

THE 29TH ACCIDENT

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Written by

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OVER BLACK:

The sound of WATER, CALM WAVES LAPPING. A YOUNG GIRL with a TRINIDADIAN ACCENT:

GIRL (V.O.)

Love moves like water between the worlds. Like time and space, it has no permanent place, it is constantly moving, expanding, ebbing and flowing. It is itself shapeless, but can take on any shape.

FADE IN:

INT. UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS - AQUATIC CENTER - DAY

WAVES LAPPING in a competitive swimming pool. RAUCOUS CHEERING from SPECTATORS in surrounding bleachers. A row of MALE SWIMMERS stand poised on diving blocks.

Various banners read: *UNO SWIM 2007-2008*

We land on a swimmer, BENNETT CARTER, 21, a white guy with shy, handsome charm--but right now he's pure focus. His briefs and cap say *UNO*.

A BUZZER. The divers launch themselves into the water.

Bennett freestyles with fury. Precision. A powerful stroke. As his head goes under, WE GO UNDER with him--teal bubbles and crashing water. As he comes up, WE COME UP with him--metal bleachers, screaming spectators, deep breaths.

Water. Stroke, stroke, stroke. Air. Water. Stroke, stroke, stroke. Air--

Bleachers. DULCIE (Dull-see) PEARSON, 21, a gorgeous black girl. Smart. No bullshit. We see her through the tint of GOGGLES. She wears a DILLARD U t-shirt. She's watching him.

Water. Stroke, stroke, stroke. Dulcie. Water. Stroke, stroke, stroke. Dulcie...

DULCIE'S POV: Bennett pulls into the lead. His body slides through the water, graceful, strong. A couple laps now, it's the last leg. Bennett finishes first by a millisecond. Dillard in second, and so forth, until a BUZZER sounds.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Bennett Carter for UNO in first...

The UNO COACH gives Bennett a hand climbing out of the pool. They embrace in a celebratory hug.

INT. UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS - AQUATIC CENTER - LATER

The meet is over. People talk, linger, disperse. Bennett emerges from the locker room rocking to *EARBUDS*. *LAST RESORT* by PAPA ROACH blasts through them.

He stops, removes his earbuds when he sees Dulcie, hanging with her CREW from DILLARD (a nearby HBCU). He observes her, considers leaving. But he's captivated.

She catches his gaze. They connect for a beat. Just enough.

He starts to walk over but second-guesses himself, pauses. Shuffles awkwardly between Dulcie and the door. Dulcie notices his hesitation and smiles. She's interested.

Now her friends start to notice. The second place swimmer, CLAY, nudges another girl, OLIVIA, who stifles a giggle. Before Bennett can make up his mind--

A STUDENT REF blows her WHISTLE at Dulcie's group.

STUDENT REF
Clear out. Y'all can socialize
tonight at Theta.

Off the ref's words, Bennett gives Dulcie a long look--an invitation in his eyes. Almost a plea. He turns and leaves.

Dulcie pretends not to watch him go, laughs with Clay and Olivia as they return to their conversation.

EXT. THETA HOUSE - NIGHT

Packed frat house decked out in HALLOWEEN DECORATIONS and THETA FUNDRAISER SIGNS. MUSIC BLARES. STUDENTS IN COSTUMES pile in and out, on the stairs, across the lawn.

Bennett's costume is a SUPERMAN T-SHIRT and jeans. He pushes through the crowd and into--

INT. THETA HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

A dark, sprawling old mansion repurposed for Greek life. Coins grind against each other to the beat. Some are already passed out--the party's been going for a while.

Fundraising vendors line the walls: A KISSING BOOTH manned by VAMPIRES--\$5 for a love bite. CRYSTAL BALL FORTUNES, TAROT READINGS, CAST YOUR OWN VODOO SPELL, COSTUME CONTEST ENTRY, WITCH DUNK TANK.

Bennett scans the crowd. It's hard to make out faces. He slides into the fray, pushing away a grabby BUNNY and NURSE as he scours the room. He makes his way to the--

DINING ROOM

A massive space with three side by side banquet tables-- beer pong, flip cup, and table tennis in the midst of a screaming audience. Bennett pauses to watch a moment while casually searching faces. Moves on to the--

KITCHEN

Empty and full BEER CANS AND BOTTLES everywhere, COOLERS full to the brim with ice and more beer. Three CHARLIE'S ANGELS dance on the island counter top, amid couples making out.

Bennett keeps moving, heads for a wide STAIRCASE, when-- FREDDIE MERCURY stops him.

FREDDIE

Hey, you walked right past me!

It's loud. They shout over the music.

BENNETT

Excuse me?

FREDDIE

At the door! Gotta pick your poison.

BENNETT

Pick what??

FREDDIE

Your poison! Your donation! It's a fundraiser. You want a fortune, tarot reading, vampire bite? Dunk the witch? Voodoo? Five bucks.

Bennett glances around the room. Pulls out five dollars.

BENNETT

Uh, costume contest?
(off Freddie's long,
silent head-tilt)
I'm Superman.

Freddie takes his money, gives him a red ticket--

FREDDIE

Fortune reading.

--and walks away to hunt down the next five bucks.

Bennett looks to the TAROT BOOTH run by a WHITE-SHEET-WITH-EYE-HOLES GHOST. He respects the lack of effort, heads for the booth and presents his ticket.

GHOST GIRL

(bored, without looking
up)
Red ticket's for the fortune
teller.

She nods toward the next booth, where a BUSTY BEER WENCH sits before a CRYSTAL BALL.

BENNETT

That guy--uh, Freddie Mercury told
me Tarot reading.

Ghost Girl looks up at him. A long beat.

GHOST GIRL

Yeah. Okay. Have a seat.

Bennett sits in a folding chair as Ghost Girl shuffles her Tarot deck. She fans the cards across the table.

GHOST GIRL (CONT'D)

Pick three. Don't look. Just pick.

Bennett chooses the first three in line. She pauses, bewildered, similar to Freddie. But she flips the cards--

THE FOOL. DEATH. THE LOVERS.

She looks up at him, fascinated. Their gaze locks, the energy shifts... stretches into a long, intense moment.

Shifting focus back to the reading, she begins:

GHOST GIRL (CONT'D)

These are powerful cards. Um, you're on a journey, but repeating a cycle. Something is beginning... but something ended. The death of, possibly of a loved one, or a belief in something--maybe a belief in love? Whatever ended, it's got you stuck in this cycle. You're afraid of something...

She glances up, now reading him. Then back at the cards.

GHOST GIRL (CONT'D)

You're The Fool at the start of a journey. And there's love in your future. But Death is--is, somehow standing in your way.

She finds his eyes, just as he averts her gaze. He's restless, laughs--too hard. Then without a word, he stands and pushes through the crowd toward the exit.

EXT. THETA HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Bennett heads down the front steps, across the lawn. Ghost Girl catches up at the sidewalk.

GHOST GIRL

Hey, Superman!

Bennett turns, surprised she followed him. She pulls off the ghost sheet as she approaches--

It's Dulcie, from the swim meet. Caught off guard, he doesn't know what to say. They stand there a moment...

A thick silence seems to swallow them. The tension, the attraction, is palpable. They both look away. Timid. Embarrassed by the intensity.

But their eyes find each other again.

DULCIE

BENNETT
Sorry I left so quick, I--

Sorry if I hit a nerve back there, I--

BENNETT

(laughs, guarded)
It's fine. Not like that stuff is real.

She nods, goes with it, ignoring how obviously he was affected by the reading.

BENNETT

Your costume took time, I see.

DULCIE

Hours. Failed midterms putting this together. ...No, it was indeed very last minute. I--a friend asked for help here. So... I came to help.

She smirks. She came to find Bennett. He watches her, grins.

DULCIE (CONT'D)

And I see you toiled over your Superman. We should probably get back inside, you might win best costume.

BENNETT

(laughing)

Freddie Mercury wouldn't even let me enter.

DULCIE

Seriously? Wowww. Well, who you here with? Frat crew? Their costumes as bad as yours?

She's fishing... and he knows it.

BENNETT

No frat crew. Frat's not for me.

DULCIE

You're not frat-tastic?

He shakes his head. She eyes him. He came alone. For her.

DULCIE (CONT'D)

I'm Dulcie, by the way. Pearson.

BENNETT

Dulcie? Really?

DULCIE

French-creole. ...More French.

He laughs, wants to say something but refrains.

DULCIE (CONT'D)

What?

BENNETT

Nothing.

DULCIE

What?? Tell me.

BENNETT

No--I was just--I was thinking--all the ways guys must use your name to hit on you.

DULCIE

Line's usually something about sugar.

Confidence building, he can't resist...

BENNETT

Liiiiike: Dulcie. You must be made of sugar to look that sweet...?

He's bashful in this leap of confidence. She stifles a grin, gives him a "try harder" look. He accepts the challenge...

BENNETT (CONT'D)

(to a nearby partier)

'Scuse me! 'Scuse me! Can I get some sugar please? Wait, nevermind. Got plenty right here.

He grabs her arm, pretends to take a few delicious bites. She laughs. He takes her hand in his, shakes it.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

Bennett Carter. Nice to meet you.

A spark in their touch. But they both pull away. A long silence while they observe the somewhat distant party.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

Dulcie. Would you care to dance?

She hesitates, but nods. They head back for the house.

LATER

It's late-late. Party over. Music gone. A few stragglers are passed out. Bennett and Dulcie lie side by side on the LAWN on her sheet. He eats Halloween CANDY, empty wrappers on his side only.

Faces beaded with sweat, both smile giddy smiles, staring up at the sky. Stars in their eyes. Bennett laughs.

BENNETT

You like that first song?

DULCIE

Love it. Never really *danced* to it.

BENNETT

Then that's our song.

DULCIE

(a dismissive laugh)

Okay. ...So what is Mr. Cali Carter doing in 'Naawwvlins?

A beat. His eyes search the sky.

QUICK FLASH of Bennett (18) slamming the FRONT DOOR of a HOUSE, storming toward a CAR--PACKED, ready for a new start.

BENNETT

Full swim scholarship.

(a beat, diverting)

Why doesn't sweet Ms. Pearson eat sugar?

DULCIE

Mom wouldn't let me eat sweets as a child. So I lost my taste for sugar and it never came back.

BENNETT

Damn, that's sad. Cupcakes?

(she shakes her head)

Ice cream?

(she shakes her head)

Plain chocolate??

DULCIE

Allergic. It's a tragedy.

BENNETT

Shit. That is tragic.

(a beat)

So why philosophy?

DULCIE

Gonna be a lawyer like my daddy. God, can't believe it's senior year already... pretty damn soon I'll be off to Boston for law school.

Bennett's face firms up. A cell phone RINGS. Dulcie scrambles for her purse. Finds her BLACKBERRY. Her warmth fades.

DULCIE (CONT'D)
Shit. Speak of the devil.
(answering)
Hi Daddy. ...Mmmmm. I know, Dad.
...On my way right now. Ummm, with--
with...Clay. And Olivia... YESSS.
Okay, love you too. Bye.
(hangs up the phone)
I gotta go.

Dulcie stands and grabs her purse. Bennett tries not to be offended by her white lie.

BENNETT
Clay from the meet? So why does a
21-year-old almost-lawyer have to--

DULCIE
I have to go.

She dials on her phone. Bennett scrambles to his feet.

BENNETT
Where do you live? I'll--

Dulcie is already on the phone again. She's suddenly cold.

DULCIE
Hi, can I get a cab please? Near
UNO campus outside Theta Xi frat
house. Thank you.

She hangs up and looks at Bennett, gives him a long hug. A cab is already pulling up to the curb. She walks toward it.

BENNETT
Wait. Dulcie. Uh, your number?

DULCIE
...I'm--I'm...focusing. On school
right now. I don't have time...

BENNETT
Wha--Really?

He speeds up after her as she opens the cab door.

DULCIE
(to driver, getting in)
1120 Bourbon Street.

Bennett stops her, momentarily taken aback by the prominent address. She looks up at him.

DULCIE (CONT'D)

This would never work.

A tense beat. He doesn't argue. He's afraid of this, wants to run as much as she does. But he inches closer. ...Closer. Until they both crack a smile.

DULCIE (CONT'D)

You're trying to think of another one aren't you?

BENNETT

Girl, you may not eat sugar, but you must've sat in some, 'cause you got such a sweet tush.

She bursts into laughter.

DULCIE

Tush??

BENNETT

That one needs work. I was--I was trying not to sound like a total creep, you know? Tush, bottom, behind, rump, buns...I weighed them all out and went with the best option besides ass. Ass--it's so obvious. I was being bold.

Dulcie is nearly crying with laughter.

CAB DRIVER

Meter's running here--

BENNETT

--Yeah, yeah, I'll pay you--
(back to Dulcie)
I don't know, Dulcie. I'm--I don't... have time for this either. But, I have so many more of those cheesy lines. You don't want to hear them all?

She's heard them all before. Every cheesy line. But with Bennett she knows they'd sound different. A smile on her lips, but she turns to the cab.

DULCIE

...I have to--

BENNETT

(a Hail Mary)
My shirt--it's, uuhhh...

Dulcie turns to him once again, waiting.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

It's a sign that we should hang out. ...uh, the "S" is really. For "Sugar."

He knows it's a stretch. But she can't resist him.

DULCIE

So you're "Sugarman"... disguised as Superman.

He grins broadly.

BENNETT

It's a great costume.

She laughs. A beat. He steps in close. The tension returns. Builds... magnetic.

He kisses her.

And she doesn't stop him. It's long and intense. They press against each other. But then, with difficulty, she pries herself away and slips into the cab.

Bennett watches it drive off, totally consumed by her.

EXT. PEARSON HOME - DAY

Dulcie's father, ROBERT PEARSON, 48, opens the door onto the front step of 1120 Bourbon Street; a multi-million dollar historic Creole-cottage home.

Dressed in a sharp suit, he stoops to get the NEWSPAPER and notices a SMALL BOX addressed to Dulcie. She appears in the doorway, dressed for class.

DULCIE

Hey, Daddy can I--

ROBERT

Package for you, baby. Be ready in ten, I'll drop you on my way.

He kisses the top of her head as he steps back into the house with his paper.

DULCIE

(muttering, annoyed)

Was gonna ask if I could take the car.

She picks up the box and opens it. Inside, assorted WHITE CHOCOLATES and a NOTE.

DULCIE (CONT'D)
Oh, no he didn't.

She reads the note: *DULCIE, THE ALLERGEN IN CHOCOLATE IS A PHENOLIC COMPOUND FOUND IN COCOA POWDER. ONLY COCOA BUTTER, NOT POWDER, IS USED IN WHITE CHOCOLATE. ENJOY. -BENNETT*

She laughs in amazement, touched by this gift, and eats one.

EXT. UNO AQUATIC CENTER - DAY

Bennett emerges from practice, headphones blasting. He stops, smiles to find Dulcie waiting for him. She tries unsuccessfully to keep a straight face.

He approaches. She steps back, puts a hand up. A barrier.

DULCIE
Just came to say thank you.

BENNETT
Wanna take a walk?

DULCIE
Just wanna say thank you.

He shrugs. They stand at an unnatural distance.

BENNETT
It's one thing Mom didn't let
Dulcie eat sweets. Kinda ironic.
But, allergic to chocolate? Just a
damn shame. That from your mom too?

DULCIE
(a long beat, deciding)
Mmm-mm. She loved chocolate. Wasn't
allergic at all.

Loved. Wasn't. Bennett looks at her, fascinated.

BENNETT
My mom would be rolling in her
grave if I didn't eat sugar. She
was an all-organic, grass-fed
hippy. But sweets were her
weakness.

He laughs at the memory. Dulcie shares his fascination.

DULCIE
How old were you?

BENNETT
Twelve. You?

DULCIE
Twelve. Weird.

There's a new, unspoken depth to their connection. She softens a little.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS - DECATUR STREET - DAY

Bennett and Dulcie walk from the crowded CAFE DU MONDE, eating BEIGNETS. She maintains the unnatural distance between them. He observes the distance with some humor. She notices.

DULCIE
(mouth full)
What?

Bennett watches her, enamored. She takes another bite.

BENNETT
Nothing. You like it?

She regards the last half of her beignet. Shrugs.

DULCIE
Not bad.

He laughs. She's devoured the thing.

BENNETT
Got some powdered sugar there--

--On her face. She wipes it away, embarrassed.

DULCIE
Guess it's pretty good. Thanks.
You're gonna make me fat.

He grins, delighted at the long-term implication. Encroaches on her space.

BENNETT
I am?

She rolls her eyes, shoves him away as they step off the stone sidewalk to cross the street. So satisfied that he's getting to her, he's still grinning, until--

Mid-crossing, within a matter of moments, a CAR speeds around the corner, its DRIVER distracted. Within a heartbeat more it will hit them, an unaware Dulcie first.

Bennett throws Dulcie forward, out of the way, then--

WHUMP!!!

He smashes onto the hood, rolls, ejected back onto the asphalt as the car SCREECHES to a stop.

Dulcie watches in horror, hardly aware of what just happened. Bennett sits up slowly, rubbing his shoulder, grumbles:

BENNETT (CONT'D)
Fine. ...I'm fine.

INT. PEARSON HOME - DAY - LATER

Dulcie leads a limping Bennett up the STAIRS, on a serious mission. He's holding an ICE PACK on his shoulder.

BENNETT
(grinning, teasing)
I think this is too fast. I don't
think I'm ready for this.

Dulcie glances back at him, rolls her eyes.

BENNETT (CONT'D)
You know that car could've killed
me.

DULCIE
It didn't hit you that hard.

But we see the truth in her face. She's still shaken.

GUEST BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A beautiful room, drenched in color. She shows him an ANTIQUE ARMOIRE and a gorgeous WOODEN ROCKING CHAIR beside it. She sits in the chair in reverie, tracing her fingers over a SYMBOL carved into the right arm of the chair.

The symbol is the VEVE DE ERZULIE.

DULCIE
My mother's favorite things.

