

WHAT A BEAUTIFUL STATE WE ARE IN

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - MORNING

Dawn breaks, casting a soft radiance over the New York skyline. The city streets are serene and deserted. Piles of leaves in vibrant shades of red, orange, and yellow line the sidewalks, signaling the arrival of Fall.

INT. ROW'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - MORNING

ROW, 20s, lies awake in bed, basking in the gentle morning light that filters through the window.

Her desk and floor are scattered with a sea of scripts, adding a touch of disorder to the space. Above her bed hangs, a poster of Gena Rowlands in the iconic film "A Woman Under The Influence," lying in bed. Just like Gena in the poster, Row lies in bed, mirroring her vulnerable position.

She rises from bed and approaches a record player. Billie Holiday's "Tenderly" starts to play.

ROW
(to the room)
May I have this dance?

She dances as if tethered to an unseen partner. The gentle tune escapes through her window.

INT. CASS'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - MORNING

The music, like a morning siren, wafts into the bedroom. CASS, 20s, lies in bed, fast asleep.

A saxophone case stands sentinel near the wall. Bookcases line the walls, filled with books of various genres: history, science, space, art, poetry, and a plethora of books about music.

The music wakes him up. He listens to the song, completely absorbed. He mutters the lyrics to himself.

CASS
*Then you and I, Came wandering by,
And lost in a sigh were we...*

INT. ROW'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - MORNING

Row pauses before her reflection in the mirror, a moment of stillness.

ROW
(to herself)
So, Row, what are you going to do
today?

She turns on the shower.

INT. CASS'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - MORNING

Cass, in a pale-blue robe, stands in front of the mirror, in deep thought.

CASS
(to himself)
Another lonely Saturday...

He opens the medicine cabinet to reveal a lineup of prescription bottles: Klonopin, Wellbutrin, Doxepin, Effexor. He takes a pill from the Wellbutrin bottle and swallows it, then slips the Klonopin bottle into his robe pocket.

The music fades to silence, replaced by the urgent clamor of sirens.

EXT. OLD TENEMENT BUILDING - EAST VILLAGE - MORNING

Police cars, an ambulance, and fire trucks rush toward the building.

Two EMTs swiftly emerge from the ambulance, wheeling a gurney inside. Firefighters rush into the building, while police unfurl a yellow "DO NOT CROSS" tape in front of the entrance.

INT. OLD TENEMENT BUILDING - EAST VILLAGE - MORNING

Firefighters hammer on doors.

FIREFIGHTER
Carbon monoxide leak! Carbon
monoxide leak! Evacuate, now!

Tenants open their doors and hurriedly exit the building, following the instructions.

INT. ROW'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Row dries her hair with a hair dryer, then applies lipstick in the mirror. Suddenly, a loud knock on the door startles her.

FIREMAN (O.S.)
Carbon monoxide leak! Evacuate
immediately!

INT. ROW'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Row quickly puts on her shoes, grabs her bag, and rushes out the door.

INT. CASS'S APARTMENT - MORNING

The blaring sirens outside invade Cass's apartment. He emerges from the bathroom, his robe askew. He swiftly puts on his jeans and slippers. He looks out the window, taking in the chaos below. Hastily, he tucks a joint into his wallet, puts on his grey fedora, and grabs his saxophone case.

EXT. OLD TENEMENT BUILDING - MORNING

Tenants cluster anxiously as EMTs wheel out an ELDERLY WOMAN. Among the crowd, Cass catches sight of Row.

FIREMAN CAPTAIN
(to all the tenants)
There's a carbon monoxide leak! The
building is off-limits until 9pm
tonight!

In the crowd of displaced tenants, Cass feels oddly adrift. He spots Row leaving and decides to follow her.

EXT. EAST VILLAGE - STREET - MORNING

Row moves swiftly through the lively streets of the East Village. Cass hurries to keep up, passing old tenement buildings, modern condos, pedestrians, and turning corners.

Row crosses a street and pauses at a glass storefront showcasing a vintage dress. She admires the dress and catches a glimpse of Cass's reflection behind a lamppost in the storefront glass.

Row continues walking, now aware of Cass following her. Suddenly, she stops and turns, catching Cass off guard and leaving him no time to hide.

ROW
What the hell do you want?

CASS
I'm sorry-- I-- I was just...

Row's eyes widen and her mouth hangs open as she lets out a piercing scream, mimicking Janet Leigh's blood-curdling scream from "Psycho." Her hands shoot up, shielding her face and head, perfectly capturing the intensity of the original scene.

Cass, shaken to the core, collapses onto the ground next to a parked car, holding his chest and hyperventilating.

CASS (CONT'D)
Oh, my God!

Row breaks into laughter, reveling in her performance.

ROW
You know, I've always wanted to do that, the iconic shower scene from "Psycho." "We all go a little mad sometimes..."

She looks at him.

ROW (CONT'D)
Hey, you okay? You don't look so good...

She pulls a bottle of water from her bag and hands it to Cass.

ROW (CONT'D)
Here, have some water...

Cass takes three deep breaths, then suddenly rises, picking up his saxophone case.

CASS
Are you nuts?!

ROW
Yeah.

Cass takes off.

ROW (CONT'D)
(to herself)
Why am I snitching on myself so
early in the morning?

She runs after Cass.

ROW (CONT'D)
Hey! Hey! Wait a minute!

CASS
What's the matter with you?

ROW
You have absolutely no sense of
humor.

CASS
Leave me alone.

ROW
I said I was sorry. Will you just
stop? Please!

Cass stops and turns towards her.

CASS
What do you want?

Row chuckles.

ROW
"What do you want?" Really? You
were the one following me!

CASS
It doesn't matter anymore.

ROW
I made you uncomfortable.

CASS
You scared the shit outta me.

ROW
Oh, my God. You were stalking me.
What was I supposed to do?

Cass rubs his neck.

CASS
Okay, okay, you're right.

ROW
Who are you? Have we met?

CASS
Uh, well, we're, um, neighbors.
You're my-- my downstairs neighbor.

Row appears slightly surprised, realizing she hasn't noticed him before.

ROW
Oh, hi...

CASS
I'm Cass.

ROW
Call me Row.

She eyes him suspiciously.

ROW (CONT'D)
So, why were you following me?

CASS
I... It's just that... I didn't
know where else to go.

Row lets out a heavy sigh.

ROW
Me neither.

CASS
But you were walking so fast, I
thought...

ROW
Oh, no, no. I'm an actor. I was
rehearsing. I'm playing a neurotic
writer in an upcoming play.

CASS
(almost to himself)
It figures.

ROW
Hey, what's that supposed to mean?

After an awkward pause.

ROW (CONT'D)
Well, uh, it was nice meeting you.
Sorry again.

CASS
Yeah, same here. I didn't mean to
scare you, too.

ROW
It's okay.

Another awkward silence ensues.

ROW (CONT'D)
Well, bye.

Cass sadly waves.

CASS
Bye.

Row starts to walk away, but Cass, driven by an impulse,
calls after her.

CASS (CONT'D)
Hey, wait!

Row stops and turns, curious about what he has to say.

ROW
Yeah?

Cass moves closer to her.

CASS
So, uh, what are you gonna do all
day?

ROW
Hmm? I really don't know.

Cass pauses, contemplates.

CASS
It seems like, um, uh...

ROW
What?

CASS
It-- it seems like, uh, we both
don't have anywhere to go.

ROW
And?

Cass wrings his hands.

CASS

Uh, you know, um... we could... um, maybe we could spend the day together?

ROW

Are you serious?

CASS

Uh, yeah... I mean, we both don't have any plans, right?

Row absorbs the idea, contemplating the possibilities.

ROW

Hmm?

CASS

It's Saturday... um, everyone's favorite day of the week.

ROW

And there's nothing more pathetic than spending it alone.

CASS

Exactly.

ROW

I... I don't know. What if you're like a wandering psych patient?

She eyes him up and down, taking in his pale-blue robe and slippers.

ROW (CONT'D)

I mean, you're wearing a robe and slippers.

Cass looks at himself, almost like he forgot he was wearing them.

CASS

(to himself)

Oh, fuck.

(to Row)

I-- I didn't have enough time to change. The only thing I cared about was my saxophone.

Row furrows her brows, conveying her lingering uncertainty.

CASS (CONT'D)
Hey, what about you? You-- you
almost gave me a heart attack.

ROW
Is that all you got?

CASS
Uh, you can turn out to be a-- a--
a-- wackadoodle.

Row laughs.

ROW
"Wackadoodle"? Really?

Cass shrugs. Row contemplates further, allowing the idea to
settle in.

ROW (CONT'D)
Why not? What the hell! If this is
how I get myself killed, I'm all
about it.

Cass smiles, surprised.

CASS
Wow, all right. Great.

ROW
But first, coffee. My brain's a no-
go without it.

CASS
Coffee time is my favorite time.

Row steals a glance at Cass, softly laughing to herself.

EXT. CAFE - MORNING

Cass and Row step out of the cozy cafe.

ROW
So, now what?

CASS
I'm not sure. I... I can't make
decisions.

ROW
Uh... let me think...

Cass finds a bench outside the cafe and slumps down, resting his face on his hand. Row joins him, sitting by his side, observing the world bustling around them.

ROW (CONT'D)

Well, here we are...

CASS

Yeah.

A confused JAPANESE TOURIST couple approaches, iPhone map in hand.

JAPANESE TOURIST

Hi, uh, how do we get to the Guggenheim?

Row glances at the map, eager to help. She points to a nearby bus stop.

ROW

Take that bus up to 89th Street.

The tourists bow in gratitude, disappearing into the city crowd.

ROW (CONT'D)

Um... we're in the heart of New York, right?

CASS

Right.

ROW

Let's just walk around and see what inspires us.

CASS

Okay. Sure.

EXT. BOWERY STREET - MORNING

Cass and Row stroll along the now clean streets of the Bowery. He hums a soft tune to himself and looks around.

CASS

The Bowery is looking more like the suburbs these days.

They stop in front of the old CBGB, now transformed into a John Varvatos clothing store. Cass looks away.

CASS (CONT'D)

I, I, I, can't look at it. They turned the birthplace of Punk into a boutique shop. You know, the Talking Heads made their debut right here, performing "Psycho Killer" for the very first time!

ROW

(to herself)

*Psycho Killer, qu'est-ce que c'est?
Better, run, run, run, run, run,
run, run away...*

Her face suddenly lights up with an idea.

ROW (CONT'D)

I got it. I got it. Let's get the fuck out of here!

CASS

Wha-- what do you mean?

ROW

Uh, we can explore outside the city. There's more to New York than glossy skyscrapers and fancy boutiques, right?

CASS

Oh, wow, yeah-- yeah, that sounds like fun.

ROW

I'm sick of going to the same places.

CASS

Me too.

ROW

Though, it might rain later.

CASS

Should we grab umbrellas?

Row looks down at his slippers.

ROW

Uh, we should probably get you some shoes.

Cass chuckles.

CASS
Oh, right.

ROW
How about we go to Chinatown? It's
nearby.

