

ASH

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EXT. CITY STREET - DUSK

Crossing our frame are a pair of sneakers running with purpose. As we pan up along the gravel we reveal ASHLEY (20's). We can see that she is a young and beautiful creature. Her frame is small, her poise exudes an inner confidence, her eyes betray a deeply haggard weariness.

The weathered city glistens behind her as she breathes hard, in sync with the soul of the city.

Over images of her running, an even, slightly disheartened older male voice levels out...

MALE (V.O.)

Dear Ash...

INT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - EVENING

Course and nimble female fingers tipped with scarlet nail polish inject a key into a dead-bolt and smartly turns it.

We pull to see Ashley walking into the apartment.

MALE (V.O.)

...I got your letter yesterday. I was so happy.

INT. APARTMENT ROOM - EVENING

She enters the room and moves down a long and narrow hallway of a dimly lit apartment, the likes of which has seen better days. Her forehead, heavy with perspiration and frazzled hair from arduous exercise.

She shuffles through a small stack of the day's mail, as one piece arrests her attention.

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

...It seemed the only thing that was making my time here so hard was not hearing from you.

The envelope is torn open. Her name and address poorly written on the cover. The return address reads by stamp: ATTICA CORRECTIONAL FACILITY.

From it, she pulls out a folded loose-leaf letter tucked inside a Christmas card, its cover depicting a jolly Santa Clause hanging a stocking over the fireplace. She glances over the hand written note, and quickly folds it up, sliding it back into the envelope.

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

I thank you from the bottom of my heart for writing me. I was really beating myself up over you

Ashley slips off her sneakers with her feet, checking her phone.

From behind her, we see a door open. Pleasantly startling Ashley is an OLDER WOMAN with broad shoulders, a chubby face, and her hair pulled back tightly in a messy bun. She is the NANNY.

NANNY

Buenas.

Bundled in the Nanny's arms is an INFANT BABY BOY holding a bright yellow animal toy in his tiny fingers. This is Ashley's son.

Delighted, Ashley nuzzles her face against her son's, peppering him with little kisses.

The Nanny passes him to Ashley.

ASHLEY

(to Nanny)

Que tal, Mamen?

Ashley kisses the Nanny tenderly on the cheek.

NANNY

Bien, bien, gracias a Dios. Le iba a preparar la leche. (I was just about to prepare his formula)

ASHLEY

Ah, si...

Ashley hands the Baby back to the Nanny who rests him in a high chair. The Nanny takes out milk from the refrigerator.

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

...I just hope you know how much a part of my life you are. You are my hope and world. I intend to do everything in my power to be the best...sober, Dad to you. My goal is to make you happy.

The Nanny pours milk from a plastic container into a little Sponge Bob sippy cup.

Ashley affectionately examines her son, wiping his cheek, fixing his shirt.

ASHLEY
 (whispering to Baby)
 Mommy's sweaty'n gross, huh?
 (baby talk)
 So sweaty and gwoss.

While screwing the lid back on the sippy cup, the Nanny points to a heavy text book resting on top of a stack of others seemingly untouched books.

NANNY
 Rego mi cafe sobre tu libro de sociologia. (He spilled some of my coffee on your school book.)

ASHLEY
 Uh-huh...Pues...no importa. No te preocupes. (It's not really important, don't worry about it.)

Ashley smiles, but the Nanny returns a look of mild disappointment. As if wanting to help, Ashley watches as the Nanny serves the Baby his formula.

ASHLEY
 He's so thirsty, huh? Whatta thirsty boy!

MALE (V.O.)
 ...I saw the board of pardons today. They are recommending 19 months...June next year, but I won't know for sure until about a month from now. I could do only 10, but I'm not holding my breath. You'll know when I hear.

INT. APARTMENT LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Ashley walks down another short hallway, entering a bare, colorless living room with the only exception being a muted TV showing cartoons in a corner. She dumps the day's mail on the table.

MALE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 ...Anyway, thanks again for the card with such good news. I am the proudest father in the world.

Ashley turns the TV off. She flips open a laptop on the table and turns it on.

MALE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
It said that you're making some
money as a cashier and doing well
at it I'm sure.

MOMENTS LATER

On the monitor, we see that she is writing an email:

*Marsella's Lounge at 8:30 is
perfect. What would you like me to
wear?*

Below her response we see the original e-mail:

*Oliver said I would get a deal with
you tonight. 8:30... usual spot?*

She blandly reads the message. She looks at the TV for a bit, lost in thought when - the Nanny and Baby enter.

Startled, she hits SEND, pulling the laptop screen down a little.

ASHLEY
Did you empty the trash today?

NANNY
I do right now, okay?

ASHLEY
Thank you. Can you put him in his
walker?

NANNY
Claro...Claro.

The Nanny slides the Baby into his walker. He starts CRYING the second he is in it.

NANNY
(softly to Baby)
Calmate, chavalito.(calm down,
little one.)

MALE (V.O.)
I don't think I'll make it out for
your graduation, but please let me
know the details.

The Nanny grabs a full wastebasket and leaves.

ASHLEY

Gracias.

Meditating on her child, something catches her eye.

She notices a small box under the coffee table, strewn among a pile of magazines, old junk mail and coloring books. She picks it up and opens it.

MALE (V.O.)

Are you graduating with high honors? I hope you were studying hard as hell, getting good grades. What did your major end up being?

Inside the box are a number of folded notes, pictures, various mementos - but on the top is a dated PHOTO of a white MALE in a formal, navy dinner dress uniform warmly embracing a Chicano WOMAN wearing a simple white dress. It appears to have been their wedding day. These are Ashley's parents.

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

...Let me know. I am so excited about your future!...I'm glad your mom is doing well too. Are you two keeping in touch?