Bennett watches her closely. She's nervous.

DULCIE (CONT'D)

She had a PhD in metaphysics and philosophy of religion. She believed in this...

(re: symbol)

The Veve de Erzulie. Symbol of the Voodoo patron saint of love.

She checks on Bennett, on his reaction. His face reveals nothing as he takes a seat on the edge of the bed.

DULCIE (CONT'D (CONT'D)

Magic is a real thing.

She stops, waits for him to run for the door. He doesn't.

DULCIE (CONT'D)

I know this, because my mother was an Obeah woman. A conjurer.

(long pause)

This is where you start laughing and walk out.

Bennett crosses his arms, settles in. Something's really got his attention.

BENNETT

I'm very curious.

DULCIE

It's...it's an important part of who I am. My mother was incredibly gifted. Naturally. Born with magic in her blood.

BENNETT

Hm. Okay. So, your mom--Mrs. Pearson...?

DULCIE

Roseline.

Bennett stares at her a beat, almost breathless.

BENNETT

Roseline. What's the most magical thing she believed?

DULCIE

...She always said love is the most powerful magic. She got this--

(re: the symbol)

--tattooed on her arm the year I was born.

Bennett looks at it, looks away. Gazes at the floor, lost in thought. Silence stretches on, uncomfortable.

QUICK FLASH of a WOMAN, 37, (we will learn this is his mom, RAE) lying in BED, sunken and purple, a breath from dying. But her eyes dance, watching empty space in sheer awe. Seeing something beautiful.

DULCIE (CONT'D)

So. There it is.

She stands; certain it's over. He stands, not done--

BENNETT

Then I guess magic isn't--wasn't...
powerful enough. For her to save
herself. I mean, with real magic
she could've saved herself, right?

Dulcie freezes, caught between disbelief and anger.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

...When the tumor in my mom's brain
got big enough, she started to lose
her mind. She'd whisper to me,
*Benny--I can see between the
worlds.* Kept saying it. That she
could "see between the worlds" like
there was some magic. Like she
wasn't really dying. She and my dad
called in healers. Shamans... but.
She, uh, she died. And my dad--it
destroyed him. There was no magic
to their love.... or, at all.

DULCIE

(a beat)

Well. I'm sorry. It just doesn't
work that way.

BENNETT

Then what's the point?

DULCIE

Love changes you. Makes you better.
Shows you something, like, cosmic--
yes, magical. Something bigger than
yourself. But I can see you're
unable to grasp that.

A close, heated moment. She's overly hostile, overly
defensive--could slap him or kiss him.

BENNETT

You like me. More than you think you should. And what I did in the street, that scares you. So you brought me here to scare me off. But isn't that like the opposite of what you supposedly believe?

She glares at him. The thin line between love and hate at its thinnest. He's right.

DULCIE

That car could've killed you.

BENNETT

(smiles)

...It didn't hit me that hard.

She rolls her eyes, but finally gives in, steps toward him-- and kisses him. A deep, free-falling kiss.

INT./EXT. MONTAGE - DAY/NIGHT

Wardrobe/seasons shows passage of about three months:

-Bennett and Dulcie walk hand-in-hand along the MISSISSIPPI RIVER on a beautiful NIGHT. Lights glimmer on the water's surface. They talk and laugh, bundled in warm clothes.

-Bennett with Dulcie and her friends, Clay and Olivia, all at a BARACK OBAMA RALLY.

-Bennett and Dulcie sit and talk in JACKSON SQUARE with their CAFE DU MONDE beignets and coffees.

-Bennett and Dulcie alone in the UNO AQUATIC CENTER. She laughs and squeals as he throws her into the pool. THEN--a close, sweet moment in the pool. Madly in love.

-Dulcie straddles Bennett in the back seat of his CAR as they make out. She removes her panties from beneath her skirt. It's clumsy, but no lack of passion.

-A nervous Bennett on the freezing doorstep of 1120 BOURBON STREET, dressed in a suit jacket and holding flowers. Robert lets him in, with no warmth to the welcome.

INT. PEARSON HOME - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Bennett, Dulcie, and Robert sit around a formal dining table inside this immaculate home, eating dinner. Tense silence. Bennett fidgets with his napkin, nervous.

DULCIE

Oh, Daddy, did I tell you? Bennett is undefeated this season. He's come in first every meet.

ROBERT

(nodding, unimpressed)
And what do your parents do, Bennett?

BENNETT

My dad owns a hardware store back home in LA. Built it from the ground up. And, uh, my mom died when I was twelve. It's something Dulcie and I have in common.

UNDER THE TABLE, Dulcie takes Bennett's trembling hand. He looks at her--they share a deep understanding, beyond words... Robert just barely nods again, yet unimpressed.

ROBERT

What does your father say about you not declaring a major?

BENNETT

...He doesn't say--he doesn't know--we, we don't talk. About that.

DULCIE

Daddy, Bennett's at UNO on a full scholarship.

ROBERT

(feigning shock)
An academic scholarship. That's wonderful!

BENNETT

No. Uh, no, sir. It's an athletic scholarship. For swim. ...I'm faster than Clay.

Bennett laughs sheepishly. Robert is unamused.

EXT. PEARSON HOME - LATER

Dulcie and Bennett walk to his car, both shivering in the winter cold. They're angry, distant.

BENNETT

I thought it was worth mentioning!

DULCIE

Clay is pre-med and has a 3.9 GPA!

BENNETT

We both knew this was going to happen. We both knew he would hate me! It's because I'm white!

DULCIE

Do NOT. Don't even go there. He has been hard on all colors of guys I've brought home!

BENNETT

All colors of guys?? Really? That many? How many guys exactly?

DULCIE

Don't get off subject.

BENNETT

Right. Right. I'd hate to stray from *Dulcie's father hates me to all the colors of guys Dulcie's been with*. I mean, I don't know which one I'm more excited about.

DULCIE

Will you stop?!
(a long, heated silence)
This was why--I knew this wasn't going to work.

BENNETT

Wh--Dulcie. This is, this is just...your dad hates me. So what?

DULCIE

He's protective. And this is it.
(she shifts, looks away)
This is where we stop seeing each other. I'm leaving for law school this summer anyway, and--

BENNETT

You can't be serious! That's crazy! How can you let him dictate your life like this? You realize you're acting like a child.

She knows he's right, but she's prideful and guarded. This is hard for her--uncharted territory. It hurts...

DULCIE
(walking away)
...Yeah, I think we're done here.

BENNETT
Stubborn as a child, too!

DULCIE
(stops, turns)
When my mother died it was like...like...he thought I was made of glass! Like I could break if I stepped outside the front door. And if I so much as scraped a knee--my god, the field trips I missed. Prom? With the drinking? No way. Living in the dorms or my own place? Nope. I'm pretty sure he would actually have a heart attack if anything happened to me. And...he's all I have.

She fights tears, shrugs...it's over.

BENNETT
What about the whole "love is magic" thing? You're supposed to prove that to me! Not prove I was right! Not prove that being stupid enough to love someone just brings-- just brings...

Dulcie shakes her head, heartbroken. Humiliated.

DULCIE
He'll stop paying my tuition. I won't graduate.

BENNETT
...When did he say that?

DULCIE
While you were helping with the dishes.
(a beat, a heavy breath)
There's something else I should tell you...

Bennett swells with anger, not listening. He paces a few moments. Looks at her, tears in his eyes--

And drops to one knee. No ring. This is impromptu. He takes one of Dulcie's hands as she gapes at him.

BENNETT

I love you. Oh my god, I am so in love with you, Dulcie. Magic or not, I've loved you since our first dance. And I don't want to lose you. Not to your dad, not to law school... I--I have a shitty GPA. Your dad might hate me forever. I'll probably never be a doctor. I win races. But, but the only thing, in this entire world, that matters to me is--is winning you--Jesus that was terrible. That was cheesy...Sounded so good in my head.

Dulcie is crying. She adores him. He looks up at her.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

Dulcie...marry me.

INT. PEARSON HOME - ENTRY FOYER - AFTERNOON

Dulcie arrives home with her schoolbag.

DULCIE

Daddy?

No answer. She heads upstairs and into the--

GUEST BEDROOM

Where she creeps to the antique armoire. She opens it, pulls a PINK VINTAGE SUITCASE from the bottom, then parts a rack of women's clothing to pull out an IVORY WEDDING DRESS covered in clear plastic. Dulcie holds it up to herself, beaming.

As she sways with the dress, a FEW TATTERED BOOKS stacked on the top shelf of the armoire catch her eye.

She slides her fingers down the spine of one book. It reads:

"LOVE AND THE SACRED MULTIVERSE" BY ROSELINE PEARSON

DULCIE (CONT'D)

(whispers, to book)

You'd love him.

EXT. PEARSON HOME - MINUTES LATER

Dulcie leaves her house, toting the PINK VINTAGE SUITCASE, schoolbag, and books. Bennett is standing outside his car,

waiting for her. They share a nervous, wild smile.

INT./EXT. BENNETT'S CAR - DRIVING - DAY

Bennett turns from a main street and approaches a toll to a bridge that stretches further than the eye can see. LAKE PONTCHARTRAIN CAUSEWAY. A sign reads *TO MANDEVILLE*.

DULCIE

Just wait til you see where my mom
and dad got married. The Mandeville
courthouse is... it's perfect.

EXT. MANDEVILLE COURTHOUSE - DAY

An historic white building. Quaint and beautiful.

INT. MANDEVILLE COURTHOUSE - LATER

Bennett and Dulcie wait in a small STAGING ROOM, tense with excitement. She wears her mother's wedding dress. He's in a modest suit and LACE-UP BOOTS.

The MUFFLED VOICES OF WEDDING PROCEEDINGS float in from one room over. Bennett and Dulcie are up next. She holds a BOUQUET OF YELLOW DAISIES, smells them, whispers--

DULCIE

Thank you. They were her favorite?

Bennett nods. They share that wild, nervous smile again. She laughs as she muses:

DULCIE (CONT'D)

It'll be perfect. You know why?
Because our marriage will age like,
sorta like dog years, in reverse.
So when people are normally four
years in, it'll be our first
anniversary...We'll still be having
sex at least six nights a week.

BENNETT

(softly laughing)
Dog years in reverse is good.

DULCIE

Mm-hmm. Our seven-year itch won't
happen for...28 years.

INT. MANDEVILLE COURTHOUSE - SAME

ALL MOS: A small judicial room. Bennett and Dulcie face each other before a PODIUM, holding hands.

CLOSE on a MARRIAGE LICENSE on the podium; two blank signature lines. Dulcie signs. Then Bennett signs.

Beneath reads: **FEBRUARY 29th, 2008**

DULCIE (V.O.)

Bennett... I vow to be by your side
every day. I vow to always eat
chocolate with you.

LATER, behind the podium, an OFFICIANT in a black robe speaks. Clay stands off to the side, recording on an EARLY IPHONE MODEL.

DULCIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I vow to love you until my dying
breath, and to prove the magic of
our love to you every chance I get.

LATER, they exchange rings and Bennett kisses his bride.

DULCIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I vow to you that our dance will be
the dance of my soul, and our song
will be the song of my heart.
Always.

LATER, Bennett and Dulcie hold each other close, dancing before the podium as if no one else exists in the world.

EXT. MANDEVILLE COURTHOUSE - LATER

Robert pulls up to the curb outside the courthouse in a VINTAGE MERCEDES, with Olivia in the passenger seat.

INSIDE HIS CAR:

OLIVIA

I told 'em they're crazy.

ROBERT

Thank you, Olivia. Stay here.

He gets **OUT OF THE CAR**. She ignores him and follows. Just as he's heading for the courthouse entrance--

Bennett and Dulcie come spilling through the doors, giddy. Clay is right behind them.

All three stop short when they see Robert. He rushes toward Dulcie, seizes her by the arm and starts dragging her back to his car.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
And in this dress?! You lost your damn mind?! This isn't how it's gonna go.

Dulcie resists his grasp. Bennett follows close beside them, helpless. Clay and Olivia watch.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
(to Bennett)
You get the hell outta here!

BENNETT
Please, sir. I love your daughter very much.

DULCIE
Stop, Dad, I love him! This is crazy, let me go! It's too late, we're married!!

ROBERT
Oh, I know people who can fix this. Trust me, we're gonna fix this.

Robert forces her into his car. Bennett makes a run for his own car, to follow them.

INT. MERCEDES - LAKE PONT. CAUSEWAY - MINUTES LATER

Robert speeds over the causeway, fuming. Dulcie cries in the passenger seat, clutching the MARRIAGE LICENSE and her DAISY BOUQUET.

DULCIE
You can't just undo my marriage. It's my marriage! You of all people should understand this!

Robert doesn't respond. He glances in the REARVIEW, sees Bennett tailing him. He speeds up, weaves between cars.

DULCIE (CONT'D)
(re: marriage license)
This is more than some legal paper! I'm not a child! You can't erase it! You can't--

He snatches it out of her hands as--

UP AHEAD, vehicles suddenly slow down to heed a flashing sign: *GO SLOW>>>LOW FOG*

Dulcie reaches to snatch it back. Robert, preoccupied, doesn't see the cars in front of him stopped. He's still flying at 65 mph. Dulcie notices just in time.

DULCIE (CONT'D)

Dad!!

Robert slams on his breaks, but--

The car skids, fishtails, moments from smashing into traffic. Robert cranks the wheel to the right. The car swerves, just before impact--

And CRASHES through the guardrail. It plummets, plunging through the thinly frozen lake 15 feet below.

EXT. LAKE PONT. CAUSEWAY - SAME

Bennett's car SCREECHES to a stop behind them. He jumps out, races across the causeway--sees Robert's car sinking beneath the lake surface.

He dives from the bridge into the frigid water.

EXT. LAKE PONT. - UNDER WATER - SAME

Through the MURKY BROWN WORLD, Bennett swims after the car as it drifts to the lake floor 12 feet below.

INSIDE THE SUBMERGED MERCEDES Robert unbuckles himself, then Dulcie. She's panicking. The car twists, drifting sideways, until it settles on its driver side on the lake floor.

Bennett reaches the passenger side, looks in. Dulcie tries the door. It won't open. Bennett points to the manual lock. She pulls up on it, tries the handle again. It clicks!

She pushes to open it as Bennett pulls. The pressure is too heavy. Robert tries. He and Bennett get it open just wide enough. Robert holds it as Dulcie slips through, and swims out right behind her. The door closes on itself.

Pained for breath, all three clamber towards the surface.

But Dulcie stops short.

The train of her dress is caught in the door. Bennett swims back down as Robert, unknowing, keeps swimming for the

surface. Bennett pulls on the dress. It won't tear.

Dulcie claws for air, choking on water, starting to convulse. Her nose bleeds.

Bennett tries to open the door. Too heavy. He heaves...

Robert swims back down now and helps. Together, they open the door. Release Dulcie's dress. Free her. But--

Her arms suspend in the water. She's gone still. No longer struggling. Bennett holds her and swims to the surface.

EXT. LAKE PONTCHARTRAIN - ABOVE WATER - SAME

Bennett and Robert burst through the surface, sucking in air, wheezing and coughing. Dulcie is limp in Bennett's arms.

CARS on the bridge are stopped. A CROWD OF PEOPLE stand looking over into the lake. GASPS and MURMURS. People CALL OUT TO THEM, MAKE PHONE CALLS.

Bennett cradles Dulcie, whose lips are blue. He slaps her.

BENNETT

Dulcie! Dulcie! Wake up!

No response. SIRENS approach in the distance.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Bennett lies awake in a hospital bed, BANDAGES, BREATHING TUBE. Distressed and anxious, he's ready to get up and walk out of there. Clay enters.

BENNETT

Clay!! Clay, you seen Dulcie??
They're not--they won't--I need--

CLAY

No, I don't know. Hey, lay back, man. Lay back. Relax. I haven't seen her. Or Mr. Pearson. You ok?

Bennett broods--a caged animal. He pulls the tube off his face and gets up. A DOCTOR enters.

DOCTOR

Whoa. Easy. Mr. Carter, you've been in shock, not to mention hypothermic. You need to rest.

BENNETT

How's Dulcie? I need to see her.

DOCTOR

Right now, I just need you to lay--

BENNETT

I need to see Dulcie!! How is she?

DOCTOR

Please. I need you to be calm.

BENNETT

(in his face, agitated)

WHERE'S DULCIE?! WHERE IS SHE?!!

CLAY

Man, relax!

DOCTOR

I need a nurse in here please!

A MALE NURSE runs in as Bennett grabs the doctor. The nurse forces him to bed. He fights. Clay helps, they overpower him. The doctor gives Bennett a shot. The room blurs.

HOURS LATER

Bennett blinks, opens his eyes, lies motionless. Clay is still in the room, crying now.

Bennett's father, JACK CARTER, 45, the stoic type, stands in the doorway. The doctor talks to Jack in a hushed tone. They don't realize Bennett has woken, or that he's listening.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

--Plenty of excellent grief specialists you'll want to make sure he talks to. Considering Ms. Pearson was eight weeks pregnant, he may take her death even harder. As his father, you'll likely be a stronghold for him, so I advise...

In a world of shock and pain, Bennett shuts his eyes.

INT. UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS - AQUATIC CENTER - NIGHT

Quiet. Empty. Bennett sits in a far corner of the bleachers. As far as possible from the pool. He stares at the water. So still, serene. Always like home before. But now... haunting.

He looks down at his wedding ring, spins it around and around on his finger.

NIGHT LAPSES TO DAY--

as the BLEACHERS fill--a CROWD CHEERS. SWIMMERS are mid-race.

POV IN THROUGH EXT. WINDOW

as Clay reaches the wall, others finish behind him. A BUZZER SOUNDS. CHEERS ERUPT.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Clay Harrison for Dillard in
first...

And we find it's BENNETT'S POV; he stands outside looking in. He watches Clay's COACH help him out of the pool. But Clay doesn't celebrate, the win feels empty.