CASS
Sure.

INT. CHINATOWN STORE - MORNING

The Chinatown store is filled with colorful displays of Asian footwear styles and traditional Chinese shoes. Cass and Row navigate through the aisles.

ROW
So, what's your shoe size?

CASS
Uh, ten.

Row spots a pair of black Kung Fu shoes and hands them to Cass.

ROW
Try these on.

Cass slips off his slippers and slides his feet into the shoes.

CASS
Perfect.

Cass takes a few steps, feeling the comfort and flexibility of the shoes.

ROW
You're giving off some major Kung
Fu vibes!

Cass awkwardly attempts a Kung Fu kick, resulting in a comical display.

CASS
Ready for our New York adventure?

Row responds with a Kung Fu punch.

ROW
Bet.

Cass and Row share a laugh, brimming with excitement as they set out to explore the wonders of New York.

INT. STATEN ISLAND FERRY - MORNING

Cass and Row sit in silence, waiting for the ferry to set sail. He softly hums to himself, deep in thought.

Row contorts her face as if tasting an extremely sour candy, then tightly closes her eyes and presses her lips together. She continues with variations, opening her eyes wide and stretching her jaw muscles. Cass's humming fades as he watches her.

CASS
What are you doing?

ROW
Uh, facial acting exercises. Wanna try?

CASS
Okay.

ROW
Close your eyes.

Cass obediently closes his eyes.

ROW (CONT'D)
Imagine a time when you were really angry... Now express it.

Row's face morphs into a tableau of rage, her eyes fierce. Cass mimics her, his version comically exaggerated. She laughs.

ROW (CONT'D)
Want me to show you?

Cass nods.

ROW (CONT'D)
Bring your eyebrows closer together, okay?

Cass furrows his brows.

ROW (CONT'D)
Good... Now press your lips super tight.

Cass purses his lips tightly.

ROW (CONT'D)

Now, stick out your tongue.

Cass sticks out his tongue, and Row playfully follows suit. They laugh.

The ferry slowly sets sail, and Row rises from her seat, making her way toward the railing. Cass follows.

They lean over the railing, the city a distant spectacle.

INT. STREET FAIR - STATEN ISLAND - MORNING

The approaching Halloween season is evident in the fair's lively decor: pumpkins carved into grinning faces line the walkways, faux cobwebs stretch across stalls, and life-size skeletons hang from tree branches, swaying in the gentle breeze.

Cass and Row wander through the street fair, teeming with animated people and enthusiastic vendors.

ROW

So, what do you do, Cass? What's your contribution to this rampant capitalist society?

CASS

I-- I teach music to second graders.

ROW

Oh, that's so cool. I love kids. They're so nose-y.

She glances at Cass's saxophone case.

ROW (CONT'D)

And what about your sax? Are you in a band? Any upcoming shows?

Cass looks down, his cheeks turning pink.

CASS

No... I'm-- I'm actually really shy.

ROW

Do you love playing the sax?

CASS

Yeah... it feels like flying.

ROW
Damn, that makes me sad.

CASS
Why?

ROW
Because you're not doing what you love.

CASS
Yeah, I know. I've always wanted to be in a band, but I'm just too scared to perform in front of people. What if I fuck up, you know?

ROW
Hmm... You should think about it this way... Perfection is totally impossible and also very boring. Like, where's the fun in that? And I think the pressure to be great like all the time, you know, to come across as perfect, is not really realistic.

Cass rubs his neck.

ROW (CONT'D)
Like, what's the alternative? A life full of regrets? I say fail and fail and fail... It's better than not living at all.

Cass takes this in.

INT. STREET FAIR - STATEN ISLAND - MOMENTS LATER

Cass and Row find an arts and crafts station where children of various ages are engaged in crafting Halloween masks.

ROW
This is so cool.

They take a seat, joining in the fun.

ROW (CONT'D)
What do you want to be?

CASS
Uh, I don't know.

ROW
Well, for today, we can be
anything...

They both consider the endless possibilities, deep in
thought.

ROW (CONT'D)
I know! You'll be a pink moon, and
I'll be a shining star.

Cass smiles, accepting the imaginative roles. Row starts
cutting a piece of art paper.

CASS
I... I really like that.

ROW
Yeah?

CASS
Yeah, um, "Pink Moon," is like my
favorite Nick Drake song.

Row nods, she knows his music too.

ROW
Yeah, he's great.

CASS
Do you know what the song means?

ROW
Uh, I think so... It's about
isolation, feeling alone, right?

Cass drifts off for a moment.

CASS
Yeah, exactly, disconnection... Um,
it's the title track of his final
album, which he wrote during a very
hard time in his life.

ROW
He battled depression, no?

CASS
Yeah.

Cass shifts uncomfortably, quickly redirecting the
conversation.

CASS (CONT'D)

Anyway, um, have you heard of the annual Pink Moon event?

Row shakes her head.

CASS (CONT'D)

Um, so, the Pink Moon is the full moon in April. Uh, it's-- it's named after the wild ground phlox, a pink wildflower that blooms in spring. Native American tribes named the moon after this flower.

ROW

Wow, that's so cool.

Cass cuts out a moon shape from a pink foam sheet. Row looks at him.

ROW (CONT'D)

It's too small...

She gently takes the scissors from his hand, their fingers slightly brushing, creating an intimate moment. Cass looks at her with a soft smile, his eyes lingering on hers as she skillfully cuts.

ROW (CONT'D)

That't better.

Row passes the scissors back to him, smiling.

EXT. STREET FAIR - STATEN ISLAND - MORNING

Now wearing their handmade masks, Cass and Row make their way through the bustling fair. He takes a moment to admire Row's star mask.

CASS

"We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars..."

Row smiles. Their eyes meet. A moment.

ROW

Who said that?

CASS

Uh, Oscar Wilde.

Row shakes her head and sighs.

ROW
I can't believe he spent years in
jail just for being gay...

Suddenly, a YOUNG GIRL, 9, munching on a red candy apple, carelessly bumps into them and continues on her way, unperturbed.

Row's attention is drawn towards a stand piled high with tempting red candy apples.

ROW (CONT'D)
Dare you to grab two.

CASS
Are-- are you suggesting I steal
them?

Row gives a confirming nod. Cass ponders her daring proposal.

CASS (CONT'D)
Hmm? I don't know...

ROW
Did you ever steal anything as a
kid?

CASS
Well... I might have "borrowed"
some Star Wars trading cards from
my friend's older brother when I
was like six. I-- I really wanted
them, and I didn't think he would
miss them.

ROW
Cool.

CASS
Um, what about you?

Row laughs.

ROW
I was a brutal, brutal, thief. Like
Bonnie and Clyde vibes.

CASS
All right, all right...

He eyes the alluring red candy apples.

CASS (CONT'D)

I'll steal the apples, only if you steal something later.

ROW

Bet.

As the vendor momentarily turns away, Cass nonchalantly approaches the busy table and swiftly takes two candy apples.

Cass and Row sprint away from the fair like a pair of mischievous accomplices.

VENDOR

The apples are free, you idiots!

EXT. HISTORIC RICHMOND TOWN - STATEN ISLAND - DAY

Cass and Row stroll along a charming street in Historic Richmond Town, a village frozen in time. Their masks hang loosely around their necks as they enjoy their candy apples.

CASS

I, um... I want to ask you something?

ROW

Sure. What is it?

CASS

Is Row really your name?

ROW

Yeah, I was named after my grandpa, Rowland, and my favorite actress is Gena Rowlands. So, it's like fate.

CASS

That's pretty awesome.

ROW

Have you seen her movies?

CASS

Um, I-- I saw, "The Notebook."

Row lights up.

ROW

Oh, man, you've got to see "A Woman Under the Influence." It's amazing...

She hums the "Swan Lake" theme, extending her arms in the air and twirling around, mirroring Gena Rowlands' performance. Cass watches her. She stops, and they continue walking.

ROW (CONT'D)

All of Cassavetes' films are about like not being phony, you know? Like don't be a fucking robot. Even if it means making a complete fool of yourself. His characters are constantly falling down, but they always get up. That's what it means to be brave, man. You know what I mean?

CASS

Yes. Yeah. Um, it's also really cool that you're named after your grandpa.

Row drifts off.

ROW

Yeah... My grandpa practically raised me. My parents were never around, too busy with their careers. I like never saw them. I think that-- that they only had me just so they could project this idea of a "perfect life," you know, balancing family and career. This whole stupid concept of the American dream, what a joke!

There is a pause.

ROW (CONT'D)

Um, so, what about you? Are you close to your family?

Cass looks off.

CASS

Well, my mom is like my best friend. We talk every week. I miss her so much since she, uh... left New York... Um, she's always been like my biggest supporter.

Row looks down.

ROW

I feel like my parents don't believe in me.

(MORE)

ROW (CONT'D)

Sometimes, I think they want me to fail so I can get a "real" job, you know? Like they're always telling me I'll never go anywhere in life being an actor.

Another pause.

CASS

Uh, where you from?

ROW

Florida.

CASS

How did you end up in New York?

ROW

I studied acting at NYU. After graduation, I decided to stay.

CASS

Do you miss Florida?

Row scoffs.

ROW

Nope. It feels like the 1950s there now. It's a fucking shithole. I'm never going back there.

She sighs.

ROW (CONT'D)

Ugh. I've only been doing off-Broadway shows and a few commercials. I really need to get more work.

Cass looks pensive, stealing a sideways glance at Row.

CASS

Um, do you have another job?

Row's head shakes almost imperceptibly. Her eyes remain on the cobblestones beneath her feet.

ROW

No, not at the moment.

CASS

Are you looking for work?

ROW
Not exactly.

Cass looks slightly surprised.

CASS
So, like, how do you afford the
high rent?

Row looks away, her cheeks turning a shade of red. The question clearly makes her uncomfortable, but she musters the courage to reply.

ROW
My parents... they pay it. They do
it, so they can keep controlling
me.

CASS
But it must be nice, in a way.

ROW
Yeah, I guess it is.

After a moment, she flips the conversation back to him.

ROW (CONT'D)
So, what about you? Have you lived
in the East Village your whole
life?

CASS
Yeah, pretty much. Uh, my mom and I
lived together until she moved, um,
to Los Angeles a few years ago. I--
I got to keep her rent-stabilized
apartment.

He drifts off.

CASS (CONT'D)
The neighborhood doesn't have the
same feel as it used to, though.

Row falls silent, considering the price of progress. She looks at the quaint, untouched beauty of Historic Richmond Town, appreciating its preservation.

ROW
I suppose that's the price of
progress, right? But it's nice to
have places like this, where things
never change.

CASS

Yeah, I guess you're right.

Suddenly, Row stops and stares at him.

ROW

Hey, wait, your name is Cass.

Cass looks at her strangely.

CASS

Yeah?

ROW

You know, Gena Rowlands and John
Cassavetes?

Row playfully points to herself, then to Cass.

ROW (CONT'D)

Row... Cass...

CASS

Oh, wow.

Row laughs, playfully slaps Cass's arm.

