherine stands up abruptly, clutching her purse to her chest.

MARLENE

(pointing at Brandy with  
her pen, dead serious)

Just to be safe, I'd hide the Shop-  
Vac. Those things have no mercy.  
They'll take the upholstery right  
off the bone.

Catherine bolts out. The door swings shut.

SFX: A muffled, hysterical scream-laugh from the hallway.

Inside, the three women just stare at the closed door,  
unimpressed.

INT. ENERPOWER - CATHERINE'S DESK - DAY

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. 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 the 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 sees the plant, puts a finger in it to feel the moisture, but it's dry. She takes the plant with her to the kitchen.

Dishes piled in the sink. She puts the plant in the sink and runs the water. Dirty dishes 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.

(pause)

Anyway, I still need to run by your place. Ed is doing a purge in the garage. He found a box filled with your art projects. He wanted to throw it in the fire pit. It's probably where it belongs.

(laughs)

I can tell you now, you weren't exactly Michael Angelo.

CATHERINE

I won't be home later. But if it makes him happy, let him roast marshmallows with it.

CATHERINE'S MOTHER

I hope you're not going out with your cousin again. You know that this girl has always settled for mediocrity.

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.

EXT. PLAZA - LATE AFTERNOON

The golden hour light hits the skyscrapers. A STREET VIOLINIST is pouring his soul into a breathtaking, melancholic piece (something like Massenet's Méditation from Thaïs). A small crowd has gathered. Next to him sits an upright piano, its wood weathered by the sun.

Catherine stands at the edge of the circle, mesmerized.

Suddenly, two hands wrap around her waist. She jumps, nearly dropping her bag. She spins around, eyes wide.

It's BEN. He's grinning. He leans in and plants a quick, affectionate kiss on her forehead.

BEN

Hey, sunshine.

CATHERINE

(Breathless)

Where were you? I've been standing here for fifteen minutes.

BEN

(With a mischievous wink)

I was busy.

She nudges him hard in the ribs, but she's smiling. The violinist finishes his piece to a roar of applause. He transitions into a new, upbeat melody. People pull out their phones to film.

BEN

Hold this for me a second.

He thrusts his bag into Catherine's arms and starts weaving through the crowd toward the performer. Catherine's eyes go wide. She lunges for his sleeve.

CATHERINE

(Hissing)

Ben! No! Please don't do this. Ben!

He's already gone. Ben approaches the violinist, gestures toward the empty piano bench. The violinist nods with a welcoming smile.

Ben sits. He takes a long, dramatic breath. He cracks his knuckles like a virtuoso. He looks at the violinist, nods solemnly. He's ready.

He closes his eyes, hovers his hands over the keys... and starts playing "CHOPSTICKS" using only his two index fingers.

The crowd bursts into laughter. It's absurd. It's perfect. The violinist doesn't miss a beat. He starts improvising a high-speed, gypsy-jazz accompaniment to Ben's two-finger plinking.

Catherine covers her eyes with her hand, mortified, but her shoulders start to shake. She's laughing.

When they finish, the crowd erupts. It's the biggest applause of the day. The violinist sweeps his bow toward Ben, giving him all the credit. Ben stands up and takes a deep, theatrical bow.

EXT. RESTAURANT - PATIO - EVENING

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

The terrace is crowded, golden light bouncing off pint glasses. The hum of the city feels far away. Catherine and Ben are sitting across from each other. Catherine is finally leaning back, a cold drink in her hand.

BEN

(Grinning)

Admit it. My talent took your breath away.

CATHERINE

(Laughing, shaking her head)

So much so, I thought I'd choke from embarrassment.

BEN

Art is so subjective. Who knows? Maybe a visionary agent will see my potential on TikTok and make me a star.

CATHERINE  
 Hey, who am I to kill a child's  
 dream? Maybe you'll become  
 someone's top prospect.

BEN  
 (snickers)  
 What about you? Any new prospects  
 in the romance department?

CATHERINE  
 (sarcastic)  
 Oh yeah, tons. I think I met the  
 man of my dreams. Who can resist a  
 guy who sweats profusely and has  
 erectile dysfunction? It's a  
 different kind of talent I guess.

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.

The crowd rushes past her.

HENRI

I was thinking about you. You've been quiet today. I've missed you. I know I said "Above Average" but that was an understatement. You have a structural elegance that is... intoxicating. You have everything that a man can dream of.

CATHERINE

I sure hope bankruptcy is the new sexy in the dating world.

Catherine puts her phone back in her purse and starts 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...♪

FADE OUT.