EXT. UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS - ATHLETIC FIELD - DAY

Rows upon rows of white folding chairs filled by HUNDREDS OF STUDENTS in GRADUATION REGALIA. Bennett sits among them, indifferent.

FEMALE DEAN (O.S.)
And now, if the 2008 College of
Business Administration would
please rise...

Bennett stands with his fellow graduates.

EXT. LONG BEACH, CA - JACK'S HOME - DAY

Bennett's packed car is parked along the curb in front of a modest suburban house (which we recognize from the earlier flashback). He and Jack unload the car.

INT. JACK'S HOME - BENNETT'S ROOM - LATER

The same as Bennett must have left it when he was 18 years old. He's taking down old stuff and unpacking when a PHOTOGRAPH in a corkboard distracts him.

CLOSE on this picture of himself as a kid (10) with his mom, RAE (35), pretty, vibrant. She and Bennett are all smiles at the beach, the ocean behind them.

EXT. CARTER'S HARDWARE STORE - NIGHT

A small, Whole Foods-adjacent hardware store in a strip mall.

INT. CARTER'S HARDWARE STORE - SAME

Quaint, but fully stocked and moderately busy. Bennett works a cash register, rings up supplies for an ATTRACTIVE WOMAN. His hair is longer now, he looks a little older.

Her eyes linger on his. She smiles. He smiles back, awkward, then not-so-subtly removes his work gloves, revealing his WEDDING RING. He still wears it.

BENNETT

Easier without the gloves.

She nods, taking the hint.

LATER - SERIES OF SHOTS

Bennett helps VARIOUS PEOPLE with DIY projects. He measures and cuts wooden boards and planks. Shows customers what color paint to buy; nails, screws, tools. He helps some of them map out their plans. He seems to enjoy his work.

INT. JACK'S HOME - GARAGE - DAY

Bennett works at a workbench, bobbing to headphones. His hair is even longer now, pulled back in a bun. His face is scruffy with beard growth.

He wears GOGGLES, GLOVES, smooths wood with an ELECTRIC SANDER. Other stained pieces sit aside to dry. Jack enters.

JACK

New project?

Bennett stops sanding. He looks around. Shrugs. Nods. Jack crosses the garage to the other side, where we see--

Two WOODEN ROCKING CHAIRS, side by side. They're replicas of Dulcie's mother's, down to the VEVE DE ERZULIE carving. Bennett has enough pieces to build at least three more.

JACK (CONT'D)

Rocking chairs. Anything else?

BENNETT

I like making them. They're beautiful pieces of furniture.

Bennett turns to start sanding again. Jack quickens, navigating uncomfortable territory--

JACK
They are. They're extraordinary.
(a beat)
Hey. You hungry?

BENNETT
I could eat.

LATER - DUSK

Jack and Bennett sit in rocking chairs. They eat from a box of pizza on the ground, drink beer, watch the street. Lost for words.

Each is stuck beneath a hard shell, but especially Jack--he's been at numbness a long time. He curiously runs a hand over the VEVE DE ERZULIE, doesn't inquire.

JACK
(rocking in his chair)
These are nice. Comfortable. Solid.

Bennett nods and raises his beer to that. Passing cars fill a long silence.

JACK (CONT'D)
So. Your hair's gotten...long.

BENNETT
Yeah.

Jack regards the WEDDING RING on Bennett's finger. He's uncomfortable broaching the subject, it's painful:

JACK
...Therapy's still an option.

Bennett shoots him a "*You fucking kidding me?*" look.

JACK (CONT'D)
Almost four years. February 29th is around the corner and you become a one-man rocking chair factory...

BENNETT
So therapy. Because that worked so well for you. Oh wait--you never tried it.

Bennett downs his beer, tosses his remaining slice back into the box and stands to put his work gear back on.

JACK

This isn't about me.

BENNETT

I've finally gotten your attention?
It's about me now? It's my turn?

Jack watches him...knows he deserves every word. He makes an attempt at redemption, or atonement at least:

JACK

You know, I never told you this,
but I dream about her. All the
time. She brings me daisies, these
bright yellow daisies. They were
our--

BENNETT

Your wedding flower, yes, I know.

JACK

Fine. Look. I wasn't there for you
when your mom died, it emptied me
out. But I know what that emptiness
looks like and I see it in you. You
don't wanna listen to me, fine. I
get it. I was a mess. I'm still a
mess... Still never cleaned her
office...

BENNETT

Well it wasn't just my wife. Had a
kid, too. Both gone.

Jack watches the street, hardly knows how to look at his son.

JACK

I--I know. And I don't want what's
become of my life to be yours. I
want you to...move on. You should
talk to someone, and I know it
isn't me. If it's not a therapist,
then, you should--I think you
should...talk to Robert.

Bennett shoots the same crazy look as before. Jack keeps his eyes focused on a passing car.

JACK (CONT'D)

I bought you a plane ticket. Just a
cheap red eye, so you'll get there
on the 29th.

Bennett considers this as Jack collects the pizza and beer.

JACK (CONT'D)
Go see him. You know, closure. Just think about it.

Jack leaves Bennett to his thoughts and his sanding.

INT. JACK'S HOME - BENNETT'S ROOM - NIGHT

Bennett struggles to pack a suitcase, uncertain whether he wants closure.

INT. JACK'S HOME - BATHROOM - LATER

Bennett stands before the mirror over the sink. He grazes his beard, runs a hand through his hair--

Then proceeds to shave his head with electric clippers. REAR POV OVER BENNETT'S SHOULDER: He grazes his fingers over his smooth buzzed head like freedom. He shaves his beard next.

INT. AIRPLANE - TAKE OFF - NIGHT

Bennett stares out the window. The WOMAN BESIDE HIM puts in earplugs, dozes off. The city disappears below as he puts in headphones and pulls his BEANIE down over his eyes. The muffled sound of A FAST SUBLIME SONG plays.

MORNING

QUEEN'S *I WANT TO BREAK FREE* is playing. We pass empty row after empty row, until we reach Bennett's row, where he's passed out. (The Queen song is coming from his earbuds.) A mature FLIGHT ATTENDANT leans over and shakes him gently.

Bennett startles, pulls out his earbuds and looks at her.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
Sir, we've landed. It's a quarter past seven. Everyone has de-planed.

He gets his bearings. A glance at her NAMETAG, which bears a wings emblem and the name PARKER. He nods, stands and hurries off the plane.

He nods to the PILOT on his way out.

INT. LOUIS ARMSTRONG NEW ORLEANS INT'L AIRPORT - DAY

Bennett approaches BAGGAGE CLAIM. He waits nervously for his bag. The carousel hasn't started yet.

A glance around, unsure when he'll see Robert. He checks his cell. No missed calls. Turns his attention back to baggage. The carousel revs into motion. Bags spill onto the belt. Bennett spots his bag. And behind it--

A PINK VINTAGE SUITCASE spills onto the belt. He stares at it. Unmistakable. He waits to see who will claim it. It makes a second round on the carousel. Ownerless. He edges toward it, to look at the luggage tag, as--

A LITTLE GIRL, 3, pummels his leg. Startled, he looks down at her. The beautiful, olive-skinned, curly-haired girl gazes up, adoring. She raises her arms.

LITTLE GIRL

Dad-deeeeeeeee.

Bennett glances around, crouches down to her.

BENNETT

Hi. You lost? What's your name?

The little girl giggles and throws her arms around his neck. Bennett looks to the luggage belt again, bewildered. And now-- the pink suitcase is gone...

It suddenly SMACKS down on the floor next to him, a woman's legs beside it.

DULCIE (O.S.)

Hon, really? It went around the thing like four times. You still asleep? C'mon, the rental's ready.

Bennett freezes. Not a breath from his lips. He can't look.

And, like an alarm, a light, shrill BEEP!--

Sends Bennett's world out of focus. This little girl's sweet face, so close to his, flits with light from behind, casting a glow like a halo. BEEP! Her laughter echoes. And then, there, crouching perfectly clear into his view--

Dulcie. Now 25 years old. Her face wrought with worry.

DULCIE (CONT'D)

Helloooo?

BEEP! BEEP!--a TSA CART drives past, its rhythmic beep clearing the way. Bennett is transfixed. Paralyzed.

BENNETT

(sotto)

It's not real.

Snapping out of it, he pushes the girl--EMMA--away as he stands. He rushes toward no place in particular, just to get away. But Dulcie follows, scooping up Emma, who's crying now.

DULCIE

Hey, what--you're scaring Emma.
...You're scaring *me*. Where are you going?

She grabs him, turns him by his shoulder. He stares, awed.

DULCIE (CONT'D)

Oh my god, Bennett... Did you leave something on the plane??

He glances around. PEOPLE stare and whisper. Among them, the flight attendant who woke him on the plane.

DULCIE (CONT'D)

Bennett...?

He studies her, taking her in. An apparition. A ghost. With a shaking hand, he touches her cheeks, then her lips.

BENNETT

You. This--this beautiful girl--

DULCIE

Emma? Our daughter??

BENNETT

It's like you're really here.

DULCIE

Really here? What--we *are*.

BENNETT

Like you're... alive.

Dulcie blinks. Her eyes well with tears as she absorbs this unsettling mystery. But her bewilderment quickly dissolves to anger--*this must be a joke*. She soothes Emma, grabs her bag.

DULCIE

The car's ready.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS, LA - PEARSON HOME - LATER

Dulcie parks their rental car out front. She gets out, Bennett slow to follow. She watches him as he regards the wintry street, the house, like a frozen memory.

She seems to have some new understanding--whatever he must've told her on the car ride.

Robert suddenly rushes out the front door in a suit, carrying a packed suitcase and briefcase.

DULCIE

Dad! Where you going? I thought you'd be at the office.

ROBERT

Hi baby. Had to collect some things. Doug is terribly ill, have to cover him in court tomorrow in Jackson. Won't be back tonight.

Bennett watches their interaction, stupefied. Robert kisses Dulcie's cheek, shakes Bennett's hand, and hails a cab. As he's getting in--

ROBERT (CONT'D)

I am so sorry you kids came all this way. I'll make it up to you. Dinner tomorrow night. You choose the place. A nice one. Love you!

DULCIE

Love you!

Dulcie looks to Bennett, observes his perplexity and unease. She wraps her arms around him. He resists at first, but slowly surrenders to a deep hug.

DULCIE (CONT'D)

See? I didn't...die. No one died. We were so lucky.

He glances at Emma, asleep in her car seat. Dulcie begins to sway, like there's music playing. He can't help but sway with her. And soon it's some rendition of a slow swing-waltz. CLOSE on Bennett, smiling, as--

QUICK FLASH of Bennett and Dulcie slow dancing in the COURTHOUSE STAGING ROOM on their wedding day. Intense love.

EXT. PEARSON HOME - SAME

Dulcie and Bennett dance on the sidewalk. He twirls her, lets the moment take him.

INT. PEARSON HOUSE - GUEST BEDROOM - LATER

The ARMOIR and ROCKING CHAIR are still there, but the room looks different than it used to. It's tidy, feels emptier, things have been moved around--and removed.

As Bennett unpacks alone, he can't help staring at Dulcie's pink suitcase.

He turns his attention to the rocking chair, walks toward it, removing his beanie, just as--

He glimpses himself in the armoire MIRROR. Stops, startled. And WE SEE--his hair...is a medium length. He examines that which he just buzzed off yesterday as Dulcie enters.

DULCIE

Our little trouble maker is down
for the count.

She unpacks. He hedges around a question, glances around, passively noticing a WATER STAIN in the ceiling...

BENNETT

Why didn't you tell me you were
pregnant?

Dulcie looks strangely at him. Thinks a moment, realizing.

DULCIE

I was scheduled for an abortion the
same week you proposed.

BENNETT

(stung)
Is that why you said yes?

DULCIE

Bennett. I said yes because I fell
madly in love with you. And I was
going to give you the sonogram on
our wedding day. But...plans
changed. So I gave it to you in the
hospital as a--BIG surprise. You
were so excited. You were in love
with her right then.

(touching his face, his
forehead)

There's really something going on
with you.

BENNETT

Can I see it? The sonogram?

DULCIE

Do you still keep it in your
wallet?

Bennett takes out his wallet. Opens it. From within the cash slot, he removes a folded black and white SONOGRAM of prenatal Emma. He stares. Fascination and sadness.

His sensibility pulls Dulcie in--like a constant force of gravity; she can't fight it, and she would never want to be released from it... Suddenly, she makes for the armoire as:

DULCIE (CONT'D)

I have a crazy idea...

She throws its doors open--

To find it empty. No rack of clothing. No books. She pauses, thinks, momentarily averted. But then, turning to Bennett, a fondness for this crazy idea lights up her face.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS - STREETS - DAY

Dulcie walks at a brisk pace, Bennett right on her heels, carrying Emma. Life feels almost normal again--*everything* is alive. Live MUSICIANS play along the narrow street, DAY DRINKERS hang over painted balconies above.

Bennett can't help smiling. This feels like how it should be.

Dulcie clips along, past CAFES, PUBS, TAROT SHOPS and CRAWFISH JOINTS. He watches her, reaches for her hand. Now with the presence of mind to--*notice* her.

BENNETT

You cut your hair. I like it.

DULCIE

(smiling)

Cut it a couple years ago.

And then he realizes...he doesn't know his own life.

BENNETT

How--uh--how've you been?

They both laugh strangely at the gravity of such a simple question. She's unsure how to answer, slows her pace a bit.

DULCIE

Uhh, good. Pretty good. Kicking ass
in law school. Second year in, top
of my class.

Proud and enamored, he watches her with that old, all-consumed look he used to. She continues, with an edge of strain in her voice now...

DUCLIE (CONT'D)

And you. You're... Best dad. Best cook.

Bennett notices her rigidity. But he diverts, whispers:

BENNETT

And the, uh, the sex? Am I getting enough sugar?

Dulcie laughs, nods. They hold each other's gaze a beat, until she sucker punches him:

DULCIE

Less sugar now with your med school applications.

BENNETT

Med school? Me? I'm--

She'd already forgotten. She nods, mulling over his surprise.

DULCIE

This reminds me of a time you got stitches.

(off his silent confusion)

You fell off a ladder in our backyard. Hit your head on this old brick and your memory was off for a day or two...Twelve stitches? Ring any bells? Right back there.

Bennett touches the back of his head, surprised when he feels something. She watches him, intrigued.

DULCIE (PRE-LAP)(CONT'D)

I don't know what's going on with you...

EXT. OCCULT BOOKSHOP - MOMENTS LATER

Dulcie tugs Bennett along faster, and in through the doors.

DULCIE (PRE-LAP)

...I'm sure you think this is ridiculous. But. You're the one saying I--died...

INT. OCCULT BOOKSHOP - MINUTES LATER

DULCIE (O.S.)

...Saying you have this other life.

Rows and rows and stacks upon stacks of books. Old oak from floor to ceiling, a winding staircase to reach the height of the rear bookshelf. Tables of sage, incense, and crystals.

We find Dulcie, scanning the shelves for titles as she leads Bennett down one row. He follows close, absorbing this place.

DULCIE (CONT'D)

So I thought, why not just... We can call Dr. Matthews when we get back, too. I think we should.

She turns to him. He's confounded--by many things.

DULCIE (CONT'D)

Dr. Matthews is the psychiatrist I saw after the accident. You didn't want to see anyone.

She stops suddenly. She's found the BOOK she was looking for, slides it from the shelf and hands it to Bennett.

"LOVE AND THE SACRED MULTIVERSE" BY ROSELINE PEARSON

He skims the cover with immediate aversion. Emma, still in Bennett's arms, points at the book.

EMMA

Grammee.

DULCIE

Yeah, baby. That's right, Grammy.
(to Bennett, a hint of
resentment)

It's a great book. I've tried to share it with you many times, but you avoid it like the plague. My mom was the premier metaphysical author of her time. Not so long ago. It's out of print now, but it's like a collector's item.

Bennett takes a long time with it, heavy with old grief. Something flares in him, just like the day she read his Tarot cards. He tries to blink it away.

BENNETT

No disrespect to your mom.

He shakes his head, hands the book back to her. She looks stung. But it's not a new hurt. This has been there.

DULCIE
At least open it.

He's already turned, heading back for the entrance.

BENNETT
Nothing in that book is going to
bring you back.

DULCIE
Bring me back? I'm right here. Your
daughter is right here.

He takes Dulcie's hand, benign in his refusal. He pulls her toward the exit the same way she pulled him in.

DULCIE (CONT'D)
(reciting, memorized)
"Parallel universes: universes,
dimensions, worlds, realities
separated from each other by a
single quantum event. Portals often
open when consequence diverges from
intended path, such as accident--"

BENNETT
--Let's call Dr--who?--Matthews?

She gives up, rolling her eyes as they push through the door.

EXT. DECATUR STREET/CAFE DU MONDE - LATER - DUSK

The streets are more crowded at the onset of night. Dulcie and Bennett walk hand in hand, but in silence, slowly approaching the cafe. There's a strain, a tension between them that feels older than a single day. Emma fusses.

EMMA
Daddeee, I need to go pee-pee.

Before Bennett can respond, Dulcie is pulling her from him.

DULCIE
I'll take her. Grab us beignets,
and grab me a coffee please.

And the two are gone, Dulcie pushing into the restaurant, disappearing in the CROWD. Bennett fights the throng of people, trying to find his place in a line that stretches onto the sidewalk.

INT. CAFE DU MONDE - LATER

Bennett orders at the counter.

LATER

Bennett balances TWO COFFEES and a PAPER BAG of beignets as he stands off to the side. Tries to avoid being bumped into. He glances around for Dulcie and Emma.

LATER - NIGHT

Bennett shoves through the cafe, back out to the--

SIDEWALK OUTSIDE

Searching the crowd of TOURISTS, LOCALS, street VENDORS, ARTISTS... he spots a WOMAN and CHILD... takes a step--

Someone bumps him, knocking one coffee to the ground. A momentary annoyance, but he doesn't care. Panic wells within as he looks around...

BENNETT

Dulcie?

He turns, on tip toes, searching atop heads.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

Dulcie! Emma?