CASS (CONT'D)

Ow.

They continue walking.

ROW

You know, Rowlands was Cassavetes'
muse...

INT. STATEN ISLAND FERRY - DAY

Cass and Row are back on the ferry, seated near a group of PROUD BOYS. They are dressed in matching black Fred Perry polo shirts and wear hats displaying the group's logo - a left-facing rooster head. One of them has a tattoo of a fetus inside a heart on his arm. Row eyes the tattoo.

ROW

(to herself)

Tsk.

Proud Boy #1 begins to mockingly sing Frank Sinatra's "New York, New York." Cass and Row observe them.

PROUD BOY #1
*If I can make it there, I'll make
 it anywhere, It's up to you,
 New York, New York, New York, New
 Fucking York!*

The Proud Boys burst into laughter, noticing Cass and Row watching them. Proud Boy #2 eyes Cass's bathrobe.

PROUD BOY #2
 (to Cass)
 What the fuck are you looking at,
 clown?

ROW
 Tell me something. You're matching
 shirts... Did you use Valpak
 coupons?

PROUD BOY #2
 Ha, ha. Very funny.

Row is about to respond, but Cass nudges her, signaling her to stay quiet. Cass clears his throat, visibly nervous.

CASS
 You-- you like Sinatra, right?

PROUD BOY #2
 What are you, stupid? Of course.
 He's a fucking legend!

CASS
 Wanna hear a story about him?

The Proud Boys laugh, exchanging nods and looking smug.

PROUD BOY #2
 Sure. Why not?

Cass's knee bounces up and down.

CASS
 Well, uh, in the late 1940s,
 Sinatra goes to Harlem to see the
 Will Mastin Trio led by a young
 Sammy Davis, Jr, right. Uh, he was
 so impressed that after the show,
 Frank invited Sammy to come see his
 own show. But you know what
 happened? A whole week goes by, and
 he didn't show up. So, Frank went
 back to Harlem and asked him why he
 didn't come.

(MORE)

CASS (CONT'D)

Sammy told him, "I did. They wouldn't let me in." Frank was so pissed off that he tore up his contract with the theater-- and-- and when Sammy wasn't allowed to perform at the Copacabana, Frank refused to perform there too. When-- when Sammy couldn't get a hotel room at the Sands Hotel in Vegas, Frank insisted that if Sammy wasn't treated equally, he would walk out. Um, when Sammy got into a car accident and lost his eye, guess what? Frank paid Sammy's medical bills. Even-- even offered his home as a place for him to recover. When asked why he was so kind to Sammy, you know what Frank said? "He's my brother."

A long silence follows as they all stare at each other. The tension is palpable.

PROUD BOY #2

Fuck you!

Row stands up, looks at the proud boy's tattoo of a fetus inside a heart.

ROW

Fuck you! I love abortions!

Row grabs Cass's hand, and they start running.

PROUD BOY #2

Get them!

The Proud Boys give chase, running after Cass and Row throughout the entirety of the ferry.

Cass and Row hold their breath and hide behind a wall as the Proud Boys run pass them.

EXT. STATEN ISLAND FERRY - DAY

Cass and Row run off the ferry, laughing.

EXT. NYC STREET - DAY

Cass and Row come to a stop, trying to catch their breath. They find a nearby bench and sit down, collecting themselves.

ROW
That was fun!

CASS
Yeah!

ROW
So, where to next?

They pause, deep in thought.

CASS
Wanna just hop on the subway and
see where it takes us.

ROW
Okay.

INT. SUBWAY - DAY

Cass and Row sit next to each other in a semi-crowded train, they look around aimlessly as an awkward silence hangs between them.

As the doors open, a trio of OLD MARIACHI SINGERS enter, dressed in full black, gold-embroidered Charro suits. They begin playing a Spanish romantic song.

Cass and Row exchange subtle glances, visibly touched by the music.

As the song comes to an end, Cass and Row extend their hands, dropping change into the singers' cup.

ROW
That was beautiful.

CASS
Yeah, that was great.

ROW
Unexpected moments like this are
why I love this city.

CASS
Yeah, me too.

EXT. MORNINGSIDE HEIGHTS - STREET - DAY

Cass and Row walk along the street.

CASS
Can I ask you something personal?

ROW
Yeah, sure.

CASS
Um, do you believe in God or follow any religion?

Row shakes her head defiantly.

ROW
I don't believe in that stuff anymore. It's just non-stop propaganda. You know, all they do is spread lies, hate, fear. And my biggest beef with them is what gives them the right to tell others how to live. Why do they do that? What do they gain? So, screw them!

CASS
Mmm... You sound angry.

This encourages her to continue her rant.

ROW
Yeah, I'm fucking angry-- When I think of all the good people who have suffered because of them.
(mocking)
"God told me to hate you." They're evil, racist, sexist, misogynistic, homophobic, money-laundering frauds. And then I think of all the useless wars and terrorist attacks carried out in the name of God. It really pisses me off.

CASS
Okay, I get it. Bu-- but not all of it is so bad. I mean, it can teach us patience, forgiveness and kindness. You know, everything has its pros and cons, right?

Row looks at him cynically.

ROW
Yeah, yeah, I'm sure. I do hope hell is real, though.

CASS

Why?

ROW

All these intolerable little shits
have to go somewhere, right?

Row turns to Cass.

ROW (CONT'D)

Hey, wait, like why are we even
having this conversation?

CASS

Uh, well... I-- I was wondering if,
uh...

ROW

What is it?

CASS

Uh, we're near the Cathedral of St.
John the Divine. Um, I've never
been, and I've always wanted to
go... Maybe we can go together?

Row's expression shifts to one of slight unease and surprise.

ROW

You religious?

CASS

No, well, yeah, um... a little.

ROW

What does "a little" mean?

CASS

I... I kind of believe in a higher
power.

ROW

So, you do believe in God?

CASS

No, no, no. Not like God-- God in
the Bible. I mean, I believe that--
that maybe there might be some kind
of, uh, afterlife.

ROW

So, you believe in heaven?

CASS

Well, not exactly like-- like the heaven we often hear about in books.

ROW

Then what is it, exactly?

Cass pauses before replying.

CASS

All right, so, uh, have you ever heard about Plato's beliefs on death and the afterlife?

Row shakes her head.

ROW

No. So, tell me, what did he think?

CASS

Yeah?

ROW

Please, go, go, yeah. I'm curious now.

CASS

So, um, he believed in something called the immortal soul. It's like, um... this eternal part of us that exists before and after our physical body. He thought that-- that, like, uh, we go through multiple lives to gain more wisdom and knowledge.

ROW

So, like, our soul keeps coming back?

CASS

Yeah.

ROW

Isn't that the same as buddhism?

CASS

Uh, it's a bit different.

ROW

In what way?

CASS

Well, uh, in Buddhism, they believe that consciousness is reborn into-- like humans, animals, and even other realms. It's, um, like an ongoing process of rebirth.

ROW

So, it's not just humans?

CASS

Right, um, it includes all kinds of beings, and it-- it can take many different forms.

ROW

Ugh. I don't wanna come back as a rock.

Cass chuckles.

CASS

No, no, no, only conscious beings can be reborn.

ROW

Cool, all right. So, did Plato believe in any form of, uh, judgment after death, like in the Bible?

CASS

Well, um, it's complicated... You see, he believed the soul goes through a review of its actions and choices in life... It's like, um, being held accountable for what you've done, and like your future in the afterlife depends on it.

ROW

So, there is no difference between Plato and "judgment day." It all sounds the fucking same to me.

Cass shrugs.

CASS

I-- I guess you're right. You know, it's not even about the afterlife, really. Uh, I'm just hoping there's more to life than what we see.

(MORE)

CASS (CONT'D)

That-- that there's something
beyond all of this. I mean, I'd
even be happy with an alien
invasion, you know...

He looks up at the sky in wonder. Row follows his gaze.

CASS (CONT'D)

What world lives up there...
unimagined, hidden... invisible?

A moment.

ROW

So, why this cathedral?

Cass beams.

CASS

It's-- it's like the largest
cathedral in North America-- and
the Gothic architecture is
incredibly impressive. Um, the
artwork is amazing too, and there's
this-- this Keith Haring Triptych
I've always wanted to see.

A hint of a smile appears on Row's lips, her curiosity
piqued.

ROW

Keith Harding?

CASS

Yeah.

ROW

All right. Sure. Let's go.

INT. CATHEDRAL OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE - DAY

Cass and Row stand in awe as they enter the majestic
cathedral. Sunlight casts vibrant colors across the vast
space through stained-glass windows. They look up at the
soaring ceilings.

CASS

Pretty awesome, huh?

ROW

Yeah.

They walk along the central nave, admiring the stunning artwork and historical artifacts. Their eyes are drawn to the Keith Haring Triptych.

CASS

Oh, wow...

ROW

Now that's my type of cool.

They take in the triptych, completely absorbed.

ROW (CONT'D)

What's the story?

CASS

Harding finished it just weeks before his death. It's a tribute to those who died from AIDS...

(pause)

Uh, I think that art can really bring us together, you know?

ROW

Yeah.

INT. CATHEDRAL OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE - MINUTES LATER

Cass and Row continue their exploration, pausing at various notable artworks and historical features, stealing glances of each other. They stop in front of the Barberini Tapestries.

CASS

Uh, these were created in the 17th century, depicting the life of Christ. They're made of wool and silk, and, um, the designs were created by several artists like Giovanni Francesco Romanelli, Pietro da Cortona, and Giovanni Lorenzo Bernini...

Row looks up at Cass, visibly impressed.

INT. CATHEDRAL OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE - MOMENTS LATER

As Cass and Row walk through the cathedral, soft organ music starts to play. They pass a dedicated area where votive candles burn.

ROW

Um, I'd like to light a candle for my grandpa.

CASS

I thought you didn't believe in God?

ROW

I... I don't really, but he did. Do you think that's phony?

CASS

No, I think if there was ever a God, He wouldn't judge.

Row drops some money into the donation box and then lights a candle.

ROW

(to herself)

Hey, grandpa... I wish you were here. I miss you so much. I love you... I forgive you.

Cass watches her.

EXT. BIBLICAL GARDEN - CATHEDRAL OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE - DAY

Cass and Row stroll through the biblical garden, where various plant species mentioned in the Bible flourish. They marvel at the vibrant peacocks and the bustling hive of 15,000 honeybees.

They come to a stop before the Peace Fountain created by Greg Wyatt.

CASS

It's a symbol of peace.

ROW

Will we ever have peace?

CASS

I hope so.

EXT. ROOFTOP - CATHEDRAL OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE - DAY

Cass and Row stand on the rooftop, smiling as they take in the breathtaking view of the city, even catching a glimpse of the spire of One World Trade Center.

EXT. MORNINGSIDE HEIGHTS - STREET - DAY

Cass and Row exit the cathedral, stepping out onto the street.

CASS
So, how do you feel?

ROW
Um, I'm not sure... But, that was kinda wild.

CASS
What do you mean?