Ashley's gaze is halted by:

Her father's Christmas card and letter on the table.

The Baby snuffles in its walker.

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

I'm not sure how much she's had to do with your success anymore, but you have both been a success story to me.

Ashley folds up the loose leaf letter, slips it back in the card, and drops it into the box, covering the photograph.

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

I am proud of her too. I think I still love her.

Ashley drops her face, some unresolved feeling brewing inside. Her eyes grow distant and moist.

The Nanny comes back in, wiping her hands. She glances to the computer, and then to Ashley. They exchange a long hard look - an awkward understanding.

MALE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Man, Ash, there is still this part
 of me only she can hold, and that
 only she can carry...and that
 creates this lack...I think I'll
 have to feel inside for the rest of
 my life.

Ashley wipes her forehead. Embarrassed. Ashamed.

ASHLEY
 Me tengo que alistar. (I need to
 get ready.)

NANNY
 (With serious resolve)
 Si. Como no. (Of course)

Ashley closes her laptop.

INT. SHOWER - NIGHT

Steam circulates around a rain of hot water as Ashley showers. She lathers the shampoo through her hair.

MALE (V.O.)
 ...Make sure you visit Grandma, OK?
 Hey, if you get a chance, come and
 visit me too. I think it's out of
 the way, though, but, damn that
 would be nice.

As we pan down, she touches herself along her breasts and thighs. At closer examination of her face, there is a mixture of tears mixed with drops of water.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

In front of a vanity mirror, Ashley stands with one bared leg on the seat as she massages lotion onto her thigh, then her calf.

MALE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 ...Your picture is far from ugly.
 You really have grown into a
 beautiful woman.
 (MORE)

MALE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I keep expecting to hear you're
 going 'Hollywood,' or something.

She struggles to pull a tight, short, shiny skirt above her waste. The lace bra is anything but modest, followed by a loose hanging cotton blouse.

She paints her lips with a thick red lipstick as she transforms in front of our eyes from a simple young mother to a gorgeous woman dressed to appeal to every man's carnal desire.

MALE (V.O.)
 ...I made the mistake of showing it
 to a friend in here and that was
 the last time I show pictures of
 you to anyone.

A deep sigh as she looks deeply into her eyes, then down to her waist. She pulls her shirt tightly around her hips, cinching it...examining the reflection, turning her hips this way and that. She exhales a deep, melancholic breath, never dropping her gaze from the eyes looking back in the reflection.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ashley enters the kitchen to find the Nanny feeding her child. Behind them, Ashley swipes a paper towel to press against her red lips to wipe away the excess lipstick.

MALE (V.O.)
 ...I would love to call you, but I
 think you have a block on your
 phone. I will try and call this
 Sunday if the blocks are down.

Ashley tosses the paper towel in a garbage basket under the sink.

ASHLEY
 No me esperes (Don't wait up.)

The Nanny looks up with a deep concern.

NANNY
 Ay hija, porque no te quedas aqui
 con nosotros. El nino necesita
 estar con su madre. (Oh child, why
 don't you stay home with us. The
 boy needs to be with his mother.)

Ashley shakes her head - no. She wishes she could.

ASHLEY

Te lo agradezco muchisimo. Se que mereces mas que lo que te doy. (I am so grateful to you. I know you deserve more than what I can give you.)

NANNY

Cariño, no me debes nada. Pero si quieres darme algo...pues, acompañaame a la iglesia. Allí aprenderas de un camino mejor. (Dear, you owe me nothing... but, come to church with me. There, you'll learn of a better way.)

ASHLEY

Ay, Tia...

Ashley has heard it before as she bends down to kiss the Nanny on the cheek. She moves to her baby child. A long - long kiss on his forehead.

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

...If I can't get through, I will try every Sunday and maybe I'll get through eventually. OK?

She leaves the room. The Nanny pauses before picking up the spoon to continue her feeding.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - NIGHT

The stark hallway is illuminated only by Ashley's sheer beauty. Her eyes remain sad.

ASHLEY

... Ash, I just can't believe how great you're doing. Keep up the good work. You don't realize it, but you've helped my self-esteem a lot.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Ashley busts out the door of her apartment. Parked on the curb in front is a TOYOTA CORROLA. She unlocks the car and gets in.

MALE (V.O.)
 ...Thanks, Ash, for being such a
 good kid. You're doing everything
 I wish I would have done when I was
 your age...

INT. TOYOTA CORROLA - DRIVING - NIGHT

Ashley drives, while talking on her cell phone.

ASHLEY
 Ya, I'm just about there... Yes.
 Don't worry, Oly. I'm good to go.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Ashley stands, leaning against her car in a strip mall
 parking lot. She smokes a cigarette while she waits.

MALE (V.O.)
 By the way, sorry about the
 Christmas card...They claimed to
 have ran out of birthday ones so
 this was all I could get my paws
 on. It's probably closer to
 Christmas than your birthday by the
 time you read this anyway.

A jet black LINCOLN SEDAN pulls up next to her. She ashes her
 butt on the ground.

INT. LINCOLN TOWN CAR - CONTINUOUS

Ashley slides into the back seat, pulling her dress down so
 it doesn't ride up too much.

To her side sits an OLDER MAN in a business suit on his cell
 phone. He pays her no regard.

The car pulls away.

MALE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 ...Anyways, I will let you know
 when I find out my 'real' release
 date. I hope it's soon. I can't
 wait to see you.

The man hangs up his phone and looks to Ashley... Creepily...
 Lustfully...

OLDER MAN

Hello again...

She doesn't resist as he begins gliding his finger up her skirt.

MALE (V.O.)

Like I said, I will write soon. I
miss you, and I love you so very
much...Love...Dad.

Ashley looks out the window, watching the street roll by.

Black.