He paces down the sidewalk, around the outside of the cafe and down a CORRIDOR to the--

RESTROOMS

He scans the line of PEOPLE WAITING. No Dulcie. No Emma. He's on the brink of a meltdown, rushes back out to the--

SIDEWALK

And nearly runs right into Dulcie, walking Emma along by the hand. Bennett lurches forward, wraps his arms around Dulcie, realizing only now that he hasn't been breathing.

DULCIE

Sshhhh. Shhh. Sshhhhh. We're here baby. It's okay. We're here.

BENNETT

I'm so--I'm sorry.

Bennett catches his breath. He scoops Emma into his arms.

DULCIE

I'm sorry. The line took forever,
and then we couldn't find you.

Bennett wipes at his eyes, misty. His hands tremble as he extends Dulcie's coffee.

BENNETT

Probably cold now. Mine spilled. I
can get in line again.

Dulcie shakes her head, looking at him with slight wonder, as if for the first time. She gives him a gentle kiss.

DULCIE

Let's go home.

INT. PEARSON HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Dulcie, Bennett, and Emma eat beignets and drink glasses of milk on the carpeted floor. Emma pauses playing with a toy to take a long gulp. It gives her a milk mustache.

DULCIE

(to Emma)

Grandad can't know we were eating
in the living room, 'kay bug?

Emma's eyes go wide as she dramatically holds a finger over her lips, then collapses to the floor in giggles, rolling around. Bennett laughs, watching her.

He suddenly seizes her mid-beignet bite and tickles her wildly. Emma squeals and laughs, delighted. He roars:

BENNETT

Will she defeat the tickle beast?!

Dulcie watches for a beat, then jumps on Bennett to rescue Emma. The two team up against him and take him down to the carpet in tickle torture.

MASTER BEDROOM - LATER

Bennett carries in a sleeping Emma, lays her in a crib near the door. Bennett watches her.

DULCIE (O.S.)

(near distance)

This message is for Dr. Matthews,
it's Dulcie Pearson calling to
schedule an appointment...

Bennett traces a finger over Emma's nose, over her fingers, amazed. Strokes her hair, whispers to her:

BENNETT

Before I could ever love you, I'd already lost you. But somehow, all these years, I've loved you anyway. I hope you know how much.

GUEST BEDROOM - LATER

Bennett enters, oblivious to Dulcie undressing for him.

BENNETT

Unbelievable. She looks like you--

He stops--Dulcie stands there, blouse open. She walks toward him as he freezes, like he's forgotten how...

She kisses him, moves his hands to the right places. It only takes a second for him to remember. He kisses her back, touches her, picks her up and carries her to bed.

INT. PEARSON HOME - GUEST BEDROOM - DAY

Morning sunlight wakes Bennett, bundled in a HOODED SWEATSHIRT. He rolls over to find the bed empty. All smiles, he pulls on a pair of boxer briefs and races out of the room.

INT. PEARSON HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Bennett bounds into the kitchen.

BENNETT

I smell coffee! I'm gonna dip you in it to get my sugar--

He halts. Robert sits at the counter, reading a newspaper, sipping coffee.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

Oh. You're here. Uh...

Bennett glances down at his briefs, embarrassed. He pulls back his hood, reveals a BUZZED HAIRCUT.

ROBERT

Yeah. You feeling better?

Robert regards Bennett strangely.

BENNETT

I feel fine. Where's Dulcie? Emma still asleep?

Robert rises from his stool.

ROBERT

What did you just say?

BENNETT

I asked where Dulcie went. I'll check on Emma...

Robert--who we now notice is disheveled, scruffy--stalks toward Bennett, looks at him close. Looks in his eyes.

ROBERT

Come sit down.

BENNETT

Sit down for what? Where's Dulcie?

ROBERT

(a sigh)
Dulcie died, Bennett.

Bennett shakes his head, unwilling to accept it.

BENNETT

Dulcie! You here? Your dad doesn't believe me! Dulcie you--

He marches from the **KITCHEN** into the **HALL**, where he catches his reflection in a hallway **MIRROR**. Runs his hands over his **BUZZED HEAD**--

And crumbles to the ground. He sobs, can't catch his breath. Robert wraps his arms around Bennett's shaking body. Bennett clutches on as Robert gently helps him up.

INT. PEARSON HOME - DINING ROOM - LATER

Bennett sits at the table. His red, tired eyes fixate on nothing. Robert sits across, watches him.

BENNETT

It wasn't a dream. They were here. Talking. And laughing. And Emma, you should've seen her, she... how will I remember her face?

He's already exhausted trying to remember. Robert opens his mouth, about to say something. But stops. He clears his throat, seems to change his mind.

ROBERT

You'll never forget her face. She lives in a world right here.

(pats his heart)

I'm sorry you lost your mother, Bennett. I'm sorry about the accident--sorry you lost Dulcie. It's going to take real hard work not to lose yourself while you figure out what all this means.

(a beat)

I've wanted to call you for a long while. Years now. Because, you know, I--I lost me. Back then.

Robert fumbles through this rare humility. But there's an edge of hope in his voice, an energy in his words that rings with enthusiasm.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

I lost me when my wife died. And I was wondering if you can forgive me for what I did. I was so far out of line. So afraid of losing Dulcie too. The older she got, the scarier it was for me...the tighter I held on. Wherever Dulcie and Emma are... the pain you feel now is real. I'm so sorry you're living with that.

Robert wipes his tears before they can fall. He reaches for Bennett's hand, squeezes tight.

INT. PEARSON HOME - GARAGE - DAY

Robert stands before a wire rack of shelves, pulls down ONE OF MANY DUSTY BOXES, this one labeled "DONATE." He sets it on the floor, and pulls out a few TATTERED BOOKS.

GUEST BEDROOM - LATER

Bennett finishes packing, his is now the only suitcase. A KNOCK. Robert slowly enters and extends the books to Bennett.

ROBERT

These were Roseline's. Woulda been Dulcie's. I want you to have them.

Before really seeing what they are--

BENNETT

I can't take those... they--

He stops, finding the offer bizarre now as Robert sets them on the bed... and he reads each cover:

"OBEAH ANCIENT INCANTATIONS"

"THE HIDDEN REALITY"

"LOVE AND THE SACRED MULTIVERSE," BY ROSELINE PEARSON

Bennett is astonished by this third book.

Robert walks out before Bennett can object again, leaving him alone to more carefully read all the titles. Conjure healing. Astral projection and angelic guides. Parallel universes.

Begrudged, but undeniably piqued, Bennett opens "LOVE AND THE SACRED MULTIVERSE." He leafs through and a BUSINESS CARD falls out, a card for a TAROT & PSYCHIC READINGS SHOP, local address and phone number.

He keeps flipping pages, soon finding a single section highlighted in PINK MARKER. He stops... reads:

INSERT ON PAGE--

Parallel universes: dimensions, worlds, realities separated from each other by a single quantum event. Portals often open when consequence diverges from intended path, such as accident, natural disaster, or death.

Bennett recalls easily--it's Dulcie's exact recitation from the previous day. He's mystified, but heartened by this tangible trace of her. He looks around, looks to the door as if half-expecting her to come around the corner.

He moves to sit in the rocking chair, trying to piece it all together. Pulls out his wallet, looks inside. No sonogram.

Instead, there's a FOLDED, PRINTED PAGE, torn and browned at its edges. He pulls it out a moment and brushes it between his fingertips, then puts it back, puts his wallet away.

He leans against the chair, notices--the WATER STAIN in the ceiling is gone. Perplexed, he runs a hand over his head.

REAR POV OVER BENNETT'S SHOULDER: We see past Bennett to the pristine egg shell ceiling. His hand runs over his smooth buzzed head and we notice--

A LONG DISTINCT SCAR on the back of his scalp, about 12 stitches wide. It wasn't there before.

EXT. LOUIS ARMSTRONG NEW ORLEANS INT'L AIRPORT - DAY

Curbside, Bennett and Robert hug goodbye. Robert gets in his car and drives away as Bennett heads into the airport. But he stops before entering, pulls the TAROT CARD out of his pocket. He hesitates... hails a cab.

EXT. TAROT SHOP - DAY

More of a derelict one-room house, jammed in between liquor stores on a rundown street. Bennett gets out of the cab, approaches the tarot shop door. KNOCKS.

A beat. The door slowly opens. A brown-skinned GIRL, 13, on the other side gazes up at him.

BENNETT

Hi. Uh...psychic readings?

She nods, steps back to let him through, into--

INT. TAROT SHOP - CONTINUOUS

A dim, candlelit room. A soundtrack on a CD player fills the shop with ambient OCEAN SOUNDS. Tables and shelves are stacked with OCCULT CURIOS. A BACK ROOM is partitioned by a hanging bed sheet. Behind it, a mattress on the floor, the feet of a SLEEPING GROWNUP.

The girl motions for Bennett to kneel at a low table, where a COFFEE SETTING for one sits beside a TAROT DECK.

BENNETT

Little young for coffee?

She settles down *across* the table from the coffee. Bennett motions to the back room, to the person sleeping.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

Tarot reader on a break? You gonna wake 'em up? Please?

TAROT GIRL

(Trinidadian accent)

Sit. I do your reading.

BENNETT

Uhhhh. Is this...legal?

TAROT GIRL

Doesn't matter how old I am. Time is liminal.

(MORE)

TAROT GIRL (CONT'D)

I am 90 years old and you are 9. I am being born and you are dying. Love and wisdom are the only permanent things. And love--it is the transcender. It transcends all. It defies time and space and moves like water between the worlds. So you want to know if what's in your heart is real?? You want answers?... Sit. Drink.

LATER

Bennett sits cross-legged at the table. Sets the emptied coffee cup down in front of the girl.

BENNETT

Good coffee. You make that?

She closes her eyes a moment, then gazes down into the grounds left behind at the bottom of the cup.

TAROT GIRL

Two hundred dollars.

Annoyed, Bennett opens his wallet. Exactly \$220 in twenties. He hesitates.

TAROT GIRL (CONT'D)

The rest will be enough for travel back to the airport.

Bennett curiously hands her \$200.

TAROT GIRL (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

You have a lesson to learn. We all can transcend this fear that holds you back.

BENNETT

Fear? Wha--

TAROT GIRL

Yes. Fear. What blocks you.

Unfazed by Bennett's confusion, She picks up the tarot deck. Holds it in her right hand and hovers her left over the cards as she closes her eyes.

She hands him the deck. Signals for him to shuffle. He shuffles, hands them back. In a quick, sweeping motion, she fans them out across the table.

TAROT GIRL (CONT'D)

Choose.

Bennett chooses a card. Flips it over. DEATH. He stares at the card, stricken by the coincidence.

QUICK FLASH of Dulcie pulling this card for him years ago at the Halloween party.

And as if the Tarot Girl has read his mind:

TAROT GIRL (CONT'D)

You see? Death has a lesson. She is alive. And she is dead. She is with you. And she is not with you. Space is liminal, like time. There are many realities. To have the one you want, you must believe the one you want. Face the fear. Love is waiting for you to let go.

Bennett nods. A long silence as he waits.

BENNETT

Is that it?

Off her silent nod--

EXT. TAROT SHOP - MOMENTS LATER

Bennett bursts through the door, fuming. He hails a cab.

INT. AIRPLANE - DAY

Bennett sits in his seat, numb. He pulls down the window shade, puts in his headphones, closes his eyes.

INT. JACK'S HOME - ENTRY HALL - DAY

Bennett enters and immediately stops to listen. Jack is on the phone in another room.

JACK (O.S.)

--I do, and I appreciate the call... Right, of course. It was real--but to him. I, uh, I know the feeling... I already have someone I want him to see... Thanks, you too, Robert. Be well.

A CLICK and Jack emerges, headed for the front door. He stops when he sees Bennett.

BENNETT
Flight landed early.

Jack rushes to embrace his son.

INT. PSYCHIATRIST'S OFFICE - WAITING ROOM - DAY

Bennett and Jack wait. An ADMIN sits behind the counter. DR. PARKER, late 50's, emerges from an inner door.

--She's the flight attendant who woke him on the plane.--

DR. PARKER
Hi, I'm Dr. Annalise Parker. You must be Bennett. And you must be Jack. Nice to meet you both.

Bennett eyes her, tries to place her.

DR. PARKER (CONT'D)
(to Bennett)
Come on back.
(to Jack, graciously)
Probably best if you wait out here.

Bennett follows her, wary. They enter--

DR. PARKER'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

She shuts the door and sits, gestures for Bennett to have a seat. Silence. Dr. Parker smiles. She has a comforting, motherly nature; a talent for gently delivering hard truths.

DR. PARKER
Would you like water? Or tea?

Bennett shakes his head, still trying to place her.

DR. PARKER (CONT'D)
Okay. Why don't you tell me what's been on your mind lately.

He shifts, uncomfortable.

BENNETT
S-sorry. This isn't easy for me...
Have we--uh--have we met before?

Dr. Parker gives him a long look. Thinking.

DR. PARKER
Not that I can recall.

A beat. Bennett drops the nagging familiarity--for now.

DR. PARKER (CONT'D)
What's on your mind, Bennett?

BENNETT
Well, first of all, no meds. I've seen my dad on meds, and...he's just gone. Shut down.

Dr. Parker nods her consent. He continues.

BENNETT (CONT'D)
My wife died four years ago. Or--I thought she died. But, uh, she--she...I saw her on the 29th. I spent the day with her. And my, my daughter. Who also died. In the same accident. In 2008, on the 29th of February.

Dr. Parker jots notes on a pad of paper.

BENNETT (CONT'D)
She--they had--we had a whole life. This whole other life. Like... another reality. We had all these memories. Things I've never experienced. I held my daughter. I, uh, I made love to my wife. Dulcie. I thought it was a dream at first. But she convinced me it was real. And. I believed her. And the next day they were gone again.

DR. PARKER
Do you still believe her? Do you believe she's alive?
(off his hesitation)
Do you believe she was real?

Bennett stares at the floor, fights tears. He shrugs.

DR. PARKER (CONT'D)
Reality is a funny thing. I believe that our perception is our reality. And... it seems to me that your perception might not be aligning with the collective reality. That doesn't invalidate your experience or make it not real to you.

BENNETT

Sounds like something you'd tell
one of your schizophrenics.

DR. PARKER

Do you think you're schizophrenic?

BENNETT

No.

DR. PARKER

Have you ever seen other people or
heard voices the rest of us might
not see or hear?

BENNETT

No.

DR. PARKER

So you likely had a vivid dream?

BENNETT

I don't know. Maybe.

DR. PARKER

Alright. What else do you think
could have happened?

BENNETT

(long pause)

I don't know. Have you--have you
ever heard, what if time and space
are, um, liminal?

DR. PARKER

Liminal? Like transitional?

BENNETT

Yeah. Like, everything is in
between. It's all impermanent, and
all existing at once. Like there
can be multiple "worlds" going at
the same time. And they all bend
around various quantum events...? I
sound crazy.

DR. PARKER

No, it's okay. This is good. We
have a starting point. We're
working with the possibility of an
alternate reality, and a dream
state. Which of those two do you
think is more likely?

(a beat)

(MORE)

DR. PARKER (CONT'D)
I'm no meta-physicist, but I do
find the laws of physics pretty
compelling.

Bennett doesn't reply. His silence says it all.

DR. PARKER (CONT'D)
People come to me because they're
suffering in some way. This--
(pointing to her temple)
--is so very, very powerful. But
you can harness that power. You can
decide to take your life back.
Deciding that February 29th was
probably a dream doesn't take
anything away from you. Or from
your love for your wife. That love
is real and will always be real.

Bennett nods. A trust bond is building between them.

BENNETT
What if I want it to be the real
reality?

DR. PARKER
If that's the real reality, then
what is this? This moment right
now? This feels real to me. And to
your father. If you're willing to
accept your experience as a dream,
you are acknowledging the power of
the mind and choosing to let go of
the dream as a potential reality.
Again, that doesn't mean you have
to let go of your wife or daughter.
It just means you can move forward
and begin to heal.

Bennett is visibly overwhelmed.

DR. PARKER (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
You've already taken some big steps
towards healing. Focus on that.
Navigating tragedy is a tremendous
task. You're already doing gr--

Fidgety, Bennett stands up.

BENNETT
Thank you for your time, Dr.
Parker. I think--I don't know if
this is right for me.

He leaves her office.

EXT. COFFEE SHOP - LATER

Bennett and Jack stand in line at a quaint cafe. STUDENTS and YOUNG PROFESSIONALS at the tables. Bennett looks at Jack, waiting for him to ask about the session, but his dad ignores the subject. Bennett shakes his head, frustrated.

Jack pretends to be engrossed in the menu he's holding.

They stand in tense silence. Until something in the bakery display catches Bennett's eye. He steps up to the glass, seeing something behind it that brings a huge grin to his face. He laughs a little.

BENNETT

Dad. You ever had a beignet?

JACK

A bin-what?

Next in line, Bennett steps up to the counter.

LATER - LATE AFTERNOON

Golden sunlight pours in on Bennett and Jack as they sit at a window table. They eat their beignets in happy silence.

Bennett points to a spot of powdered sugar in Jack's beard. They share a little laugh.

INT. JACK'S HOME - BENNETT'S ROOM - NIGHT

Bennett sits on the floor of his bedroom, Roseline's book in hand. Almost afraid, he opens it to a specific page and starts reading. His eyes well after a few lines. He pauses, almost puts the book down. But he continues out loud:

BENNETT

...Love has hurt us, it has drown
us in its tides and taken from us.
Love is an infinite expanse, so
deep and wide and dangerous that we
fear it may swallow us whole. We
fear both its mystery and its
translucence. We fear its vastness
and its power. But it is lifeblood
we cannot live without. To embrace
its magic, we must face it. We must
dive straight in.

QUICK FLASH of Emma's giggling face glinting like a beautiful flare of light. And Dulcie beside her. So clear and vivid, like they're right in front of him.

Shaken by the vision, he shuts the book.