ROW
It's hard to say. I need to think about it. But I'm definitely gonna need a drink now...

EXT. PARIS BLUE - HARLEM - DAY

A "PERMANENTLY CLOSED" sign hangs on the door. In the window, there's a photograph of Samuel Hargress Jr. with the inscription "RIP LEGEND." Cass gazes at it.

CASS
I can't believe he's really gone.

ROW
Who was he?

CASS
Uh, Samuel Hargress Jr. was the owner of this bar. He was here every day, seven days a week-- he lived upstairs. Um, it became a haven for the Harlem jazz scene, and many famous musicians performed here. His love for music and the community made this place really special. Man, he was so cool. He wore a 70s, uh, three-piece suit, snakeskin shoes, a thin mustache, fedora, and dark sunglasses at night. He was known for his style but more for his kindness and generosity. He was on of a kind...

INT. JAZZ BAR - HARLEM - DAY

Cass and Row sit at the semi-empty bar. The space is dimly lit, with vintage posters, photographs, and artwork covering the walls paying homage to jazz legends. The vibrant sounds of jazz music fill the room.

The BARTENDER, 50s, pours two whisky shots. Row swiftly downs her drink, while Cass hesitates, looking at his glass.

ROW

Come on. Just one shot.

Cass gulps down the whisky, coughing slightly.

CASS

Okay, so, um... returning to our earlier conversation...

He raises his empty shot glass.

CASS (CONT'D)

Liquid courage, right?

ROW

All right, all right. Um, seeing all that beautiful art felt like magic, you know. It-- it almost made me believe in... a universal life force that connects us all.

CASS

Right, right.

ROW

I still don't believe in God, though. But, uh, I think that all that magic comes from within us, right? We are the magic.

Cass smiles warmly at Row, appreciating her perspective.

CASS

I like that.

Row signals to the bartender, who refills their shot glasses. The two clink their glasses together, smiling.

ROW

To Samuel Hargress Jr.

CASS

A true legend.

EXT. HARLEM - DAY

Cass and Row stroll along a street. He is humming once again.

ROW
What's that tune you're humming?

Cass shrugs nonchalantly.

CASS
Oh, just something.

Row nudges him playfully.

ROW
Show me...

CASS
Wh-- What do you mean?

Row points to his saxophone case. Cass rubs his neck and reddens.

ROW
Right now, right here.

CASS
I'd rather die.

Row looks around.

ROW
Um, the street's kinda empty. Just delete your mind for a moment. It's all in your head, remember? Uh, just tell yourself, "I can. I can. I can." Come on, take a chance. So, what do you think?

Cass pauses.

CASS
I-- I-- I think I'm still really afraid. I see disaster. I see humiliation. But, but...

ROW
But?

CASS
Okay. Okay.

Row smiles. Cass takes a deep breath, nervously unzips his saxophone case, and pulls out his instrument.

He positions the saxophone and starts playing Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit." His fingers glide effortlessly over the keys.

As the music fills the air, the noise of the street seems to pause. Row's face lights up with recognition. She knows this song, and is visibly moved by Cass's performance.

Cass places the saxophone back in its case. A long silence hangs between them as they walk off.

ROW
That was really, really beautiful.

CASS
Ah, it was just all right.

ROW
How did it feel?

CASS
Um, like the world was kinda ending.

ROW
Yeah, that's valid. I've been there before.

Her eyes light up with excitement as she spots a bus pulling up nearby.

ROW (CONT'D)
Come on...

Row rushes toward the bus before it leaves, with Cass closely following behind.

INT. BUS - DAY

Cass and Row sit side by side, quietly riding the bus. Row looks out the window, deep in thought. Cass steals glances at her.

EXT. BRONX - DAY

Cass and Row amble down a busy street. The noise of urban life - car-horns, distant music, spirited conversations - fills the air.

Suddenly, Row pauses, her gaze drawn to a modest flower shop. Her eyes lock onto the delicate white gardenias. She picks up some and pays for them.

Cass looks at her with curiosity.

CASS
Who are those for?

Row smiles.

ROW
Lady Day...

Cass is taken aback.

CASS
Billie Holiday? What do you mean?

ROW
Your lady, Billie Holiday, is
buried right here in the Bronx.
We're going to see her...

Cass smiles.

EXT. SAINT RAYMOND'S CEMETERY - BRONX - DAY

Cass and Row stand before the imposing, yet serene, closed gates of Saint Raymond's Cemetery.

CASS
It's closed.

He sinks onto the ground, a look of defeat on his face.

ROW
You give up that easily? Haven't
you ever climbed a fence before?

She hands Cass the gardenias, her eyes gleaming with daring determination.

CASS
Bu-- but, uh-- We can't do that?

ROW
Why not?

CASS
We're breaking in. What if we get
caught?

Row laughs, shaking her head at his caution.

ROW

Who's going to tell on us? They're
all dead.

With a grace born of adrenaline, Row scales the fence, her figure momentarily silhouetted against the sky. She lands with a soft thud on the other side, turning back to urge Cass on.

ROW (CONT'D)

Come on...

Encouraged, Cass passes the gardenias back to Row and scales the fence, a thrill coursing through his veins.

EXT. SAINT RAYMOND'S CEMETERY - BRONX - DAY

The cemetery is quiet, its tranquility, contrasting sharply with the city's bustle. Row and Cass tread softly among the tombstones, the gardenias clutched in his hand.

EXT. BILLIE HOLIDAY'S GRAVE - SAINT RAYMOND'S CEMETERY - DAY

They reach Billie Holiday's headstone. Cass lays the white flowers down reverently, a silent tribute to the music icon.

ROW

Life is a constant improvisation.
Just like jazz, just like our
day...

Cass and Row smile. From his wallet, Cass pulls out a joint, glancing at Row with a grin. They sit side by side, passing the joint back and forth, and gradually become high. They lie down on the grass, gazing up at the sky.

ROW (CONT'D)

Do you ever think about time, Cass?

CASS

Tick tock. Tick tock.

ROW

Is anything exempt from time?
Nothing last... Sometimes, I feel
like... like I'm running out of
time. I keep getting older. The
world is passing away...

CASS

What if the way we measure time is
what makes us sick?

ROW
What do you mean?

CASS
Have you ever heard of Julian
Barbour's theory on time?

ROW
No, I don't think so.

Cass pushes up from the grass. Row mirrors his movement, both seated upright now, facing each other.

CASS
He, uh, challenges the traditional
concept of time as a flowing,
linear progression. Think about
it... What if all of time is
happening at once? Every moment,
every experience existed
simultaneously.

Row pauses, takes a moment to process this.

ROW
Then we would have no past, no
future... just now!

CASS
Right! And-- and life is not about
counting seconds, minutes, and
hours. Time is not meant to be
conquered. Uh, the more you chase
after it, the faster it-- it slips
through your fingers. And believing
it to be the measure of success
will only lead to suffering. Time's
worth lies not in how much you fill
it but in how you experience it!
How you spend it is what truly
matters, right?

With a burst of energy, Row stands up, stretching her arms towards the sky as if physically challenging the constraints of time.

ROW
Fuck time!

Inspired, Cass also stands, joining her in her defiance. Together, they shout into the open sky, their words echoing in the quiet cemetery.

CASS AND ROW

Fuck time!

EXT. BRONX ZOO - DAY

Cass and Row, still high, wander through the bustling zoo, absorbing the vibrant sights and sounds. They pause at the monkey enclosure, where monkeys chatter and leap about with unrestrained fervor.

CASS

I envy them.

ROW

Why?

CASS

They don't have to worry about the same bullshit we do. They can just be.

Row's eyes follow a baby monkey as it falls and learns. The mother monkey swiftly picks up the baby, displaying their care for each other.

ROW

I wonder what they think of us.

CASS

They'd probably say that we're not very kind.

ROW

Cruel, even.

CASS

Yeah.

A moment passes.

ROW

Thank you.

CASS

For what?

ROW

For stalking me this morning.

CASS

I'm glad I did.

INT. SUBWAY - DAY

Cass and Row sit across from each other in a semi-empty train, their hands positioned for a game of red hands.

ROW
Ready?

CASS
Mm-hmm.

Their hands are outstretched. A sudden jolt of the train distracts Row, and Cass seizes the opportunity to slap her hands. A ripple of laughter passes between them. Suddenly, Row drifts off.

ROW
Um... do you ever feel stuck, Cass?

CASS
In what way?

ROW
Emotionally, as if you're trapped
in a moment.

CASS
Sometimes... yeah. It's like-- like
walking in fog.

ROW
Or crying without knowing why.

CASS
Or knowing why but not being able
to stop.

ROW
Right.

CASS
Uh, I think it's called depression.

They exchange a glance and, with a soft smile, their hands return to the game.

EXT. WASHINGTON HEIGHTS - DAY

Cass and Row come across a lively Spanish musical concert. The crowd sprawls before them, a massive sea of people bustling with relentless energy. Cass's face turns pale and tenses up as he takes in the sight.

ROW
Let's move closer.

Cass rubs his neck, feeling uncomfortable.

CASS
No, no, no, no. I'm find here.

Cass wrings his hands.

ROW
What's wrong? Are you okay? You
look all pale.

Cass's hands tremble slightly as his eyes dart around,
scanning the crowd with unease.

CASS
I... I...

Row looks at him, sensing his nervousness.

ROW
What is it?

Cass looks down, feeling embarrassed and hesitant to share.

CASS
I-- I have anxiety. I can't handle
big crowds.

Cass takes a step back, distancing himself from the crowd.
Row follows suit, and they start to walk away.

INT. SUBWAY - DAY

Cass and Row stand in silence, holding on to the pole.

ROW
We have a serious mental health
crisis in this country.

She playfully point to Cass.

ROW (CONT'D)
Exhibit A.

Row nervously laughs. Cass looks down, hurt. She immediately
regrets her words.

ROW (CONT'D)
Cass, I'm sorry. I... I...

As the doors open, Row exits the train. The influx of people causes Cass anxiety, preventing him from stepping onto the platform.

Row shouts through the departing train's window.

ROW (CONT'D)
Meet me at the next stop! Get off
the next stop!

Cass looks at her, visibly anxious.

ROW (CONT'D)
Cass, get off the next stop!

EXT. WASHINGTON HEIGHTS - DAY

Row emerges from the subway and rushes onto the bustling street. She runs through the streets of Washington Heights, visibly panicked.

INT. SUBWAY PLATFORM - DAY

Cass sits on a bench, anxiously waiting, his knee bouncing up and down as he scans the surroundings. He reaches into his robe pocket, retrieves the bottle of Klonopin, and swallows a pill.

After a long moment, he looks up and spots Row sprinting down the staircase, sweaty and gasping for air. He stands. With relief and a smile, she approaches him, opening her arms wide. She hugs him.

ROW
I was so worried you left me.

She catches her breath.

ROW (CONT'D)
I didn't mean to hurt you.

CASS
You don't have to say anything--

ROW
It-- it wasn't a jab honestly. It's just that I sometimes make stupid jokes to cover up my own feelings. You see, my heart is broken. My grandpa was diagnosed with Alzheimer's and got really depressed, and he...