INT. JACK'S HOME - OFFICE - MINUTES LATER

Dark. Then a fragment of light with a slow CREAK as Bennett opens the door to this seemingly forgotten room. As if frozen in time, a covering of dust blankets most everything. Mementos of his mother--her things--are everywhere.

Bennett creeps through, careful not to disturb the stillness. He smiles at some of the artifacts that conjure childhood memories.

A PHOTOGRAPH on the desk catches his eye. It's the only thing he picks up, clears away the dust...

Rae--seven months pregnant in her wedding dress--and Jack, on their wedding day. Absolutely beaming. She holds a bouquet of BRIGHT YELLOW DAISIES over her head like a trophy.

Disappointment sets in as he returns the photo to its place. He takes a last weary look around and leaves the room in its perpetual darkness.

EXT. JACK'S HOME - DRIVEWAY - DAY

Bennett is working away, hair getting longer again. He stains wood pieces, his usual headphones blasting. In the open garage behind him, ROWS AND ROWS OF ROCKING CHAIRS. Dozens of them. All the same.

A phone call interrupts his music. RACHEL on the caller ID, which also displays the date: SAT, FEB 28 2015. He's considering answering, until--

JACK (O.S.)
You gonna get that?

Bennett didn't realize Jack had approached. He shakes his head, sends the call to voicemail.

BENNETT
Got a lot of deliveries today.

LATER

A shining pick-up truck in the driveway. Bennett and Jack load in rocking chairs as they talk.

JACK

This is the one--that cashier that was with us for a few months, like, a couple years ago?

BENNETT

Yeah, Rachel.

JACK

Yeah, I remember her. So you like her. How long you been seeing her?

BENNETT

Pretty much since we met.

JACK

(beat, confused)
Since...you met at the store? Two years ago? You never mentioned her.

BENNETT

I'm taking my time.

JACK

That's...a lot of time.

BENNETT

I'm taking her out tonight. Gonna ask if she wants to, uh, do the girlfriend thing.

JACK

Girlfriend? After two years?
(off Bennett's annoyed
silence, carefully:)
The timing doesn't bother you?

BENNETT

The timing? What about it?

JACK

The date, Bennett. It's February 28th. The day before--

BENNETT

And tomorrow is March 1st. So what?

They load the last chair. Bennett closes the truck gate.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

Thanks for the help. Be back.

EXT. WALNUT AVE - DAY

Bennett turns onto a tree-lined suburban street. CLOSE on the corner sign--WALNUT AV.

MOMENTS LATER

Bennett pulls into a driveway, unloads two rocking chairs. He carries them to the front door and knocks, turns to observe the street while he waits.

His gaze leads to a SMALL HOUSE a few doors down. A FOR RENT SIGN on the lawn.

Bennett is drawn back to his delivery when the front door opens. A middle-aged man, Bennett's CUSTOMER, shakes Bennett's hand.

CUSTOMER
Appreciate the delivery.

MOMENTS LATER - SMALL HOUSE

Bennett stands in the street, stares at the 825 address painted on the curb.

QUICK FLASH of Bennett in the PEARSON GUEST ROOM, seeing the TAG on Dulcie's pink suitcase: *825 WALNUT AVE, LONG BEACH CA.*

Bennett studies the house. Scrutiny...familiarity. He's been here before. Perhaps many times.

He regards the contact number on the FOR RENT SIGN. Considers it a long time, before he pulls out his phone and dials.

INT. UPSCALE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Bennett and RACHEL, 25--pretty, doting in the way she looks at him. Just...not Dulcie. They sit across from each other in the low-lit ambience. Awkward silence. He's jittery and distracted. She smiles, tries to find his eyes.

BENNETT
The sea bass here is supposed to be excellent.

RACHEL
No fish for me, remember? Been full vegan for months.

BENNETT
Oh, oh, of course.

Both begin to say something and stop, overly polite; but they start laughing together. A sweet, genuine moment of ease and connection.

LATER

They eat in silence. Occasional comments about the food. Occasional overcompensating smiles.

LATER

The check comes. Bennett absently puts down his credit card.

RACHEL

You okay?

BENNETT

Actually, there was, uh, something I wanted to ask you.

She suppresses a grin, places her hands on one of his.

RACHEL

Before you ask. I just want to make sure the timing is okay.

BENNETT

The timing?

RACHEL

The date. Being so close to--

BENNETT

It's not--it's not even the right year. It's, why does everyone...?

(a beat)

Rachel. This is what I want. I think it's time for us to move this forward. I want you to be my girlfriend. If that's what you want, too.

A beat.

RACHEL

I'm sorry--your--what'd you say?

BENNETT

A relationship. I'm ready for a--

RACHEL

A relationship? What have we been doing all this time?

BENNETT

Um, we've--we've been, uh. We've--
what...did you think I was asking?

RACHEL

It's been two years, Bennett. I was
thinking a marriage proposal??

BENNETT

Well. Yeah. That's--that's,
marriage is... That's what I was
saying. I'm just, I'm not good at
this. I'm sorry. Moving this
forward, to marriage, is--

RACHEL

Bennett. It's okay, sweetie. I know
this is hard for you. Just take a
minute...and ask. Don't be nervous,
you know I love you.

She strokes his hand, gives him a sweet, nurturing smile. He
swallows...and pushes through, so determined to move on--

BENNETT

Rachel. Will you marry me?

INT. UPSCALE RESTAURANT - MEN'S BATHROOM - MINUTES LATER

Bennett rushes in. Panic. He slaps water on his face. He
leans, catches his breath, pulls out his WALLET.

A CIRCULAR INDENT in the leather, impressed there by his
WEDDING RING, which he pulls out at present. Beside it, we
also see the FOLDED, PRINTED PAGE he keeps there.

He looks at the ring, softly smiling as he spins it around
his ring finger. But then, in surge of anger--he hurls it
across the room. A CLANG echoes off the walls as it hits tile
and bounces across the floor.

He takes a few deep breaths and collects the ring. He thinks
and paces... Finally, he pulls out his cell phone and dials
ROBERT PEARSON. A JET PLANE ROARS in PRE-LAP--

EXT. CLOUD-SPECKED BLUE SKY - DAY

A COMMERCIAL AIRPLANE sails toward the sun.

EXT. LOUIS ARMSTRONG NEW ORLEANS INT'L AIRPORT - DAY

Bennett, DUFFEL BAG in tow, makes his way from BAGGAGE CLAIM. He glances over his shoulder at the carousel a couple times. Nothing unusual. No Dulcie. No Emma.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS - JACKSON SQUARE - DAY

A beautiful, sunny day. Bennett and Robert slowly stroll. They feel familiar, friendly, even though it's been years. Robert looks strangely well, almost younger than before.

People are out, enjoying the historic city. Robert and Bennett relish the silence between them. Somehow, words don't seem necessary.

After a few beats...

ROBERT
Do you love her?

Bennett can't find the words to answer.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
You came all this way for my
blessing and don't even know if you
love her?

BENNETT
I--it's--I do. I...care about her.
Very much.

ROBERT
I never married someone I cared
about very much. Dulcie's mother
and I were madly in love. You
two... kind of reminded me of me
and Roseline.

Bennett smiles, but then grapples with the assertion. Another few beats of silence. Until, across DECATUR STREET, he observes CAFE DU MONDE and tenses.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
You have my blessing.

Bennett contemplates, distracted now. A familiar anger surfacing.

BENNETT
Those books you gave me--did you--
do you... believe in the magic
stuff? I mean, do you believe, uh,
love has some kind of... magical
properties??

Robert laughs good-naturedly.

ROBERT

Ros was drawn to the metaphysics of love. Its energy, she believed was unbound by dimension. Just like in physics--the law of conservation of energy. Energy can be neither created nor destroyed. She was certain the love in one lifetime could not be destroyed, even in death.

He chuckles ironically at the memory.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

I thought it was a nice sentiment, while she was alive. A nice idea for a greeting card.

His expression edges into belief, with a shine of mystery.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Since she's been... I--I've started to believe her. In a real way.

Bennett blinks, silent. He didn't expect this, and it wasn't the response he was looking for. Robert anticipates his next question... and stops. Faces Bennett, looks at him gravely.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

It's hard to explain. I don't see Ros. Not like you've seen Dulcie. And Emma. But--we still... have conversations. She sends me signals that she's listening...

Something that would have made Robert sheepish once. Even if he could have brought himself to such vulnerability. But he stands firm in this conviction. Not a belief. It's a *knowing*.

Bennett nods, quiet, but the skepticism and resentment are loud in his set jaw and exhausted eyes. LOUD LIKE CRASHING WAVES...

QUICK FLASHES

-Of Bennett (10) and Rae (35) the day of the CORKBOARD PHOTO. She leads him into the SURGING TIDE.

-Of Dulcie, a frozen beauty in her CASKET.

INT. JACK'S HOME - BENNETT'S ROOM - NIGHT

EMPTY CARDBOARD MOVING BOXES are stacked against one wall. A few on the floor, half full. A pile of others near the door, sealed and labeled with black marker.

Bennett sits on his bed, spinning his wedding ring on his finger. He stops to pick up a FRAMED PHOTO sitting beside him. It's a candid wedding shot of him and Dulcie.

Bennett places it in a small black TRASH BAG, already full of other mementos--letters, swim medals, additional photos.

He glances OUT THE WINDOW, at the GARBAGE BINS on the curb awaiting collection.

A long beat. Defeated, he dumps the contents of the trash bag back into the beat up SHOEBOX it all must've come from, angry he can't bring himself to get rid of it.

His WEDDING RING THUDS off the side and bounces onto the bed.

Bennett hesitates, places the ring back into its well-worn spot in his wallet.

INT. WALNUT AVE HOUSE - DAY

Bennett and a PROPERTY MANAGER, 40s, stand in an empty MASTER BEDROOM. He stares up in wonder at a FAMILIAR WATER STAIN in the ceiling. A step closer. He studies it.

QUICK FLASH of the identical WATER STAIN in the PEARSON GUEST ROOM ceiling.

PROPERTY MANAGER

Leak in the roof. The owners
already scheduled a roofing company
to come next week, so you're good
there.

A long silence as Bennett continues to stare. The stain seems to swallow all sound. LIKE BEING UNDER WATER. Then--

PROPERTY MANAGER (CONT'D)

--Uh, excuse me...? Hi.

BENNETT

(snapping to)
What? --Oh, sorry. I'm sorry--

PROPERTY MANAGER

I was confirming your rental agreement. It's just you and your wife on the lease, right? No pets?

BENNETT

Yes. Just me and my--my...uh, Rachel. My fiancée. No pets.

INT. WALNUT AVE HOUSE - SERIES OF SCENES - DAY/NIGHT

Bennett and Rachel arrange furniture, unpack boxes, put things in cabinets.

He revisits the WATER STAIN in the bedroom, gazing up at it for a while. Then he returns to unpacking, eventually finding the METAPHYSICAL TEXT BOOKS Robert gave him. He puts them in a box labeled TRASH.

LATER - BACKYARD

Bennett stands on a slate patio surrounded by fresh sod, all enclosed by a BRICK RETAINING WALL. The wall is beautiful and rustic, pieced together with a mix of new and OLD BRICKS.

He's entranced by it, but can't place what feels familiar. He turns, glances up to the bedroom window--to the WATER STAIN visible from this vantage point.

QUICK FLASH - NEW ORLEANS

Dulcie leads him through the busy street.

DULCIE

--Fell off a ladder in our backyard. Hit your head on this old brick ...Twelve stitches? Right back there.

BACK TO SCENE

And now Bennett is stumbling across the YARD toward the brick wall, which he slowly touches, searching it like it has answers. He feels the back of his head.

INT. WALNUT AVE HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Bennett passes Rachel, who's wiping down KITCHEN countertops, and beelines for the--

BATHROOM

In a daze, Bennett approaches the three-way medicine cabinet mirror. Adjusts it so he can see the back of his head. Parts his hair. And there--

The SCAR he never realized he had.

He stares at it, hands now shaking. Tries to get a closer view, blinks as if he could blink it away. But it remains. His breathing quickens. He wavers, grips the edge of the sink, trying to process...

INT. PSYCHIATRIST'S OFFICE - WAITING ROOM - DAY

Bennett sits. Dr. Parker waves him into her office.

DR. PARKER'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Bennett sits across from Dr. Parker.

DR. PARKER

I'm glad you came, Bennett.

BENNETT

Don't know what else to do.

(beat)

When I was here a few years ago, I told you my wife had died--

DR. PARKER

I remember your situation.

He looks at her, relieved and thankful. But also remorseful, weighted with guilt about wanting this to be over.

BENNETT

There are these--these traces of her everywhere. Like. Signals. Like an ongoing conversation. It's... hard to explain. I just need it to stop. I'm--I want to move on.

DR. PARKER

Moving forward from a tragic event is hard. It's like it becomes a piece of you. So you have to commit like hell to what you're letting go of in order to move forward. When we hold onto the past, we leave no space in our lives for the future.

Bennett nods, knows she's right.

DR. PARKER (CONT'D)
Has this dream ever come back?

Bennett shakes his head, an air of disappointment that surprises him.

DR. PARKER (CONT'D)
Okay, that's a good thing. But just because it hasn't doesn't mean it won't. It may very well recur and feel just as real. When these dreams do recur, it's usually because the dreamer is not dealing with some present fear. There are certain lucid dreaming techniques to help...

As the session with Dr. Parker continues in V.O.--

INT./EXT. SERIES OF SCENES - DAY/NIGHT

-At the WALNUT AVE HOUSE, Bennett stands on a step stool, paint roller in hand, staring up at the WATER STAIN. Deeply conflicted. He paints over it.

DR. PARKER (V.O.)
You simply need to face whatever fear is arising within the dream. It will feel terrifying. Even crippling. But you push through. Face the fear. Wake up.

-Jack explores the untouched OFFICE in his home. Every dust-coated relic seems to have some deep significance. He opens the shutters, lets light in as he notices the WEDDING PHOTO-- the only thing cleared of dust. It's painful to look at. His wife, her belly, the DAISIES. He closes the shutters...

DR. PARKER (V.O.)
And a big piece of that is letting go of what you're holding onto. Because the things we hold on to feel comfortable, like protection. But, if we embrace the thing that scares us, we don't need all that old stuff anymore.

-Bennett jogs near the ocean. He stops a moment to gaze out at its formidable vastness.

DR. PARKER (V.O.)
I'm developing a cognitive sleep
study and I think you should
enroll...

BACK TO DR. PARKER'S OFFICE

Bennett's leery. She tries gently to sell him...

DR. PARKER
No medication involved. I think it
would give us information that
could stop this dream from
returning. Stop these--signals.

A careful pause. She grabs paperwork from her desk and hands
it to him.

DR. PARKER (CONT'D)
Here. This explains more. Covers
most of what you need to know about
the study.

Bennett considers it all as he reads the pamphlet. WE SEE a
section about "LETTING GO OF THE PAST":

INSERT ON PAMPHLET--

*Prior to the study, purge familiar places and sleep habitat
of physical reminders, photographs, mementos, etc. Such items
can signal the brain, triggering repeat dream patterns.*

DR. PARKER (CONT'D)
You'd be under surveillance every
night for maybe a week surrounding
the 29th of February. I think that
date is one of your triggers.

Bennett closes the pamphlet, shutting down. Not ready.

BENNETT
I'll think about it.

EXT. WALNUT AVE HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY

A few empty beer bottles. An empty pizza box. Jack and
Bennett stain rocking chair parts and assemble the chairs
from finished pieces.

Instead of listening to headphones, Bennett plays his music
on speakers for his dad to hear too. Both father and son bob
to the beat. Silent as they go, but they function like a well-
oiled machine. Eventually, Bennett ventures, reluctant...

BENNETT

Decided not to do the sleep thing.

JACK

(a beat)

Oh yeah? How come?

Neither looks up from his work. Bennett shrugs.

BENNETT

Seems bogus. Like getting rid of some photos is the answer. The problem is--she died. That's the problem. Not that I keep photos of her. And, and a ring.

Jack sneaks a glance at Bennett. He's got no right to judge, and knows it. He takes his time...

JACK

Your mother used to say, "Things hold energy."

QUICK FLASH of Bennett (12), in a pew of folding chairs filled with people, sand beneath them. Could be a beach wedding, but it's a funeral. Bennett's hands tremble against his black suit, clutching the FOLDED, PRINTED PAGE.

Bennett, poised as usual to say something snarky and defensive about his father's failures, has no fight.

BENNETT

I'm not doing it. Who knows if the same thing'll even happen again.

INT. WALNUT AVE HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

It's early. Bennett stirs in bed. Checks his iPhone on the nightstand. The display reads--

MON, FEB 29 2016 7:12AM

He looks over. Bed empty. A TOILET FLUSHES. He breathes. Anticipation. A DOOR CREAKS. And in walks--

Rachel. Rubbing her eyes, hair disheveled. Bennett lies back down, tries to hide his disappointment.

RACHEL

What's up?

BENNETT

Nothing.

Rachel lies her head on his chest.

RACHEL

You feeling ok? Because I can call
in sick. I can stay with you.

Bennett kisses her hand. Smiles at her.

BENNETT

Nah. I'll be fine.

Rachel nods, yawns, closes her eyes.

RACHEL

Mmmmm. Ten more minutes...

Bennett stares up at the pristine white ceiling. He kisses
Rachel's forehead, slides out from under her.

BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Bennett starts the shower. Places his iPhone on the counter
and sets his Spotify to shuffle. It plays through a small set
of Bluetooth speakers.

CALIFORNIA LOVE by TUPAC comes on as Bennett showers.

IN THE SHOWER

Bennett leans into the water. He turns the heat knob all the
way. Scalding. Steam billows up. He grits his teeth. After a
long beat, he turns the heat knob all the way off, blasts the
cold water. Freezing.

He repeats this self-inflicted torture--he can *feel*. A couple
songs later, *I WANT TO BREAK FREE* by QUEEN starts to play.

Bennett pauses, can't help but smile to himself as he
listens. But his face hardens, gaze turning upward, as if to
God, or the Universe. He's pissed.

He rolls his eyes, impatiently sings along as if forced:

BENNETT

I've got to break free--God knows,
God knows I want to break free.
I've fallen in love.

Bennett shuts off the water and steps out of the shower, cuts
the song. As he dries himself, he notices the time.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

Rachel! Wake up! You'll be late!

MASTER BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Bennett shuffles to the bed in his towel, gently shakes Rachel.

BENNETT

Rachel. Hey.

She stirs BENEATH THE COVERS, GROANS, pulls the sheets from over her head. But--

It's Dulcie. Now 29.

DULCIE

Who's Rachel?

Bennett jolts back. A long beat. His eyes shine, locked on her. He falls to his knees, lays his head on her chest. Dulcie wraps her arms around him, kisses his head.

DULCIE (CONT'D)

Huh? Who's this Rachel?

BENNETT

Nobody. It doesn't matter. It was just, just a weird dream.

DULCIE

You got a girlfriend?

Bennett kisses her chest, her neck, her cheek, her lips, adamantly shaking his head.

DULCIE (CONT'D)

Better not. I'll whoop your ass.

Bennett doesn't waste a moment. He removes his towel and gets into bed, pulls the covers back over both of them. Dulcie GIGGLES, GROANS with pleasure.

Muffled, from under the covers:

DULCIE (CONT'D)

I have morning breath.

BENNETT

I don't care.

DULCIE

I'm gonna be late for work!

BENNETT

I don't care.

INT. WALNUT AVE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Bennett sits across the kitchen table from Emma, now 7, a booster seat in her chair. He stares at her in wonder and adoration as she eats oatmeal.

She notices Bennett watching her, gives him a big grin, missing two front teeth.

EMMA

What Daddy?

BENNETT

Nothing. Just can't believe what a big girl you are.

EMMA

Mom says it's cuz of this.
(re: the oatmeal)
But it tastes like snails.

BENNETT

Oh really? When did you taste a snail?

Emma's eyes go wide with mischief. She giggles and holds a finger to her lips, *ssshhhh*. Bennett laughs, gets up and fixes her a bowl of sugar cereal. He copies her gesture of silence. She smiles, nods. Their secret.

Dulcie enters on the fast clicking of her heels. Dressed to the nines in a suit. Bennett ogles her, but then--

BENNETT (CONT'D)

Wait, you're not actually leaving are you? You said--

Dulcie pours coffee into a travel mug.

DULCIE

I was kidding. You know I can't miss court--Oh, baby, what did you give her?

Bennett and Emma share a silly look.

DULCIE (CONT'D)

And what are you doing acting all casual? Your USMLE is in four days.

Bennett looks puzzled. Emma whispers to him--

EMMA

Gargantuan doctor test.

BENNETT

(winks at Emma)

It's our anniversary. I'll study tomorrow.

Dulcie rolls her eyes. Searches the pantry--

DULCIE

We already celebrated last weekend, and Bennett--I swear to god--that is a thousand dollar test. Where are my protein bars? ...Oh, here.

She puts one in her purse, grabs her coffee, rounds the table to kiss Emma, then Bennett. He stands and holds her back from leaving, pretends it's play. Grinning, he checks the tag in the back of her shirt.

BENNETT

As I suspected; made of 100% pure sugar.

This earns him a reminiscent laugh from her, a surprised, wondrous look. He holds her tight, bites her shoulder.

DULCIE

What are you--stop. I have to go.

BENNETT

Call one of the partners to cover you. Please.

DULCIE

I have a solo practice! Move.

She struts for the door again. Bennett blocks her.

BENNETT

Wait! Wait. Stay. Please. Dulcie. What day is today.

It's not a question, but a prompt. Dulcie stops, looks at him again, closer now. She knows what day it is, of all days.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

You remember the last anniversary? Four years ago, in New Orleans?

Dulcie remembers. She cocks her head--is this a joke? He blinks, face set. No joke. She averts her eyes, thinking.

DULCIE

...Uhhh. Okay. You're taking Emma to her swim meet later. Yeah?

Bennett turns to Emma, pleasantly surprised. She beams at him. Swim is their thing. Dulcie searches his face, pulls out her phone and taps buttons, frenzied. A little frustrated.

DULCIE (CONT'D)

(tapping away)

So. You don't remember...okay. I'm texting you the address of the meet. Do not be late, they're in the finals. I'll meet you there. And we'll talk about this then. Okay? I love you, I have to--wait, oh my god. You know you're taking her to school, right?

BENNETT

School? It's already... 8:30.

DULCIE

Yes, Bennett, children go to school on Mondays. She starts at nine.

BENNETT

Nine? Since when does school start at nine?

Dulcie tries to contain her vexation.

DULCIE

Since we won the charter lottery.
(to Emma)
I love you baby.

Dulcie gives Bennett a quick kiss, then side-steps him and rushes out the door. He watches her go, listens to her CLICK-CLACK down the driveway. A CAR STARTS. She's gone.

Fuming, anguished, he kicks a chair over. Emma startles.

BENNETT

Sorry. I'm sorry sweetie.

He rights the chair and sits in it. Pours himself cereal.

INT./EXT. LEXUS SUV - DAY

Bennett drives. Emma is in the back, in her car seat. She points. Bennett makes a right turn. He glances at her in the rearview, wanting to know her but not wanting to scare her with too many questions.

He turns on the radio, flips through. Immediately--

EMMA

(singing, bopping)
Shake it off, shake it off--uh-oh-
oh!! Shake it off, shake it off!

Emma joins in mid-Taylor Swift. Despite Bennett's obvious distaste for the song, he watches his daughter in adoration. Her enthusiasm is contagious.

Bennett blasts the volume and bops along with Emma, messing up the lyrics as he goes.

BENNETT

Players gonna play play play play
play and the something, ba-da-da-da-
fake fake fake.

Emma delights in their sing-along, laughing and getting even more into it.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

Hey Emma, what if we played hooky
today and I didn't take you to
school?

EMMA

But I like school.

BENNETT

You do? Okay then, school it is.
(sotto)
You are your mother's daughter.

EXT. CHARTER SCHOOL - DAY

Bennett walks hand in hand with Emma toward the entrance. Like an inside joke, they quietly sing:

BENNETT/EMMA

Haters gonna hate hate hate hate
hate...

BENNETT (PRE-LAP)

Would it be okay if I observe her
classes today?

They enter the school.

INT. CHARTER SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

Bennett stands in the middle of a second grade classroom talking to the teacher, "MISS AMANDA".

MISS AMANDA

Of course. Long as I can use you as a volunteer.

BENNETT

Sure. Definitely.

LATER - SERIES OF SCENES

Bennett has the time of his life with Emma and her schoolmates. He reads to the class, paints and glues with them during art, helps with their handwriting, plays with them at recess, coaches them during PE.

EXT. COMMUNITY SWIMMING POOL - DAY

Bennett and Emma are parked in a lot that serves a beach-front, outdoor community pool. He gets her out of the car in her yellow bathing suit, swim cap, and goggles.

EMMA

Ready coach!

Coach. He shakes his head.

INSIDE THE POOL ARENA - MINUTES LATER

Bennett stands with Emma and the rest of the DUCKLINGS, giving them high-fives. A few onlooking PARENTS wave to him from the BLEACHERS. He nervously waves back, then realizes--

One of them is his dad. Jack smiles, cheerful, as Bennett makes his way over.

BENNETT

Dad??

JACK

Hey Bennett.

Bennett looks around, then back at his father a beat too long. Jack gives him a sidelong stare. He shifts, awkward.

JACK (CONT'D)

Things better now? With Dulcie?
Takes work, ya know... She--uh,
mentioned it to me.

Bennett thinks a second, thrown off. He looks to Jack now for an unspoken answer, but there's none to be found.

BENNETT

Trying. I'm trying.

LATER

Kids are lined up at the edge of the pool, Emma among them. Coaches hover at the edge with their swimmers. Bennett is about as far from the pool as possible.

A WHISTLE BLOWS. The kids jump in, some try to dive.

LATER

Bennett cheers. Emma comes in first place by a stretch.

BENNETT

Yeah! That's my girl!

Bennett suddenly spots Dulcie in the bleachers next to Jack. She waves to him. Seeing her stops his heart, like always. He waves her over. She joins him poolside as Emma runs into Bennett's arms.

DULCIE

(to Emma)

Good swim, baby.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

(to Emma)

So proud of you!

Hugs and kisses. He sets her down, watches her run to Jack, who awaits her with an open towel. Bennett turns to Dulcie.

DULCIE

Hi. Sorry I was so flustered this morning. I'd--I'd forgotten... I mean, I--

BENNETT

It's okay. Hi. Our daughter is incredible.

DULCIE

I know. She's our little trouble-maker. Our little fish.

Bennett's eyes shine with grief. Dulcie watches him, baffled.

DULCIE (CONT'D)

Bennett, you and I--we've... I don't understand--

BENNETT

My dad asked... Are we not okay?

Dulcie goes tense. Silent. She takes a big breath and shakes her head. But seeing him vulnerable, she's reassured:

DULCIE

We're okay.

BENNETT

I don't know what you are. Or how.
Or what's happening. Every day but
this one, I live in a different
world.

It hurts her, hearing this. Her eyes well up, search the ground as if their memories are written there. She's scanning them, recalling their lifetime together.

DULCIE

Feels like that when you are here.
Sometimes. You--you're closed. It's
like... you're mad at me. Because--

BENNETT

I love you.

DULCIE

Exactly. Does it scare you? Loving
me too much? You ever think that?
(a beat, silence)
Bennett, you just. Need to open up.
Talk about stuff.

Eventually, she finds his face again, finds him staring at her. That breathless, all-consumed look in his eyes.

BENNETT

I'll talk about whatever you want.

She nods, wipes at her eyes and gives him a smirk. It grows into a wide grin as she glances around. Everyone's watching the next meet. Bennett smiles now at her mischief.

Dulcie takes his hand and drags him to a WALLED OFF AREA on the way to the restrooms.

She leans into him, giggling as they press against the wall. He wraps his arms around her and laughs, relishing this moment, until her muffled laughter subsides. He kisses her hard, hands roaming... But then--

A SWIM MOM marches behind the wall, headed for the bathroom. She stops when she sees them. Bennett and Dulcie release each other.

SWIM MOM

--I--sorry... I can--

Embarrassed, she stumbles back the way she came. Dulcie and Bennett burst into laughter, her mouth hangs open--he's in trouble.

DULCIE

Ooohhh... Lizzie's mom! Of all the moms! You're gonna get an eemaaaiil.

Bennett grabs a dry TOWEL hanging from a nearby hook, pulls Dulcie close again and throws it over their heads.

UNDER THE TOWEL

Their giggling continues. Bennett shakes his head, puts a finger over Dulcie's mouth, his grin huge... but then slowly collapsing as he looks at her. He'll lose her again tomorrow.

She shakes her head, adamantly protesting his grief. She whispers, assuring him:

DULCIE (CONT'D)

We'll figure it out. We're gonna figure it out.

INT. WALNUT AVE HOUSE - SERIES OF SCENES - NIGHT

AT HOME Bennett and Dulcie cook spaghetti. Bennett takes breaks to show Emma how to throw noodles at the wall. In EMMA'S BEDROOM, she falls asleep as Bennett finishes a bedtime story. Dulcie leads Bennett to a BOOKSHELF where she retrieves "*LOVE AND THE SACRED MULTIVERSE*."

MASTER BEDROOM - LATER

Dulcie and Bennett sit in bed. She holds her mother's book open in her lap.

DULCIE

It could help. Give us answers. Just this one chapter.

She finishes, holds it out to him. He looks at her, glances at the book, then takes it and lays it open-face on the bed. He takes her in his arms, resigned to tomorrow.

DULCIE (CONT'D)

(sighs, exasperated)
At least read it.

LATER

Dulcie lies asleep on Bennett's chest. He stares up at the re-emerged WATER STAIN.

INT. WALNUT AVE HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Morning. Bennett opens his eyes, lying in the exact same position we last saw him. No Dulcie. FOOTSTEPS approach and--

Rachel appears, leaning over him, pulling the blanket over his shoulders. She holds a hand to his forehead.

RACHEL
How do you feel?

He looks up at her, the loss of Dulcie and Emma sinking in once again.

BENNETT
Like, uh, like my chest has been crushed. It's hard to breathe.

She wipes a tear at the corner of his eye.

RACHEL
Yeah. You were pretty gone. Sick, sleeping most of the day.
(a beat)
I know you dream about her.

Bennett doesn't know what to say.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Keep sleeping. I have to get to work, but your dad's on his way.

She kisses his cheek and heads for the door.

Once she's gone, he finds, lost amid the ruffled bedding, "LOVE AND THE SACRED MULTIVERSE" open-face-down just like he left it. Across the room, the box labeled TRASH sits open.

KITCHEN TABLE - LATER

Bennett and Jack sit across from each other, sipping coffee. Bennett stares at the chair Emma sat in yesterday morning.

BENNETT
You were there this time. You spoke to Dulcie. And you held Emma. You called her your granddaughter.

Jack sits in weary silence.

BENNETT (CONT'D)
And the way you held her was--

JACK

You can't live the rest of your life dreaming of your dead wife and kid every four years. Seeing me seeing your dead wife and kid.

BENNETT

What if it's not a dream, Dad? What if it's something else?

JACK

What else?

BENNETT

What if she's--

JACK

Stop! Whatever this is, it has to stop. I had to face it. And you have to face it. I dread going to sleep at night, because I know there's a chance I'll see her. And fall in love with her all over again. But she's not here, is she? Do you see her? I can barely look at a yellow fucking flower. But I'm still trying to live my life.

Bennett relents, shocked to see his dad express this much. Jack stands from the table, storms off.

INT. WALNUT AVE HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Bennett wakes up early--can't sleep. He slips out of bed, puts on running shorts. Kisses Rachel, sneaks out.

EXT. BEACH - DAY - LATER

Bennett jogs along a paved path until he comes to the COMMUNITY POOL. A junior swim-meet is in progress. He stops to watch from afar, smiling at the memory.

INT. WALNUT AVE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Bennett sits on the couch, still in his running shorts. His cell phone in hand, Roseline's BOOK in the other--from which he removes the TAROT & PSYCHIC READINGS CARD, tattered now after years. He glances around, then dials the number.

RECORDING

Dee...dee...dee...we're sorry, this number has been disconnected or--

Bennett hangs up.

INT./EXT. MONTAGE - DAY/NIGHT

-Bennett and Rachel go to CAKE TASTINGS and EVENT VENUES. He feigns happiness, really trying to move on this time.

-Bennett rifles through the REFRIGERATOR, dances to his ear buds. Rachel approaches with a BRIDAL MAGAZINE, but stops, her face twisted with strange curiosity as he sings: "Players gonna play play play...Shake it off, uh-shake it off--uh-oh-oh," taking no notice of her.

-Bennett and Jack eat pizza and drink beer late at NIGHT in CARTER'S HARDWARE. Inventory. Jack opens up about Bennett's mother with a funny story. They both laugh cautiously at first, but it builds to hysterical laughter.

-Bennett and Rachel in the BATHROOM, get ready for bed. Don't talk, don't touch, barely look at each other.

INT. WALNUT AVE HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

It's dusk. Dressed in a casual gray suit, Bennett looks out the window with an intense stare. A FULL GLASS OF WHISKY on the sill.

In the ceiling above him, the WATER STAIN is a faint presence, seeping back through the paint.

BENNETT'S POV: 40 or 50 FAMILY MEMBERS AND FRIENDS gather in the BACKYARD. A fancy setup of tables and chairs.

SLOW FOOTSTEPS APPROACH. It's Rachel coming down the hall, almost reticent. She paces into the room.

RACHEL

Gonna miss your own rehearsal dinner.

A thick silence. Bennett tries to make light of the tension.

BENNETT

Speaking of which, c'mon, there's a party downstairs.

He smiles, extends his hand. She doesn't take it.

RACHEL
Wow. That's a record.

BENNETT
A record?

RACHEL
You can't stand to actually be with me. Like, just *be*.

BENNETT
That's not true.

But it is. A long silence. Everything they both already know passes between them. *It's over*. Bennett sighs--a confession.

BENNETT (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, Rachel.

RACHEL
It's weird, it's like--like you don't want to love her so much, but at the same time you don't trust that it's--it's enough, or something. When you love someone, they're never really gone. She, of all people, should've taught you that by now. You don't have to carry your wedding ring around in your wallet to prove she existed. And you don't have to, like, deprive yourself of love. I've never seen someone so deathly afraid of love--it literally gives you nightmares.

She lets out a long breath. Relieved. Then, with a small smile, she extends a hand to him. He takes it.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Let's tell everyone after dinner. We can still enjoy the night. I'll call the site, cancel the vendors for tomorrow. Let's just keep pretending a few more hours.

He nods. They walk out together.

INT. JACK'S HOME - HALLWAY/OFFICE - NIGHT

Bennett approaches the door to this forgotten room. His gray suit is slightly wrinkled and disheveled, shirt half unbuttoned.

The door is ajar, a light glowing from inside casts a sliver into the hall. Before entering, Bennett places a hand on the door, on a paper we've never seen... Scotch-taped there for a lifetime, it looks like...

It's torn, sun-faded and yellowed. A large crossed out circle is drawn in FRANTIC RED MARKER, in the middle simply reads:

MOM'S ROOM. NO REMOVING MOM'S THINGS

A surge of silence swells up around Bennett, staring at the sign...the HOLLOW RUSH OF BEING UNDER WATER, as--

QUICK FLASH of Bennett (12) frantically drawing this sign.

Bennett blinks, pushes the door open to find Jack sitting on the floor, taking it all in for the thousandth time. A big PLASTIC BIN beside him. Bennett watches his dad a moment.

BENNETT

You weren't supposed to appease me,
Dad. You weren't supposed to let me
decide--

(a beat, he chokes back
tears)

You were the adult. You were
supposed to clean this stuff up.