Cass sees tears welling up in her eyes.

CASS
It's okay.

ROW
No, it's not. I'm sorry. I'm so
sorry.

CASS
I forgive you.

Row hugs him again, holding on tightly.

EXT. WASHINGTON HEIGHTS - DAY

Cass and Row walk in silence for a long moment.

ROW
Do you get panic attacks?

CASS
All the time.

ROW
Do you take medication?

Cass pulls a bottle of Klonopin from his robe and shows it to her.

CASS
And some other stuff.

ROW
How does it feel? The anxiety, I
mean.

Cass hesitates for a moment, wringing his hands and looking down as he speaks.

CASS
Uh... imagine a voice that only you
can hear, always following you
around, even in your happiest
moments. It's like a cold hand on
your neck, filling your mind with
doubts. You-- you try to block it
out, but it's like yelling into a
storm. The worst part is, only you
hear it. Everyone else just sees
you struggling.

Cass clenches his fists and firmly presses his hands against the sides of his head, expressing his frustration.

CASS (CONT'D)

Get the fuck out of my head!

Row looks deeply moved.

ROW

I'll never fully get what you go through. But sometimes I feel like an actor in a play, in a language I don't understand. The spotlight's blinding, the audience is waiting. I feel exposed, trying to fake it, scared they'll see I'm a phony.

CASS

Does your mind feel like it's playing tricks on you?

ROW

What do you mean?

CASS

Like-- like being stuck in a maze, not sure if each turn gets you closer to the exit or deeper in.

Row nods in understanding.

ROW

Yeah, sometimes.

A moment passes.

ROW (CONT'D)

What else scares you?

CASS

Everything. Some people, you know, they-- they are not afraid of anything. I envy that.

ROW

You don't really believe that, do you?

Cass shrugs.

CASS

What about you? What scares you?

ROW

Frogs.

Cass chuckles.

CASS

Seriously?

ROW

Of course.

CASS

Frogs?

ROW

Yeah, frogs, they're so creepy. You don't think so?

Cass shakes his head.

ROW (CONT'D)

Um, their slimy skin, bulging eyes. They camouflage themselves within their surroundings and jump out of nowhere. Boo! What about their weird sounds, like growling and grunting? Sometimes, they sound like they're croaking.

CASS

Well, the croaking, um, is often male frogs attracting female frogs for mating. Like-- like a vocal advertisement to communicate their presence and reproductive fitness.

ROW

Mating, huh?

She mimics the croaking sound. A deep, low, guttural croak.

ROW (CONT'D)

Yep, that's really sexy.

They both laugh.

CASS

What else scares you?

After a brief pause, Row responds.

ROW

I... I don't want to end up like my parents.

(MORE)

ROW (CONT'D)

All they care about is work and money. They're like empty shells, you know? They do not live. They are not "mad to live"!

Cass smiles, recognizing the quote.

CASS

"...burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars."

Row gives Cass a smile. A moment.

EXT. STREET - WASHINGTON HEIGHTS - DAY

Clouds roll in, the city's hustle and bustle slowly quieting as ominous thunder rumbles in the distance. Cass and Row amble down the street.

Suddenly, rain begins to fall in heavy droplets. They exchange a glance and, without a word, they break into a run, weaving between the few remaining pedestrians.

EXT. UNITED PALACE - CONTINUOUS

They skid to a stop in front of the grand facade of the United Palace. They stare up at the towering marquee, the lights flickering against the dark, stormy sky.

The marquee reads: "Some Like It Hot."

ROW

Wow... do you believe in miracles?

Cass smiles.

ROW (CONT'D)

I've never seen it on the big screen before.

CASS

There's a first time for everything.

ROW

Shall we?

CASS

Absolutely.

They exchange a quick glance, before dashing into the grand theater, shaking off the rain.

INT. UNITED PALACE - DAY

The theater is bathed in a magical glow as the film plays on the screen. Cass and Row sit together.

On the screen: The seduction scene on the yacht between Sugar Kane (played by Marilyn Monroe) and Joe (played by Toni Curtis).

The moment hangs in the air. Cass turns to look at Row. Row, captivated by the film, is oblivious to his gaze. He watches her for a moment before turning back to the screen, a small smile on his face.

EXT. STREET - WASHINGTON HEIGHTS - DAY

In the aftermath of the rain, the world seems freshly washed and sparkling. Cass and Row amble down the glistening streets. Spotting a large puddle, Cass subtly guides Row around it, ensuring her path remains dry. Row smiles, touched by Cass' thoughtful gesture.

CASS

Can I ask you something?

ROW

What is it?

CASS

The acting... is it all real?

ROW

In what sense?

CASS

Uh, all those passionate movie kisses. Are they real?

ROW

Well, sort of. It's complicated. I mean, the kisses are physical, yes, but they're devoid of personal emotions. You're playing a character. It's an act. It doesn't mean anything. Here, let me show you...

Her words hang in the air between them, a silent invitation. The tension builds as she steps closer.

ROW (CONT'D)
Imagine I'm Sugar, you're Joe.

Cass looks hesitant. She steps closer, fully into her role.

ROW (CONT'D)
Give me a line to work with, okay?

Cass recalls a dialogue, his voice barely above a whisper.

CASS
"I got a funny sensation in my toes-
- like somebody was barbecuing them
over a slow flame."

ROW
"Lets throw another log on the
fire."

Row leans in to kiss Cass. He hesitates for a moment, then leans in to kiss her back. The world around them seems to fade. It's not an act anymore; it's a moment charged with undeniable attraction.

As they break the kiss, Row steps back, shifting from the character back to herself.

ROW (CONT'D)
So... was that real?

Cass is startled, his cheeks turn red.

CASS
Uh... Um... I...

Row smiles.

CASS (CONT'D)
Wh-- Why are you smiling?

ROW
I don't know what you're talking
about.

They continue walking, but something has shifted. An unspoken electricity hums between them, the echoes of the kiss lingering. Row sneaks a glance at the flustered Cass.

INT. OLD BOOKSTORE - QUEENS - DAY

Amid a sea of haphazardly stacked books, Cass saunters through the narrow aisles, his fingers grazing the books as he passes. He pauses, something catching his attention.

A small book, which he lifts from the shelf, admiring the cover with a hint of recognition in his eyes. A smile dances on his lips as he carefully tucks the book into the pocket of his robe.

A little distance away, Row scans a table littered with various books. Two TEEN GIRLS, faces awash with a layer of makeup far too mature for their age, hover nearby, glancing at Row's selections. Row hands them Patti Smith's "Just Kids" with a warm smile.

ROW
How about this?

The girls exchange a glance before giggling in unison.

GIRL #1
We prefer something more romantic.

Undeterred, Row retracts her suggestion and watches the girls wander away.

Across the store, the tension between a YOUNG COUPLE escalates, their fighting echoing off the worn wooden walls.

Cass and Row exchange a glance before wandering further into the labyrinth of book-filled aisles.

CASS
You have movies, books, and songs
telling you what love should be.
You dream of it before you
experience it, creating unrealistic
ideals. And then you're
disappointed when the reality never
compares to the dream.

Their attention is once again drawn to the another QUARRELING COUPLE, 40s, in the corner.

WOMAN
You're crazy. Why would I do
something like that?

MAN
To hurt me!

WOMAN
You're insecure!

Exchanging a glance, Cass and Row veer away from the contentious scene.

ROW
Let's fight.

CASS
What?

ROW
Let's pretend to be them.

CASS
What do you mean?

ROW
Improvisations, remember? Just
follow my lead...

As they carry out the fake break-up, Row stuffs her bag under her dress.

ROW (CONT'D)
You cheated on me because I got
fat!

The surrounding patrons watch with increasing intrigue.

CASS
No, no. You're not fat. You're not.
Well, you did put on some weight
but--

Row fakes crying, throwing the audience - and Cass - for a loop.

ROW
You made me fat! Did you ever think
I might be pregnant?!

CASS
What-- Pregnant?! Is it mine?

Their dramatic scene reaches a climax as Row hurls a book at Cass, but misses him. Then she bows theatrically as she concludes the performance.

CASS (CONT'D)
(whispers)
What are you doing?

ROW
Bowing to our audience.

Cass whirls around to find the entire bookstore watching them.

He raises his hands in a placating gesture, explaining their act as Row's bag slips from underneath her dress. Cass flushes.

CASS

Don't worry, it's okay. Really.
It's-- it's make-believe. I-- I
don't care if she's fat. I swear.

He points to the bag.

CASS (CONT'D)

See? It's not real.

Overwhelmed by the absurdity of it all, they dissolve into fits of laughter. As they move onto another aisle, Row picks up a self-help book on relationship: "Happily Ever After Handbook."

ROW

Something to slit your wrists to.

CASS

Does it make you sad?

ROW

What?

CASS

It doesn't last forever.

ROW

Yeah, but in the end, though,
nothing is truly lost... you gain
so much.

CASS

Really?

ROW

Yeah, it's like, um, I often think
about those who have never fallen
in love or never been in a "Punch-
Drunk Love" type of relationship.
Or can you imagine never having
someone be obsessed with you at
least once in your lifetime? Uh, my
dentist, who I think is like in her
forties, once told me she's never
been in a relationship. No one has
ever fallen in love with her. Now
that makes me sad, you know?

CASS

Yeah, I... I know what you mean now.

ROW

I think it's better to be in it, than not be in it at all.

Their conversation dwindles as they come across an ELDERLY COUPLE kissing behind a bookshelf. The sight sparks another line of thought.

CASS

It's not easy meeting people in this big city, though.

Row sighs heavily.

ROW

Tell me about it.

CASS

I hate going to bars. They increase my anxiety and it just costs too much. Fifteen dollars for a glass of wine! It's crazy.

ROW

I hate bars too. They're not intimate; they're so loud. How are you supposed to have a conversation when everyone is shouting on top of each other?

They reach the cashier's counter. Cass retrieves the small book from his robe.

ROW (CONT'D)

What's that? What are you buying?

CASS

Uh, nothing, just...

Cass reluctantly reveals the title: "Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair."

ROW

Neruda... That's pretty serious stuff.

CASS

It's a gift, uh, for my mom.

Row nods, her eyes narrowing slightly, knowing it's bullshit.

ROW
Right, sure. Of course it is.

EXT. BUS STOP - DAY

Cass and Row sit on a bus bench, their hands clasped as they engage in a playful thumb war.

CASS
Okay, pop quiz: Polar bear fur isn't white. True or false?

ROW
False.

CASS
Actually, it's true. Polar bear fur is transparent. It just looks white because it-- it reflects visible light. Each hair shaft is pigment-free. Okay, now your turn...

ROW
All right, um... Do humans have only five senses?

CASS
Yes.

ROW
We actually have more than five. In addition to the well-known ones like sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch, there are others like balance, temperature, pain, and even the passage of time.

Cass takes this in.

CASS
The passage of time is a sense?

ROW
Uh-huh.

CASS
I don't get it?

ROW
It's not something we can see or touch, but it's always there.

(MORE)

ROW (CONT'D)

It helps us keep track of things, like when things happen and how long they last. It also helps us remember things, and shapes our understanding of the world and how we navigate through life.

CASS

Fuck time, remember?

ROW

Yeah.

They both laugh, then they continue.

CASS

Do octopuses have three hearts?

Row shakes her head.

ROW

No one has three hearts.

CASS

Wrong again. They have two hearts pumping blood to the gills, and-- and a third heart that pumps blood to the rest of the body. And the third heart actually stops beating when the octopus swims.

ROW

Wow, that's cool. I wish I had three hearts.

Row pins Cass's thumb firmly.

ROW (CONT'D)

More!

CASS

All right, are shooting stars really stars falling from the sky?

ROW

Uh, yes. No. Um, I'm really not sure.

CASS

It's a myth. Shooting stars are not actually stars.

(MORE)

CASS (CONT'D)

They're small specks of dust from space that burn up when they enter Earth's atmosphere... making a bright flash of light.

Row's eyes light up.

ROW

More about the stars!

CASS

Here's another myth: Stars don't move.

ROW

Really?

Cass nods.

CASS

Stars may seem still from where we are because they're incredibly far away, but they're actually constantly moving within their galaxies. This movement is called proper motion.

Row laughs.

ROW

"Proper motion," huh?

Cass nods.

CASS

Uh-huh. So it's your turn, no?

ROW

Right, yes, my turn...

She takes a moment to think.

ROW (CONT'D)

Um, okay, here's one for you: Do humans share 50% of their DNA with a banana?

CASS

That can't be true.

Row mimics the sound of a game show buzzer.

ROW

Bzzt! It's true, actually.

Cass laughs.

CASS
So, we're half bananas?

ROW
No, silly. It just means all life
is connected and shares an
evolutionary past.

CASS
I like that one... So, it's my turn
again, right?

ROW
Yup.

CASS
Here's another one: Is it true or
false that the male seahorse
carries the babies?

ROW
No way. How?

CASS
The male seahorses have a special
pouch where the females pass over
their eggs during mating. Then Mr.
Seahorse fertilizes the eggs and
carries them in his pouch until
they're all grown-up seahorses.

ROW
Hey, how come you know so much
about space and animals?

CASS
I'm-- I'm a Gemini. I'm too
curious. I like to read about
everything.

ROW
Cool.

CASS
Okay, one more.

ROW
Um, sure. True or false: Elbow
licking is possible.

CASS
True.

ROW
I actually don't know the answer.

They both laugh, twisting their arms in a vain attempt to lick their elbows.

EXT. KARAOKE SHOUT - ASTORIA, QUEENS - DAY

Cass and Row stroll down the street, passing a karaoke place with colorful lights and lively music emanating from inside. Row notices the karaoke place and playfully nudges Cass.

CASS
No, no, no, no.

ROW
Why not?

CASS
I can't sing.

ROW
Me neither.

CASS
But you're an actor.

ROW
Well, that doesn't mean I can do it all.

Row smiles, challenging Cass. He raises an eyebrow, intrigued.

ROW (CONT'D)
All right, if you could sing one song, what would it be?

Cass beams.

CASS
"Summertime," by Billie Holiday.

ROW
Of course. But, why that one song?

Cass's expression turns dreamy.

CASS
Um, it captures the magic of those moments when, uh, life feels effortless, when nature is full of life, when there's hope...
(MORE)

CASS (CONT'D)

It-- it reminds me of the simple joys that life has to offer. See, to me that's-- that's very important, you know? And if I could, I'd want to be more carefree... like you.

A moment.

CASS (CONT'D)

Okay? What about you?

Row pauses.

ROW

"Because the Night" by Patti Smith.

CASS

Why?

ROW

Well, because it's really horny poetry.

Cass laughs, nervously.

ROW (CONT'D)

I mean come on. "Take me now baby here as I am." "Desire is hunger is the fire I breathe." "Love is an angel disguised as lust." "So touch me now, touch me now, touch me now." It's about fucking, right?

Row looks at him. Cass flushes, he looks away. A moment passes.

ROW (CONT'D)

Well, we both can't sing. Shall we at least give it a shot?

CASS

Okay. All right. Sure.

INT. KARAOKE SHOUT - ASTORIA, QUEENS - DAY

The private room they enter has a cosmic theme, with stars covering the ceiling, creating a mesmerizing atmosphere. Cass, a bit shy, steps up to the karaoke machine and selects "Summertime." As he starts singing, his voice is off-key and unpolished. Row watches, amused by the charming imperfection.

CASS
I was awful.

ROW
Yeah, you were.

They both laugh.

CASS
Well, your turn.

ROW
Okay, sure. I mean, after your singing, I have nothing to be embarrassed about, right?

CASS
Right.

Row approaches the microphone and starts singing "Because the Night." Her voice is sexy. She can sing! Cass looks surprised and is kind of turned on by her seductive singing.

EXT. KARAOKE SHOUT - ASTORIA, QUEENS - DAY

Cass and Row step out onto the street in silence.

CASS
Cheater. You lied.

ROW
If I told you I could sing, you wouldn't have tried. Why are people comfortable with each other when they find out they share the same fears?

CASS
I suppose you're right.

There is a silence.

CASS (CONT'D)
I lied too.

ROW
When?

Cass pauses before replying.

CASS
I don't talk to my mom every week... She died during Covid...
(MORE)

CASS (CONT'D)

It's easier to tell people she moved to California than to talk about it.

ROW

Why are you telling me this now?

CASS

After you told me about your grandpa... I...

ROW

Grief is so complicated, right? It really hurts, but no one wants to ever talk about it. Talk about the deep void in your soul, an empty space that seemed impossible to fill.

CASS

(almost to himself)
Yeah.

A moment. They continue walking.

EXT. ASTORIA PARK - DAY

A typical day in the park: parents hover over their children, dogs are strolled, kids flock to an ice cream truck, couples walk hand-in-hand.

Cass and Row sit back-to-back under the sprawling shade of an oak tree.

ROW

When do you feel the happiest?

CASS

When I'm not second-guessing everything or thinking about stuff that hasn't happened yet. When I think too much, I can't breathe. I wish I could just turn my brain off-- I wish I-- I could just let things happen, you know, be free.

ROW

What do you think about the most?

CASS

I-- I used to think I had everything figured out, but now I've come to realize that I actually know very little. I have no idea what's going to happen anymore.

ROW

Life's unpredictable, isn't it? No amount of planning prepares you for what's coming.

Row springs to her feet.

ROW (CONT'D)

You know what we need?

CASS

What's that?

ROW

More spontaneity. Actions that are free from thought and preconception. That's our true selves, right? Not these imaginary scenarios we make up in our heads. My acting coach always says, "Provoke the unexpected."

Row starts to climb the oak tree. Cass jumps to his feet.

CASS

Hey! Hey! Shit! What are you doing?!

ROW

I want to live!

CASS

Oh, God-- Please, don't do that. You-- you might get hurt.

ROW

Life's more fun when you're free, right?

CASS

What the fuck.

He rubs his neck.

CASS (CONT'D)

I-- I'd prefer it if you came back
down now.

Row ascends until she's at the top of the tree. She takes a
deep breath.

ROW

Okay, your turn.

CASS

No, no, no, no. No way.

ROW

Trust me, it's a whole different
world up here.

Cass firmly shakes his head.

CASS

No, absolutely not. I mean it!

ROW

Oh, come on.

CASS

What if I fall?

ROW

We all fall sometimes.

CASS

I'm not sure about this. It's
absurd!

ROW

You'll hate yourself if you didn't
try.

CASS

I'm-- I'm scared.

ROW

You're robbing yourself of so many
life experiences.

Cass mulls it over, rubs his head.

CASS

All right. Okay. Fine.

ROW

Yeah?

CASS

Yeah!

Cass, cautiously, begins to climb the tree. Row watches him from above, offering words of encouragement.

ROW

Hey, you're doing great. Just don't look down.

Of course, Cass looks down.

CASS

Shit. Fuck. Shit.

ROW

I told you not to look down.

Cass continues to climb, slowly but surely. He reaches the top of the tree and takes a deep breath. Row suddenly gives him a hug.

ROW (CONT'D)

You did it!

Cass nervously hugs her back.

CASS

I feel like a kid again.

ROW

Isn't it sad, growing up?

CASS

Yeah.

They savor the moment.

EXT. ASTORIA PARK - DAY

As they walk away from the park, Cass spots a tear in Row's tights and the fresh scrape beneath it.

CASS

Your knee...

Row checks her knee.

ROW

Shit.

CASS

You okay?

ROW

Yeah, it's just a scrape.

Row pulls out a compact first aid kit from her bag, as if she's always ready for such situations.

CASS

Does this happen often?

Row shrugs nonchalantly.

ROW

I tend to climb a lot of trees.

Cass chuckles.

EXT. LONG ISLAND CITY - STREET - DAY

Cass and Row walk along the waterfront boardwalk. The backdrop of the city skyline bathes in the warm sunlight.

ROW

So, why music, especially jazz?

CASS

It's-- it's how I connect to the world. Music is all around us, in everything we do. It's always there, even when we don't realize it. We make music when we laugh, cry, or even when we walk.

ROW

When we touch, kiss, make love too.

CASS

Exactly, it's communication! And-- and jazz, you know, the way the music flows and changes, and the musicians improvise and create something new each time they play. It's free and expressive, and-- and you can feel the energy in your body.

With a sudden spark in his eyes, Cass hops up on a street bench.

CASS (CONT'D)

This city is full of music. It's always telling us its stories, serenading us. We just have to open our ears to hear it...

Row, spurred by Cass's enthusiasm, rises up on the bench alongside him.

CASS (CONT'D)
New York City is jazz!

They stand together, their faces open to the city's orchestra.

MONTAGE

-- A pair of FEET, clad in worn-out shoes, PATTERN and SHUFFLE on a paved walkway, each step creating a rhythm of its own.

-- A CHILD'S LAUGHTER echoing around, as if carried by the wind.

-- A OLD MAN in a quiet alleyway, muffling his SOBS in a crumpled handkerchief, an echo of sorrow reverberating off the walls.

-- A YOUNG COUPLE, lost in their own world, share a KISS on a bustling street corner.

-- The EAST RIVER WAVES gently lap against the shore, their soft MURMURS punctuating the city's symphony.

-- A CONSTRUCTION WORKER drilling into concrete, the GRATING SOUND creating a rhythm, adding a harsher, vibrant tone to the city's song.

-- Through a cracked, DISTANT APARTMENT WINDOW, the rise and fall of a COUPLE'S BICKERING.

-- BIRDS on a tree, their sweet NOTES serenading the day.

-- Cass and Row's chests, their HEARTBEATS pulsing in time.

END MONTAGE

INT. MOMA PS1 - WOMEN'S BATHROOM - DAY

The door swings open, and Row steps into the women's bathroom. She quickly removes her ripped tights and discards them in the nearby trash can. She cleans the scrape on her knee with water and applies a fresh bandage.