Jack rises to his feet and hugs Bennett.

JACK

You're not the reason for this,
Benny. I wanted to hold on, too.

He pulls back, looks at his crying son. Jack fights his aversion to intimacy, digs deep for the strength to admit:

JACK (CONT'D)

But I shouldn't have. And it's time
to let go.

Bennett nods in agreement. Both look around the room, wondering where to start. What can they possibly let go of? Jack nudges the empty bin with his foot, and they begin.

They start on opposite sides of the room, filling the bin with books, figurines, a pair of reading glasses, a sweater on a chair...

BENNETT

...Did you know I have a scar on my
head? Twelve stitches. You remember
how I got 'em?

Jack shakes his head. He smiles.

JACK

You got into all kinds of trouble as a kid. I'm sure your mom would have the exact moment memorized. What you were wearing. How she washed out the blood so it wouldn't stain.

WE HOLD on Bennett, finding a smile. And hope.

DR. PARKER (PRE-LAP)

I'm not surprised it happened again. Wish you'd come to me sooner. It was definitely different this time?...

INT. PSYCHIATRIST'S OFFICE - DAY

Bennett sits in his usual spot across from Dr. Parker. Lost in his thoughts, but listening. She watches him.

DR. PARKER

...Recurring lucid dreams are usually repeats.

BENNETT

No, it was different. Different day, she and Emma were both older. I mean, literally it was like, just a day four years later. Our--the anniversary.

DR. PARKER

(sighs)

You're ready to let this go? There's one spot left in the sleep study. I already recommended another patient, but I can bump her.

Bennett nods; this is exactly what he came for.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Bennett sits at a table, studying from a MEDICAL TEXT. A stack of MEDICAL BOOKS and BACKPACK beside him. His hair is short and shaggy. He looks stressed, but well focused.

A WOMAN'S LAUGH grabs his attention. He looks up to find--

Rachel nods, looks to Graham as she follows Bennett away from the line to a more secluded corner.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

I'm glad to see you happy. And. I just wanted to say that I did care about you. Really, Rachel.

Rachel nods, assesses the shine in his eyes. Like a boy who never lost hope, instead of the bitterness he used to carry.

RACHEL

You're still in love with her. All these years. But you seem... like you're not trying to fight it now. Like, okay with it.

BENNETT

I'm getting my life back. The med school thing. And finally doing that sleep study soon. So... the dreams'll be gone.

RACHEL

Oh yeah. Leap year. The 29th is just a few days away.

(beat)

I...I hope you figure it out.

BENNETT

Yeah, thanks. I think I will. I'll let you get back to your coffee. And Graham. Congratulations again.

She smiles, walks away into Graham's arms.

INT. WALNUT AVE HOUSE - VARIOUS ROOMS - DAY

TRASH BAG in hand, Bennett scours the HOUSE, collecting every remnant of Dulcie. LETTERS, PHOTOS, SWIM MEDALS. He grabs a WINE BOTTLE-TURNED CANDLE HOLDER from the DINING ROOM.

QUICK FLASH of Bennett and Dulcie in his COLLEGE APARTMENT, polishing off this BOTTLE OF WINE and laughing all night.

He grabs a BROKEN AND GLUED-TOGETHER DISH from the KITCHEN.

QUICK FLASH of Dulcie and Bennett arguing at breakfast in his COLLEGE APARTMENT. She stands, drops her PLATE, it breaks.

He grabs the Halloween SUPERMAN T-SHIRT from his BEDROOM.

QUICK FLASH of Dulcie asleep in his COLLEGE BED, wearing only this SUPERMAN T-SHIRT.

The trash bag is full now. He takes his WEDDING RING out of his WALLET. A beat as he spins it around his ring finger. ...He puts it back--alongside the FOLDED, PRINTED PAGE.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - DAY

Bennett sits among a handful of other waiting PATIENTS. At the COUNTER an ADMIN calls:

ADMIN
Bennett Carter!

Bennett approaches. She hands him a STACK OF PAPERWORK on a clipboard.

ADMIN (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Here for the sleep study?
(off his nod)
Fill all this out and turn it in to
room 517 on the fifth floor.

He nods, looks at the paperwork, which has HIS NAME and the DATE already printed: **FEBRUARY 28TH, 2020.**

ELEVATOR - LATER

Bennett stands, eyes closed, head rested back against the wall as the elevator climbs. He's tired, ready for the end of all this. DING! The doors slide open.

He opens his eyes to exit, but not before noticing--

THAT GODDAMNED WATER STAIN in the tiled elevator ceiling. Distinct. It's the same one as everywhere else.

He stares a while. The doors almost close, but the next RIDER steps in--looks to Bennett expectantly. Bennett finally finds his way out into the--

HALLWAY

Perplexed, he continues down the hall and spots room 517.

INT. SLEEP CLINIC/ROOM 517 - DAY

Bennett lies on a wide HOSPITAL BED, wearing a GOWN, as a TECHNICIAN quietly goes about prepping EQUIPMENT nearby. Dr. Parker stands beside him.

DR. PARKER

You ready? We start with tonight
and four consecutive nights after.
(off his nod)
You've been doing very well.
Nothing to be nervous about.

Bennett takes a deep breath, nods. She smiles, reaches over him with her STETHOSCOPE, listens to his heart a few times.

DR. PARKER (CONT'D)

Deep breath.
(a beat, she listens)
This is going to be it for you,
Bennett. No more dreams. Just one
reality.

She leans over him a little further, and as she does--

QUICK FLASH - AIRPLANE

Bennett awakens to Dr. Parker leaning over him in his seat eight years ago.

DR. PARKER (CONT'D)

Sir, we've landed. It's a quarter
past seven. Everyone has de-planed.

FOCUS on her NAMETAG--a wings emblem and the name PARKER.

BACK TO SCENE

Bennett jolts, causing Dr. Parker to flinch backward. He shoots to a seated position, heart pounding, trying to wrap his head around what he just remembered.

QUICK FLASH - TAROT SHOP

The TAROT GIRL reads his cards eight years ago.

TAROT GIRL

Space is liminal, like time. There
are many realities. To have the one
you want, you must believe the one
you want.

BACK TO SCENE

He stares into Dr. Parker's face, certain: *there's more than
just one reality.*

BENNETT

I have to go. I have to go to the
bathroom. I have to go.

Dr. Parker jumps aside as he runs from the room.

INT. LAX AIRPORT - NIGHT

Bennett rushes through the airport.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS LA - TAROT SHOP - NIGHT

An Uber pulls up. Bennett gets out, walks to the front door.

His soft knock pushes the door ajar, as if inviting him inside. He steps in to find--

INT. TAROT SHOP - CONTINUOUS

A dark room but for dozens of lit CANDLES. The TAROT GIRL stands before him. But now she's 25. And about eight months PREGNANT. Her Trini accent is still thick:

TAROT GIRL

You know 12 is a sacred number?
Considered perfect. A symbol of
God's authority. A mathematical
keystone of the creation of the
Universe.

Bennett doesn't know how to respond. Bad idea, coming here?

She motions for him to sit in the same place he did years ago. This time on the table are several SILVER ROCKS, a bottle of WHISKEY, a bag of BLACK SAND, and an OUTDATED PIECE OF MEDICAL MACHINERY. Bennett takes it all in.

The tarot girl goes about dousing each of the rocks in whiskey as she speaks--

TAROT GIRL (CONT'D)

"As Jesus went, the crowds pressed around Him, including a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had spent all her money on physicians, but no one was able to heal her. She came up behind Jesus and touched the fringe of His cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped..." Luke 8:43.

Finished dousing the stones, she begins arranging them in a large circle on the floor.

TAROT GIRL (CONT'D)

Twelve Tribes of Israel. Twelve disciples of Christ. Twelve constellations of the zodiac. Twelve months in a year. Twelve hours of day and night. Twelve musical notes in an octave.

(beat)

Twelve years for you to let go. To believe. And to return.

She looks at him. He gets it now, but there are still parts he's piecing together.

QUICK FLASH of Bennett's mom in bed, frail, reading from a BOOK, the cover out of focus or obscured by shadow.

BENNETT

...Let go...of the fear of love.
...And believe that love can create any reality.

A broad smile spreads across the tarot girl's face--a satisfied teacher with an "A" student.

TAROT GIRL

That was Death's lesson. You learned it, yes? And you've come to cross back to a different reality.

Bennett's eyes well up as he struggles to believe.

BENNETT

How?

Stones now arranged in a circle, she pats the floor in the middle of them.

TAROT GIRL

Lie here.

Bennett does as she says, lies down in the center. She begins sprinkling the black sand on each stone. It sticks, magnetic.

TAROT GIRL (CONT'D)

With this spell, we attract the quantum portal. But to find it, and to cross over, you must face your anchor.

Bennett reflects on this.

BENNETT

My anchor?

TAROT GIRL

It is... your fear. And your belief. But also much more. It is a tether within you. It binds you to everything, good and bad. Your pain, your hopes and dreams. Like... a fracture in time, a moment when everything changed. You are bound to that moment like an anchor. Your anchor will lead you to the portal. When it does, *follow*.

BENNETT

Sounds the same as a quantum event.

She smiles.

TAROT GIRL

They are cosmic mirrors of each other, much the same. But a quantum event is a divergence from one's intended path. An anchor introduces a new path for one to choose.

BENNETT

How will I know what the anchor is?

TAROT GIRL

It manifests differently for everyone, because the fracture is different for everyone. Could be a feeling, or a leaf on the wind. You will know it, trust me.

BENNETT

What if I don't see it? Or feel it?

TAROT GIRL

Then you do not believe after all. And you will wake up here. But *believing is seeing*. If you truly believe, you will see.

Bennett's chest heaves with anticipation and dread.

The tarot girl finishes with the sand, takes the outdated medical device, equipped with cords and electrodes, and sticks two of the electrodes onto his temples. He flinches--

BENNETT

Whoa. What's that?

TAROT GIRL

EEG. Old, but it works. I monitor your heart so you don't die. Crossing a portal is hard on the physical body. An object helps if I need it. A memory. You have one?

He pulls out his WALLET, places it aside on the carpet.

BENNETT

My wedding ring. It's in there.

She nods, lifts his shirt, sticks more of the wires onto his chest and abdomen. He flinches again.

TAROT GIRL (CONT'D)

Cold, I know.

She finishes. Stands and EXITS FRAME.

TAROT GIRL (O.S.)(CONT'D)

Find your anchor. Follow. Cross the portal. You'll be fine.

She returns, crouches down and offers him a full shot glass.

TAROT GIRL (CONT'D)

Whiskey. Help you sleep. I would take one, too, but--
(re: her belly)
not now.

He takes the shot, hands her the glass.

TAROT GIRL (CONT'D)

Okay. We are ready. Oh--one more thing. This is important, do not forget. Tell your father it's her.

BENNETT

Huh? Tell him it's her? What does he have to do with this?

TAROT GIRL

Don't argue. Just tell him. Okay, now we are ready. Don't be nervous.

Bennett breathes deep. Nervous. His vision is BLURRING. She smiles down at him, pulls up her sleeves in preparation to begin some incantation. Revealing--

A TATTOO of the VEVE DE ERZULIE on her forearm.

Bennett stares, astounded. But he's too intoxicated to make sense of it...

BENNETT

Your tattoo. It's... You nev--you never told me...your name...

TAROT GIRL

(smile widening)
Roseline.

She SNAPS HER FINGERS, and--

INT. WALNUT AVE HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

QUEEN'S *I WANT TO BREAK FREE* blasts Bennett awake. He bolts up in bed, scrambles for the nightstand to silence his phone. He finds it--a blank face that only reads:

SAT, FEB 29 2020 7:30AM

There's no song playing from it, no recent apps open. Nonetheless, the song has stopped--now only an echo in his mind that turns into FAST FOOTSTEPS bombing down the hallway outside. Into the rooms bursts--

Emma, now 11 years old.

Giggling with mischief, like always, she pounces on him. He wraps his arms around her, laughing, trying not to cry. She's so big.

INT. TAROT SHOP - NIGHT

Bennett jolts in response to stimulus, but remains asleep. Roseline observes him as she quietly prays over him.

A tear slides from the corner of Bennett's eye. Roseline turns on the EEG machine. Its BEEP is steady.

INT. WALNUT AVE HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - SAME

Emma sprawls on top of Bennett, finding herself hilarious. She whispers--

EMMA

Wake up, Daddy.

For a split-second, she's in a halo of light. It flashes, then disappears, jarring him a bit.

He wipes a tear from his temple and launches her into the air. She soars above him, propped up on his feet.

DULCIE (O.S.)
(approaching)
Emma! I know you didn't wake your
father...
(appears in doorway)
When I told you not to.

Emma is caught red handed, mid-air.

Dulcie, now 33, gives her a look.

DULCIE (CONT'D)
C'mon. It's not funny. Let's go.
Your dad had a long ICU shift last
night, we need to let him sleep.

Bennett knows not to challenge her. He lowers Emma.

EMMA
Sorry Daddy.

His heart breaks a little.

BENNETT
Oh, no--don't--never be sorry for
that...

He winks at her. She grins and runs for the hall. Dulcie smacks her playfully on the butt as she passes.

DULCIE
I'll be right down, trouble!
Pancakes. Blueberries or bananas,
you choose.

Dulcie walks over to the bed, sits beside Bennett.

DULCIE (CONT'D)
You got this look in your eyes
right now. It's like--oh, to even
explain it... like even crazier
than the first night we met. Like,
mesmerized.

BENNETT
Mesmerized? I was mesmerized the
night we met? At Theta?

DULCIE
Damn straight. I could see it. Like
I see it now. I am the whole world.
(MORE)

DULCIE (CONT'D)

I am everything that brings you happiness. And everything that brings you pain. So is she.

She places her forehead against his, holds his face. Again, the halo of light. It flashes and then disappears, this time with a faint BEEP. The EEG.

DULCIE (CONT'D)

We're right here, my love. We've never left.

Bennett pulls her against him. Holds onto her tight, afraid his real life is pulling him back. Afraid Dr. Parker is right. A long thoughtful silence.

She looks up at him, waiting for him to say something--gives a disappointed nod and wipes her cheeks when he doesn't.

BENNETT

Dul--

Dulcie SNIFFS, then sniffs louder, changing the subject. She giggles as she sniffs his neck, his chest, his armpits.

DULCIE

Puh! You stanky.

BENNETT

Oh, you got jokes? You got jokes?!

He jumps out of bed, slings her over his shoulder, and carries her toward the hall.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

I'll show you who's stanky!

BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Bennett carries Dulcie into the bathroom, haphazardly starts the shower and steps in with her. Both fully clothed. She squeals, now laughing hysterically.

DULCIE

Bennett Carter! Bennett! Don't--

INSIDE THE SHOWER

He sets her down beneath the water, himself already soaked. Doesn't try to hide how mesmerized he is; openly studies her face, now 12 years older than the day they got married.

They kiss, start peeling off clothes.

INT. WALNUT AVE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Bennett and Dulcie enter in bathrobes. Emma has a stack of pancakes on a plate beside the stove. She's monitoring two more on the griddle. Bennett is impressed...but concerned.

DULCIE

She's fine. Every Saturday. Grab these please.

She hands him the plate of pancakes, takes Emma's spatula.

DULCIE (CONT'D)

Go eat with Daddy. I'll finish these, thank you my darling.

Emma grabs fixings and heads to the table. Bennett watches her eat, no less amazed than the last time.

DULCIE (CONT'D)

Sweet-pea, grab your equations book when you finish breakfast.

EMMA

(off Emma's frown)
But it's Funday.

DULCIE

Uh-uh. I don't wanna see that face. Turn it upside-down for Funday. Just a few word problems.

Bennett makes a quick pouty face at Emma, commiserating with her. They stifle their laughter with pancakes.

EXT. BEACH CLIFFS - DAY

Bennett, Dulcie, and Emma hike downward along steep bluffs, each wearing a backpack, all bundled in fleece. It's cold and windy, but the sun is shining.

Emma runs ahead of them, jumping off rocks, picking flowers.

Bennett gazes out at the expanse, the sun bouncing off its glass surface to the horizon. It looks endless, overwhelming. He stares eerily over the edge, until--

BEEP! Louder than before. It seems to echo from the sky, like a crack of lightning, snapping him to the present. He looks to Dulcie. She didn't hear it. BEEP BEEP!

INT. TAROT SHOP - NIGHT

Roseline hovers her hands over Bennett, who's gone rigid, fists clenched, as if bracing for impact. The EEG BEEP quickens. She regards it with some concern.

DULCIE (PRE-LAP)
Bennett? ...Bennett!

EXT. BEACH CLIFFS - SAME

He didn't realize he'd stopped walking. Dulcie looks back at him from a ways ahead.

DULCIE
What are you doing? C'mon.

EXT. BEACH - LATER

Dulcie and Bennett put up a BEACH TENT. Emma hands them the parts and pieces they need as they go. Bennett stops a beat, again wary of the ocean...

BENNETT
You don't think we're a little too close to the water?

She turns, surveys the ocean very seriously.

DULCIE
A tidal wave might get us...

A smirk betrays her. He races after her. She runs, laughs as he tackles her to the sand.

LATER

Backpacks unpacked, blankets laid out, the three of them lay half-in, half-out of the tent. Bennett pulls a few thermoses and sandwiches out of a small cooler, along with a small box of assorted dark and white chocolates.

Dulcie and Emma go over a math problem in her book.

LATER

All three of them huddle together in the tent beneath blankets; Emma sandwiched between Bennett and Dulcie. They watch the sunset. Dulcie eyes him with lingering disappointment.

Bennett steals a glance at Dulcie and Emma, looks back toward the setting sun. And the ocean. He glances around, looking for his anchor, for the portal...anything.

LATER - DUSK

All packed up, they head inland. Dulcie hugs a shivering Emma. Bennett scans the area frantically as they walk towards the PARKING LOT. Still...nothing unusual. Dulcie watches him.