Turning towards the mirror, she takes a moment to study her reflection. With a gentle sweep of her fingers, she smooths back her hair. Satisfied, she pulls out a tube of lipstick from her bag and carefully applies it. She smiles, feeling refreshed and confident.

INT. MOMA PS1 - MEN'S BATHROOM - DAY

Meanwhile, in the men's bathroom, Cass stands before a mirror, leaning over the sink. He splashes cold water onto his face, refreshing himself after a long day of walking and talking.

As he looks at his reflection, his eyes drift to his robe, noticing its slight disarray. He adjusts the collar and smooths out the folds. He takes a deep breath, ready to reunite with Row.

INT. MOMA PS1 - DAY

The cavernous "Meeting" room by James Turrell swallows Cass and Row. The room is bare, save for the immense ceiling cut-out, which frames the infinite expanse of the sky, transforming it into a living canvas. Cass and Row stand shoulder to shoulder, looking up, deep in thought.

CASS
(almost to himself)
They are the most important part of
the face...

Row looks at him. A quizzical expression on her face.

ROW
What is?

CASS
The eyes.

ROW
Do you really believe that?

CASS
Without question.

Row offers a counter-argument, her tone teasing.

ROW
What about the mouth?

Cass gently shakes his head in denial.

CASS
No.

ROW
You need the mouth to eat... and to
kiss. The nose is important too...

Despite her points, Cass stands his ground, his tone firm.

CASS

Yet not as important as the eyes.

ROW

But, you need the nose to breathe.
And don't forget... how would you
smell the flowers in the spring?
Then there are the ears...

CASS

Still, no.

ROW

How would you hear the words "I
love you" without the ears?

CASS

Eyes talk.

(pause)

And how else would you see what's
right in front of you?

A comfortable silence settles around them as their playful
debate ends. Their eyes meet. A moment.

INT. NOGUCHI MUSEUM GARDEN - DAY

Cass and Row meander through the lush pathways of the Noguchi
Museum Garden.

CASS

So, do you love being an actor?

ROW

I do. It's like escaping for a
little while, you know? I can be
anyone I want... If you could be
anything, what would it be?

Cass pauses before replying.

CASS

A book.

Row softly chuckles.

ROW

A book?

CASS

Yeah.

ROW

So you want fingers constantly touching you, even greasy ones? Who knows where else those fingers have been? Tears falling on your pages, hands becoming angry or devastated by your words-- being ripped and crumpled. And even the possibility of being beaten up, thrown against the wall, or tossed into the fireplace and burned?

CASS

Yes.

Row looks at him with disbelief.

ROW

Are you a masochist?

Cass shakes his head.

ROW (CONT'D)

Then why?

CASS

Uh, like, it kinda makes me feel less lonely, you know? It's like I'm sharing the experience... connection.

A moment passes.

CASS (CONT'D)

What about you?

ROW

An angel.

CASS

Really?

ROW

I want to watch people and listen to them like in the film "Wings of Desire." Have you seen it?

Cass shakes his head.

ROW (CONT'D)

Well, these angels walk around the earth, listening to our thoughts: our dreams, fears, struggles, disappointments... our stories.

(MORE)

ROW (CONT'D)

I wish I could do that too... know everyone's secrets.

CASS

What would you do with their secrets?

ROW

I would use their secrets to become a better actress.

Cass softly laughs.

CASS

Of course you would. When did you realize you wanted to become an actor?

Row chuckles, her eyes faraway, lost in a fond memory.

ROW

Well, funny story, when I was six, I broke my leg.

Cass raises an eyebrow, a teasing guess ready on his lips.

CASS

Climbing a tree?

Row grins, a silent confirmation of his guess.

ROW

I spent the entire summer indoors. My grandpa moved my bed in front of a large window in the living room. I couldn't climb the trees, but... I could see them every day. I could pretend to be like them and feel the wind blowing through my hair. From there on I began to pretend and never stopped.

She stops walking, standing amidst the leafy greens. She extends her arms, reaching for the sky just as the trees around her do. Her eyes close and she sways gently. Her hair blowing with the wind, creating an illusion of leaves rustling.

ROW (CONT'D)

Try it...

Following Row's lead, Cass pauses and turns to face her. He too slowly extends his arms.

His eyes close, matching Row's pose, joining her in a moment of peaceful harmony with nature.

INT. BUS - DAY

Cass and Row sit in a semi-empty bus, they look calm and relaxed.

ROW
How is it that our paths never
crossed before?

CASS
Actually, we had a brief encounter
in the past.

Row looks genuinely surprised.

ROW
When?

CASS
Um, it was last spring. I saw you
sitting on the steps, crying.

Row pauses, a flicker of recognition crossing her face.

ROW
I remember. You lent me your
handkerchief.

CASS
Why were you crying?

Row delves into her bag, retrieving a pocket watch. With a gentle click, she opens it, and the soothing melody of Mozart's "Twelve Variations on 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star'" starts to play.

ROW
I got caught in the rain and
accidentally broke my grandpa's
watch. It's the only thing I have
left of him. Luckily, I found a
place on Delancey that repaired it
for me.

The melody evokes a sense of nostalgia.

ROW (CONT'D)
I miss him so much...

Row rest her head on Cass's shoulder, her eyelids growing heavy as the music lulls her into a peaceful state.

ROW (CONT'D)

I'm glad we're neighbors.

Cass closes his eyes.

CASS

Me too.

Eyes closed, they indulge in a moment of rest.

CASS (CONT'D)

Are you hungry?

ROW

I'm starving.

Cass smiles, his eyes still closed.

INT. INDIAN RESTAURANT - QUEENS - DAY

The ambient murmur of the bustling Indian restaurant surrounds Cass and Row. They sit opposite each other, enveloped in a cocoon of awkward silence. Row observes other couples dining. While, Cass's fingers fiddle with a spare napkin, methodically folding it into a neat paper airplane, a silent diversion.

ROW

You seem a bit tense.

Cass shrugs nonchalantly.

CASS

I-- No. I'm fine.

Row chuckles.

ROW

Just a tiny bit nervous, perhaps?
You know, I sometimes get
butterflies in my stomach when I
share a meal with someone new.

Cass rubs the back of his neck.

CASS

All right, yeah. I... yes, I am
nervous, to tell you the truth.

Row nods triumphantly.

ROW

I knew it! Isn't it curious though?
Why do people always feel nervous
when they're sharing a meal for the
first time?

CASS

Uh, because it's very intimate. You
really see people when you watch
them eat.

A moment of shared silence follows, they exchange glances.
The paper airplane sits forgotten on the table.

The waiter returns to the table, balancing plates filled with
Indian food.

ROW

So, what's the most embarrassing
thing you ever did on a date?

CASS

Um, I once accidentally spat out
food while talking, and it landed
in her hair.

Row mischievously fills her mouth with food and intentionally
lets some spill out as she speaks.

ROW

Like this?

CASS

Even worse.

Cass stuffs his mouth with a large amount of food,
deliberately lets it spill out.

ROW

Gross.

Other diners nearby look at them, their expressions filled
with disgust. Undeterred, Cass and Row burst into laughter,
realizing the mess they've made. They quickly clean it up,
trying to contain their amusement.

EXT. WILLIAMSBURG - DAY

Cass and Row pedal their Citi Bikes through the bustling
streets of Williamsburg, fully immersed in the vibrant rhythm
of the borough. They navigate with ease, their legs pumping
in sync.

Along their route, they pass by: Domino Sugar Factory, the kaleidoscope of street art on North 14th Street and Wythe Avenue, Marlow & Sons, Nitehawk Cinema, Bedford Avenue, the Music Hall of Williamsburg, Brooklyn Brewery, McCarren Park, and finally, their Citi bikes lead them to the bustling Artists & Fleas market.

EXT. CITI BIKE STATION - DAY

The sound of wheels grinding to a halt. Cass and Row, all laughter and panting breaths, roll their Citi Bikes into the docking station.

INT. ARTISTS & FLEAS MARKET - DAY

Cass and Row wander amidst stalls of the bustling market. Local artists, vintage collectors, a treasure trove of jewelry, art, clothing, and home decor surround them.

CASS

You still haven't stolen anything.

ROW

Uh, I just haven't found the right thing to steal yet--

Suddenly, Row ducks behind a rack of dresses. Cass looks confused.

CASS

What are you doing?

Row gestures subtly towards a YOUNG WOMAN across the market.

ROW

My ex.

Cass's gaze follows Row's direction. He discreetly looks back to Row, who is now hiding under the clothing rack.

ROW (CONT'D)

Is she gone?

CASS

Not yet. Uh, she's paying for something... Okay now.

ROW

Are you sure?

CASS

Yeah, she's gone.

Row resurfaces from under the clothing rack.

ROW

I'm bisexual, by the way. Do you disapprove?

CASS

No, no. Of course not. Some of my favorite musicians are LGBTQIA+. Hello, Billie Holiday, Bessie Smith, and Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, the "Mother of the Blues!"

ROW

Just checking.

CASS

So, why did you break-up?

Row looks a little uncomfortable.

ROW

Uh, she dumped me.

CASS

Why?

Row rolls her eyes in disbelief.

ROW

We fought about Gena Rowlands until I cried...

She blows a raspberry like Mabel in "A Woman Under the Influence," an act of rebellion.

ROW (CONT'D)

And-- and-- she was like, what are you gonna do with acting? Like how is that gonna pay the bills? She was just like really, really mean like my parents. Like get a "real job," you know? She said I was always acting, like-- like pretending all the time. Can you believe that?

Cass suppresses a smile as he sidetracks to a shop filled with vintage sunglasses. Row explores the sunglasses, uncovers a pair similar to Holly Golightly's from "Breakfast at Tiffany's," and tries them on, looking at herself in a mirror.

ROW (CONT'D)

"I'm like cat here, a no-name slob. We belong to nobody, and nobody belongs to us. We don't even belong to each other."

As the vendor turns around, she walks off with the sunglasses still on. Cass casually follows her.

ROW (CONT'D)

"I'll never let anybody put me in a cage."

Cass stifles a laugh, struggling to contain his amusement.

EXT. MARSHA P. JOHNSON STATE PARK - DAY

Cass and Row, with Row wearing the sunglasses she just stole, pass under the vibrant floral gateway of Marsha P. Johnson State Park, where Marsha's famous quote, "Pay It No Mind," is emblazoned across the top.

The pair drift along, engaged by panels documenting Marsha's life and activism.

CASS

Did you know that Andy Warhol painted a portrait of Marsha P. Johnson?

ROW

No.

CASS

Her portrait is part of Warhol's "Ladies and Gentlemen" series, which featured portraits of transgender people and drag queens.

ROW

Wasn't he a bit of a creep? I mean, he was only interested in fame and, uh, appeared emotionally shallow.

CASS

You know, I-- I kind of believed that too until I, um, watched this docuseries on his life on Netflix. His voice is AI-generated, which is kind of weird at first, but now I-- I think it's beautifully done.

(MORE)

CASS (CONT'D)

Anyway, um, it showed this side of him that I think no one really knew. Uh, while many perceive him as cold, empty, manipulative, he-- he actually possessed a deep sensitivity, thoughtfulness, and a genuine engagement with the world around him. And-- and he suffered from profound loneliness. It kind of made me feel really sad in the end. Uh, there was this quote of his that really moved me...

He chuckles at himself.

CASS (CONT'D)

I'm-- I'm sorry I'm talking too much again.

Row takes off the sunglasses and looks at Cass.

ROW

No, no, go ahead, I want to hear it.

CASS

Okay, um, he said "People should fall in love with their eyes closed." I... I thought that was so beautiful, you know? Love is about connecting on a deeper level, beyond just how we look.

Row looks at him, clearly impressed.

ROW

I've never met anyone like you. You're like the smartest person I've ever met.

Cass's cheeks turn pink, and he nervously rubs his neck.

CASS

I'm-- I'm just obsessed with all kinds of information, especially history.

ROW

Why history? I find it extremely depressing sometimes.

CASS

I-- I just think, um, if everyone knew all of history, right, especially all the really bad stuff. Uh, maybe people would grow up and put an end to all this stupid hate. "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

Row's brows furrow and her eyes narrow.

ROW

It doesn't matter.

CASS

What do you mean?

ROW

I mean most people choose to live in a bubble, and some even believe it's all made up. I read somewhere, that sixty percent of Americans don't know that six million Jews were murdered during the Holocaust. And most don't even want to talk about the Native American genocide, slavery, Jim Crow, or Ukraine?

CASS

Yeah, I know. It's really sad.

Row clenches her jaw, radiating an intense anger.

ROW

Do you think people really learn from history ever? I mean, they're currently banning books about LGBTQIA+, characters of color, race, and racism. They're more afraid of books than guns, for Christ's sake! And don't even get me started on women's rights. You know, it's absolutely crazy to me to think that to this day, this shit is still happening.

CASS

I guess it seems hopeless right now but... I... I want to believe there are more of us than them. Uh, maybe we can change the world.

ROW
You're an optimist, huh?

CASS
Yeah, yeah, but think about it. Without activists and protesters, we wouldn't have seen great changes, right? For example, we wouldn't have equal rights for Black Americans without Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Park, Malcolm X, John Lewis!

ROW
And we wouldn't have had the Stonewall riots without Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera, Stormé DeLarverie.

CASS
See, you're an optimist too.

A shared smile passes between them.

ROW
Can I ask something, but it's kinda stupid?

CASS
Sure.

Row hesitates, looks down.

ROW
Uh, it's, uh... Forget it, it's not important.

CASS
Come on, just ask me.

Row pauses for a moment.

ROW
Okay, so, you're like a library in human form, right? You obviously read a lot and have an insatiable appetite for learning. Why haven't you visited all the places we went to today?

Cass pulls out his iPhone and shows her his Instagram page.

ROW (CONT'D)
Hmm, only four followers...

Cass sadly nods.

CASS

It's hard making friends, you know, when you have anxiety. It's-- it's not easy to be vulnerable around others.

He looks down, visibly embarrassed.

CASS (CONT'D)

I'm constantly worried about being misunderstood. Like-- like, they won't get me or think I'm too weird.

Row looks at him empathetically.

ROW

Well, I got to spend the whole day with you, and I feel like ridiculously lucky. And I can really say I think you're pretty special. You really are.

A moment.

ROW (CONT'D)

Social media is bullshit, you know. No one really has that many friends. It's all a fucking lie.

CASS

Yeah, but, that's the only thing anybody really cares about.

ROW

Well, I believe you only truly need a few close friends in life. Friends who will stick with you no matter what-- who would live or die for you. If you have that, you're very lucky.

(pause)

So, um... would you like to be my friend?

Cass nods.

CASS

I'd like that.

ROW

But, there's a condition...

CASS
Wh-- What?

ROW
No more religious stuff, unless it
involves a Keith Haring Triptych.

CASS
Bet.

ROW
Bet.

Row smiles at Cass, he smiles back.

INT. SUBWAY - DAY

Cass and Row stand in the midst of a semi-empty train, their hands mere inches apart as they both hold onto the pole for support.

SUBWAY CONDUCTOR (O.S.)
Next stop, the Brooklyn Bridge.

ROW
It's almost over.

CASS
What is?

ROW
Today.

CASS
Oh, right.

A silence hangs between them.

ROW
Well, it's still not nine yet,
right?

CASS
Right.

ROW
Let's walk a little, okay?

CASS
Yeah, okay. Wanna walk over the
Brooklyn Bridge?

Row smiles.

ROW

I'd really like that. You know, I've never walked over the bridge before. Um, have you ever seen the movie "Sophie's Choice"?

CASS

Uh, no.

ROW

It's incredibly emotional and sad. I won't go into too much detail, just in case you ever watch it. But, um, there's this famous scene where Stingo, played by Peter MacNicol, Sophie, played by the iconic Meryl Streep, and Nathan, played by Kevin Kline, walk along the bridge. They stop to open a bottle of champagne, and Nathan climbs up a light post to make a toast to Stingo. It's a special moment of connection between friends.

A moment passes.

ROW (CONT'D)

Um, do you know any interesting stories about the bridge?

CASS

Mmm, yeah, I actually do.

ROW

Of course you do.

They share a smile.

CASS

Okay, so, um, around 2009, there was this unusual custom called "padlocking" that became popular among couples visiting the bridge. It was inspired by a similar tradition in Paris. Anyway, couples used to attach padlocks to the bridge, and, uh, throw away the key, as a symbol of their love.

ROW

Wow, that's so romantic. What happened to all the padlocks?

CASS
The city had to remove them all
because the weight was putting the
bridge at risk.

ROW
How sad.

The train doors open, and Cass and Row step off onto the platform.

EXT. BROOKLYN STREET - DUSK

Dusk is breaking, casting a warm glow across the city. Cass and Row are walking along slowly, each deep in thought. They stop at a light. As they wait, Row absentmindedly pulls a loose string off Cass's robe. The light changes, and they resume walking.

CASS
I have to tell you something...

ROW
What is it?

CASS
Um, earlier today when you were
showing me, uh, that-- that kissing
in movies is not real, only acting,
right?

ROW
Right.

CASS
Um, I... I wasn't really acting.

Row smiles.

ROW
Same here.

Cass smiles back.

EXT. BROOKLYN - STREET - DUSK

Cass and Row are walking along the street towards the bridge when something attracts their attention. They stare at a group of CONSTRUCTION WORKERS getting ready to demolish an old, charming brownstone, making room for unaffordable condos.

CASS
Nothing is holy anymore.

They both remain still and silent for a long moment, watching incredulously at what for them is an act of vandalism.

With a loud crash, the brownstone comes crumbling down, raising a cloud of dust.

Cass takes out the book he purchased earlier from the bookstore. He reads, "Tonight I Can Write the Saddest Lines," by Pablo Neruda. He is mourning the loss of old New York, as if he lost a lover.

CASS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
(reading)

Tonight I can write the saddest lines. I loved her, and sometimes she loved me too... Through nights like this one, I held her in my arms, I kissed her again and again under the endless sky... My soul is not satisfied that it has lost her... My sight searches for her as though to go to her. My heart looks for her, and she is not with me... The same night whitening the same trees... We, of that time, are no longer the same...

MONTAGE:

-- The skyline of New York at sunset, with warm hues casting a nostalgic glow.

-- Building fronts of bodegas, exuding a sense of neighborhood charm.

-- The iconic Chelsea Hotel, a symbol of artistic and bohemian culture.

-- A street lined up with old brownstones, each with its unique character.

-- Cobblestone streets from Brooklyn, Harlem, Staten Island, reminiscent of a time long ago.

-- Murals and Graffiti-covered walls, capturing the urban vibrancy and street art scene.

-- CBGB, the legendary punk rock venue, representing the city's rich musical history.

-- The Brooklyn Bridge, a majestic structure spanning across the East River.

END MONTAGE

EXT. BROOKLYN BRIDGE - NIGHT

Cass and Row enter the bridge. The bridge is illuminated by lights. The New York skyline stretches out before them, its beauty breathtaking.

CASS
Look at that... There's no place
like it.

He looks at the city with a new sense of reverence.

CASS (CONT'D)
New York will always be...

Row smiles.

ROW
...New York.

Cass smiles back.

CASS
Yeah.

Row steps toward the bridge's railing, deep in thought.

ROW
Do you believe dreams can come
true, Cass?

CASS
Sometimes.

ROW
You know, you're not the only
one...

CASS
What do you mean?

ROW
Everyone is scared. I'm scared too.

CASS
Of what?

ROW

That I'm not good enough. It's all a risk, isn't it? What if I don't make it?

CASS

But you seem so confident.

Row softly laughs.

ROW

Actors are so insecure, even if they appear confident. It's a tough business, you know. You can work hard and still not make it. It's all about luck.

Cass turns to Row.

CASS

You're a star, remember?

ROW

Right...

She searches her bag, takes her mask out and puts it on.

ROW (CONT'D)

And you're the pink moon...

Cass takes his mask out of his pocket and puts it on.

CASS

I think we're gonna be all right.

A moment between them, then they continue to cross the bridge. Row slightly shivers. Cass takes off his robe and slips it over her shoulders.

ROW

Thank you.

EXT. OLD TENEMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Cass and Row stand in silence in front of their apartment building, facing each other. Their eyes are fixed on the ground, uncertain of what to do next. Their eyes finally meet.

ROW

It was fun. Wonderful.

CASS
The best Saturday of my life.

ROW
Yeah, mine too.

A moment.

ROW (CONT'D)
So, um, what are you up to tonight?

CASS
Um, you know, nothing much.

They share a knowing laugh.

CASS (CONT'D)
And you?

ROW
I don't know. Don't have any plans,
really.

Cass gets ready to say something but hesitates.

ROW (CONT'D)
Well... thanks again for today.

She takes the robe off her shoulders and gives it back to Cass.

ROW (CONT'D)
I guess that's it... uh, bye.

She waits a moment, hoping Cass will stop her.

CASS
Um, okay, see you around.

Row looks slightly disappointed.

ROW
Yeah, sure.

Row tentatively walks toward the entrance of the building. Cass rubs his neck, gathering the courage to say what he truly wants.

CASS
Row!

Row stops, smiles, and turns around.

ROW
Yeah? What is it?

CASS
We never danced.

ROW
W-- What?

CASS
We spent the whole day together,
talking, making masks, stealing,
singing, riding bikes, eating,
acting, and even climbing a tree,
but... we never danced.
(pause)
Saturday isn't over yet...

Cass extends his hand with a smile, his eyes sparkling with anticipation. Row's face lights up with a radiant smile as she reaches for his hand. Their fingertips touch, and the electric current between them is palpable.

EXT. HUDSON RIVER PARK - NIGHT

Time seems to stand still as Cass and Row dance slowly, cheek to cheek, in perfect harmony. They are lost in their own world, surrounded by the breathtaking beauty of the New York City downtown skyline.

FADE OUT.