DULCIE (CONT'D)
(hands Emma car keys)
Oooooh!! So cold! You know what baby, why don't you run ahead and get that heater going in the car.

Emma takes the keys, runs for the car. They slow their pace once she's gone, Dulcie now free to air her frustration:

DULCIE (CONT'D)
Bennett. Talk to me for Christ's sake! I need you to open up.

Bennett contemplates. Then--

BENNETT
You never told me your mom was from Trinidad.
(Off Dulcie's strange look)
Her accent. Beautiful woman. And funny. I like her.

Dulcie goes quiet. Perplexed, wondering if he's joking.

BENNETT (CONT'D)
She's helping me. I'm with her right now. Lying down with a bunch of rocks.

He laughs. Dulcie's expression edges toward astonishment-- This is sounding familiar to her.

BENNETT (CONT'D)
Today was supposed to be it, Dulcie. She told me I'm supposed to cross the portal back to you. I'm supposed to see an anchor. But--

Dulcie stops walking.

DULCIE
An anchor??

She stares at Bennett, caught between disbelief and confusion. The sun has dropped behind the horizon now.

BENNETT

Yeah. Why? You know what that is?

Dulcie doesn't seem to hear him. She fights tears, but they surge. She knows it's really all true now. He's been someplace else. Distracted, she looks around, up at the sky, at her own hands--at Bennett. Fascinated.

DULCIE

(sotto, amazed)

We're between the worlds.

Bennett blinks. Though it seems impossible, he finally gets it--what's been happening. It was never a dream. The NEARBY TIDE BREAKS, CRASHES, FIZZING to--

QUICK FLASH of Bennett's mom lying in that BED, on death's door, but delighting at the empty air before her. *Seeing between the worlds.*

BENNETT

You know how to find an anchor?

DULCIE

(shakes her head)

She mentioned the term. Used it in her advanced writings. She died before they were published.

Dulcie looks at Bennett, her mind racing, retracing her knowledge, what her mom taught her, how she might help...

DULCIE (CONT'D)

My mom stopped conjuring right around the time I was born. Started writing...

(recalling...)

She, uh, she said her last visitor was an anchor. Fractured her world--

INT. TAROT SHOP - NIGHT

The EEG BEEP is frightening, it's so fast. Roseline grabs Bennett's WALLET, opens it and pulls out his WEDDING RING. But with it, she pulls out the FOLDED PAGE.

CLOSE ON THE PAGE--a corner of the top margin shows "*Roseline Pea--*" She unfolds the page, finds her full name printed in this margin, and printed in the margin on the opposite side, the book title "*LOVE AND THE SACRED MULTIVERSE.*"

DULCIE (V.O.)
--showed her a page of her book
when she hadn't even planned to
write it yet...

EXT. BEACH - SAME

Bennett's face goes wild with possibility, piecing the puzzle together as Dulcie continues:

DULCIE
...That's why she got her PhD and
wrote it--so other people could
know that...whatever reality they
were living in, magic is real. It's
out there. It's inside. And love is
the most powerful kind. 'S why I've
tried to get you to read--

BENNETT
What page?

Dulcie stares blankly, resenting the interruption.

BENNETT (CONT'D)
Her--her anchor. What page of the
book was it?

INT. TAROT SHOP - NIGHT

Roseline's eyes scan down the page of her book, to a section highlighted in yellow marker... *"Love moves like water between the worlds."*

DULCIE (V.O.)
I don't remember. But, I remember
what it said. It's beautiful.
(a beat)
*"Love moves like water between the
worlds..."*

EXT. BEACH - SAME

Dulcie gazes out at the ocean, then closes her eyes, soaking in the memory of her mother as she continues reciting:

DULCIE
*"...Like time and space, it has no
permanent place, it is constantly
moving, expanding, ebbing and
flowing--"*

Tears slide down Bennett's cheeks, his face filled with awe.

INT. SUNNY BEDROOM - DAY - FLASHBACK

Bouquets of DAISIES fill the room, in various stages of life and death. Bennett (12) sits beside his mom, who lies in bed, Jack on the opposite side of the bed--both hold back sobs.

Rae clings to life by a thread, but has that book propped up in her lap. And now we can see the title on its cover--

"LOVE AND THE SACRED MULTIVERSE" BY ROSELINE PEARSON

With fortified conviction, she reads aloud to her husband and son (from where Dulcie left off), voice thin and rasping:

RAE
(slow and labored)
"--ebbing and flowing. It is itself
shapeless, but can take on any
shape."

Her voice goes out. Her breathing catches. She coughs. Bennett squeezes her hand. She nudges the book towards him, slowly nodding, the murmur of a smile on her lips.

Bennett takes the book, and from BENNETT'S POV, we see the highlighted passage. The PAGE he tore out and kept in his wallet. He struggles to continue reading as he cries:

BENNETT
"Love has hurt us, it has drown us
in its tides and taken from us.
Love is an infinite expanse--"

EXT. BEACH - CONTINUOUS

Bennett is breathless as he listens to Dulcie, who now sees how affected he is by the words. Unsure why, but she knows to keep going. She strokes his face, takes his hand.

DULCIE
"--infinite expanse, so deep and
wide and dangerous that we fear it
may swallow us whole. We fear both
its mystery and its translucence,
its vastness and its power..."

Ocean waves CRASH, dark and ominous. Up ahead, in the--

PARKING LOT

A TRUCK pulls in near their SUV, where Emma has fallen asleep in the passenger seat.

A few MEN AND WOMEN in swim suits pile out of the truck, pull SURFBOARDS from the back. Eager to catch a set while the sky is still light.

DULCIE

"...But it is lifeblood we cannot live without. To know its magic, we must face it. We must dive straight in."

QUICK FLASH of Bennett (12), book still open to the PAGE in front of him, squeezing his mother's hand. Now limp. Lifeless. She's gone.

EXT. BEACH PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATE

Before Dulcie has the chance to ask Bennett what's going on--

He halts. Frozen between moments. Staring at the truck parked a short ways off, entirely transfixed. BEEP! BEEP! snaps from the sky as he remembers:

ROSELINE (V.O.)

If you believe, you will see...
Find your anchor. Follow.

A shivering Dulcie watches him curiously, leads him the short walk to their car and climbs into the driver's seat. She follows his gaze, but doesn't know what's so remarkable.

DULCIE

Bennett, what are you doing? It's freezing.

He breaks his gaze and glances around, trying to catch up with his thoughts, then turns to Dulcie.

BENNETT

Stay here with Emma. Leave the car running.

Dulcie assesses him, knows something is happening.

DULCIE

Wait--

His gaze lingers on Emma and Dulcie, just for a moment. With a trembling hand, he shuts her car door and quickly trudges off toward the water. Dulcie watches him a beat.

She looks toward the truck again, watches the surfers as they finish pulling on their wetsuits. One of them--

We recognize. The PRETTY WOMAN, 35, from the PHOTO on Bennett's corkboard. Rae. His anchor.

She and her group, surfboards in hand, run for the water. Dulcie looks back to the horizon, no longer able to see Bennett over the slight incline. Just sand and sky. She's unsettled.

After several beats she checks on Emma, still sleeping, and slips out of the car to head for the water.

EXT. BEACH - SAME

Bennett stands ankle-deep in the ocean, looking out at the horizon. His pants are soaked to the knee.

He watches as his mother and her friends paddle out to sea on their boards. In the distance--

DULCIE (O.S.)

Bennett!

Bennett turns, sees Dulcie walking towards him. Turns back to face the ocean, and without another moment's hesitation--

He wades forward, into the freezing waves. HIS PULSE QUICKENS on the EEG monitor, echoing through the clouds, rushing over the water--BEEP. BEEP. BEEP. It urges him on.

Dulcie, still a ways off, picks up the pace, running now.

DULCIE (CONT'D)

Bennett?! Bennett!!

He's waist deep...chest deep, plunging ahead. Until he's submerged and swimming. His powerful freestyle stroke aligns with his quickening pulse.

BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP...

INT. TAROT SHOP - NIGHT

BEEP BEEP BEEP--faster. Roseline crouches beside Bennett, watching him in his restless torment. His vitals racing.

She douses his WEDDING RING in WHISKEY and BLACK SAND, then slides it onto his ring finger.

EXT. OCEAN - SAME

Out in the water, the surfers are perplexed as they watch Bennett race forward, abreast of them.

As his head goes under, WE GO UNDER with him--into dark bubbles and crashing water. As he comes up for air, WE COME UP with him--back to blue sky and endless ocean.

BEEP-BEEP-BEEP-BEEP--

Water. Stroke, stroke, stroke. Air. Water. Stroke, stroke, stroke. Air...

EXT. BEACH - SAME

Dulcie runs full speed into the water, screaming--

DULCIE
BENNETT!!! Come back!!

Eventually, waist deep, she stops, watches him dive under and disappear. She stands helpless.

EXT. OCEAN - SAME

The surfers, perched on their boards, watch him disappear below the surface. A MALE SURFER poises for action.

MALE SURFER
What the--what's he doing?

Bennett's mother calmly observes, while the rest wait in panic for him to re-emerge. When he doesn't, the male surfer dives in after him.

EXT. OCEAN - UNDER WATER - SAME

Bennett dives through the MURKY BROWN WORLD, swims deep, deep, deep down...the surfer swims after him. We drift past them, to find--

Robert's VINTAGE MERCEDES on the bottom of--

LAKE PONTCHARTRAIN - FLASHBACK

Dulcie, in her wedding dress, swims for the surface. Bennett, in his suit, is right behind her. But--

He stops short. The lace of his boot is caught in the car door. He tries to free it, tries to remove his boot, scrambles to untie it. It's stuck.

BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP--echoes through the water like sonar.

Robert--not the surfer--swims down, tries the door. Too heavy. Bennett claws for the surface, choking. His nose starts to bleed. Robert rushes to loosen the boot as Bennett begins convulsing, still clawing, until--

He goes motionless.

Robert frees Bennett, grabs him, swims for the surface.

BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEEEEEEEEP--

Up, up, up, until--

ON THE SURFACE

The surfer breaks through with Bennett and they hit air! Bennett takes a deep, GASPING BREATH, as--

INT. TAROT SHOP - NIGHT

Bennett awakens, GASPING and RETCHING for air, with Roseline at his side. BEEP-BEEP-BEEP. Only a moment, until--

INT. HOSPITAL - PATIENT ROOM - DAY

Bennett awakens, GASPING, CHOKING. BEEP. BEEP. BEEP.

BENNETT'S POV: Lying on a bed, staring up at a tiled ceiling with THAT WATER STAIN. Dr. Parker leans over him in a halo of fluorescent overhead light. Embroidered on her whitecoat: DR. PARKER--similar to a nametag.

A PENLIGHT SHINES in his eyes--

And Dulcie (33, still same age) is there, leaning over him.

DULCIE

Bennett? C'mon. We're right here.

Emma's voice, from somewhere in the room, choking on tears.

EMMA (O.S.)
He woke up? Daddy's awake?

And Jack, equally overwhelmed.

JACK (O.S.)
I don't know, sweetie. I think so.
But we have to wait and see.

DR. PARKER
I need this room clear right away!
Call Dr. Matthews, get him in here
immediately with whoever else is
here on neuro!

A WIDE view of the room reveals--

Everyone Bennett has seen or known. In addition to Dulcie, Emma, Jack, and Dr. Parker--Clay is there. Robert is there.

His NURSE...is Rachel, the woman who sat beside him on his flight the first February 29th.

A familiar face from the airport that day later became the property manager. We also recognize the surfer. In reality, they're both ancillary hospital staff.

Dr. Matthews rushes into the room--the pilot from the flight where Bennett first saw Dr. Parker.

Bennett takes this all in as Dulcie fights to stay by his side. But Dr. Matthews insists--

DR. MATTHEWS
Please! We need to give him space.
We have no idea what his
functioning will be like.

Bennett, in a world of confusion...finds his voice--

BENNETT
No. No. Wait. I'm--I...don't leave
me, please...stay.

Dulcie throws herself on him, crying as they hold and touch each other. Emma (11, still same age) rushes to join them, face red with tears.

EMMA
Daddy!

Bennett pulls her onto the bed, into his arms.

Dr. Matthews and Dr. Parker clear everyone else from the room as they allow Bennett, Dulcie, and Emma to reunite. Hugging. Kissing. Crying. Bennett examines Dulcie's face.

BENNETT

...Is it...still February 29th?

DULCIE

No. It's--

He kisses her. A long, deep kiss. They look to Emma. Bennett wipes her tears.

EMMA

Daddy. I'm your daughter. Emma.

BENNETT

I know who you are. I know you.

INT. HOSPITAL - PATIENT ROOM - MONTAGE

ALL MOS:

-Bennett lies in his hospital gown on the sliding bed of an MRI machine. He glides into the tunnel.

DR. PARKER (V.O.)

It's what we call a "waking coma."
You've been in a partial vegetative
state since the accident. Within
the first year, Dr. Matthews led a
surgery--fairly new at the time--

-Dr. Matthews inspects Bennett, does some clinical tests. As he talks, he runs a finger over the SCAR on the back of Bennett's shaved head--the surgical incision.

DR. PARKER (V.O.)

--"Deep brain stimulation." We
planted electrodes in your
thalamus. It was successful. You
didn't speak or move voluntarily,
but neuroimaging showed you were
somewhat responsive...

-Bennett sits up in his hospital bed. Dr. Parker and the male surfer--a NEURO TECH--are at his bedside with Dulcie, Emma, Jack, and Robert, explaining.

DR. PARKER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

...On rare occasion, quite
responsive.

(MORE)

DR. PARKER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Your ability to see your daughter
before meeting her, your ability to
see Dulcie, and process certain
stimuli...it's similar to a dream
state.

-Bennett works with the property manager--a PHYSICAL
THERAPIST--in a rehabilitation session.

DR. PARKER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Various realities could be
selectively processed and
incorporated into the dream. But
much of what you experienced the
last twelve years was a world
created within your own mind.

INT. HOSPITAL - PATIENT ROOM - DAY

Dulcie enters carrying a few folded men's clothing items.
Bennett and Emma sit side by side in his hospital bed, going
through one of her math workbooks. Her eyes shine. It's still
so unbelievable.

A beat. She joins them on the bed, pulls out a large, thin
TABLET. She glances at Emma, who gives an excited nod.

EMMA
We want to show you something.
Something we made for you.

DULCIE
We played this for you all the
time. The doctors said sensory
things could signal your brain.
Music, visuals, memories. Our
signals got through a few times.
They think the anniversary was a
trigger, when your scans were most
active... Go ahead, Em.

Emma opens a VIDEO on the tablet, presses play:

We see Dulcie holding baby Emma in her arms circa 2009,
talking to the camera. It's hard for her--

DULCIE (ON VIDEO) (CONT'D)
Hi my love. We know you're here
with us. We want you to know that
we think about you all the time,
and you are a piece of our every
day. We love you.

THE VIDEO CUTS TO:

Clay's RECORDING of them dancing on their wedding day. QUEEN'S *I WANT TO BREAK FREE* fades in. Bennett sways Dulcie to the music playing in this small judicial room so many years ago. The song builds, as--

INT. THETA HOUSE - FLASHBACK

The night they met. Bennett and Dulcie enter from their talk outside to find Freddie Mercury now running the DJ BOOTH.

QUEEN'S *I WANT TO BREAK FREE* has just started. Both seem to acknowledge it's not a typical first dance song. But Bennett takes her into a waltz pose and shuffles around, twirls her.

BENNETT

God knooows. God knows I want to break freeee! I've fallen in looo-ove. I've fallen in love for the first time and this time I know it's for reeeeee-eaal...

Dulcie laughs, but the moment is strangely intimate--like they're the only two people in the world.

INT. HOSPITAL - PATIENT ROOM - TABLET SCREEN

Their WEDDING DAY VIDEO. He dips her and kisses her as QUEEN fades out. The VIDEO CUTS from their wedding dance to other moments lived by Dulcie, Emma, Jack, and Robert:

The New Orleans airport. Eating beignets on the floor. Moving into the Walnut Ave house. The back yard--ladder and bricks. The sonogram. Emma singing and dancing to Taylor Swift. Emma's swim meet, Jack waving to the camera. A day at Emma's school, working in her math book. Dulcie at the beach...

The video comes to an end. Bennett takes a moment to process it all. A hint of sadness that there's...an explanation.

DULCIE

You okay?

BENNETT

I have so much to tell you.

Dulcie smiles, squeezes his hand. No words will suffice.

EMMA

Daddy, can we go home now?

INT./EXT. - LEXUS SUV - DAY

They head home from the hospital in overwhelmed silence. Jack drives. Emma rides shotgun. Bennett and Dulcie hold onto each other in the back seat.

Bennett gazes out the window, watches a WINDSTORM blowing the trees, sunlight dancing. Something remains unresolved--

BENNETT

Hey, Dad?

JACK

Yeah Bennett? You need something?

BENNETT

...Do you ever dream of mom?

Their eyes meet in the REARVIEW. Jack finds it a strange question. But before he can answer--

A YELLOW DAISY drifts onto the windshield. Then another. And another. Then SEVERAL MORE. Jack slows to a stop, and they all observe--

A FLOWER VAN stopped in the road a short way ahead of them, a fallen tree branch trapped beneath. The VAN DRIVER has the back doors open, and in the back--

Two-dozen floral centerpieces--a SEA OF YELLOW DAISIES. Half of them overturned. The wind surges, whirling more of the flowers out onto the street. It's beautiful.

Jack steps out of the car.

Bennett follows his father, followed then by Dulcie and Emma. The WIND GUSTS outside the car. Jack is entranced by the whirlwind of daisies. He meets Bennett's gaze...

BENNETT (CONT'D)

Dad. Someone told me to tell you--
It's her.

WE HOLD on Bennett and Jack, as tears shine in his eyes. Jack's amazement, his questioning stare.

Bennett and Dulcie share a look, a knowing. He pulls her and Emma close as they marvel at his mother's swirling daisies--

CUT TO BLACK.

THE END