

FADE IN:

INT. KITCHEN, ALAINA'S CASITA - MORNING

A lovely and quaint Casita in a Southwestern town.

ALAINA HIGGINS (a free spirited yet profound woman, in a frail 60 year old's body) shakily opens a can of cat food in her kitchen.

We hear her voice in the background as she goes about her morning routine.

ALAINA (V.O.)

I guess you could look at it that way. As "a choice"... But i'm not sure if I ever had much of a choice.

EXT. FRONT PORCH, ALAINA'S CASITA - MORNING

Alaina opens her front door and we are revealed to a Southwest town: shades of brown for miles on end, a piercing blue sky, skin melting sun, and wide open dirt roads.

It's the type of town that is beautiful in its solitude, but lonely all at the same time.

Alaina places the food down by the front porch.

She makes a KISSING NOISE beckoning her cat to come.

ALAINA (V.O.)

Helping, being of service... All of that was just synonymous with survival.

She looks out at the vast desert landscape, then goes back inside and closes the door.

INT. BEDROOM , ALAINA'S CASITA - MORNING

Alaina changes from her pajamas into her scrubs. We see the wrinkles on her body. Like the rings of a tree, signifying how much time has passed.

ALAINA (V.O.)

I've always been good very good at helping people...

Alaina looks at herself in the mirror. There's a deep sadness behind her eyes.

ALAINA (V.O.)
 ...I'm just not the best at
 receiving it.

She brushes her hair out of her face, combing it neatly to the side. She takes one last look at herself, then grabs her ID badge off of her desk and clips it onto the front of her scrubs.

INT. ROOM 232 , HILLAND HOSPICE CARE - CONTINUOUS

A sterile and bleak hospice center.

Alaina opens the door as her gaze meets ELENI, a Greek woman in her mid 40's who sits in a chair opposite the patient bed, holding onto a book.

In the bed next to Eleni, sleeps KOSTOS, a frail Greek man in his late 70's, with sunken eyes.

ALAINA
 I can come back another time if--

Eleni frustratedly cuts her off and turns to her "sleeping" father.

ELENI
 (in Greek)
 Stop being foolish. Don't trick the
 people who are trying to help you.

Kostos opens his eyes. Eleni turns to Alaina.

ELENI (CONT'D)
 He likes to pretend to be asleep so
 the nurses don't bother him with
 more bloodwork.

KOSTOS
 That's not what I'm doing.

ELENI
 So what do you call this act you
 put on?

KOSTOS
 Practicing being dead.

Eleni sucks her teeth. She throws the book in her hand on the chair and walks out. Kostos laughs but ultimately just ends up in a coughing fit.

Alaina lets out a small laugh, but tries to hide it.

EXT. MEDITATION GARDEN , HILLAND HOSPICE CARE - MOMENTS LATER

A small mediation garden in the back of the hospital.

The water flows through pebble fountain, breaking the silence with the soft sound of trickling water.

Kostos sits in a medical gown, holding onto his IV drip. He looks at the small pebble filled waterfall.

ALAINA

You need to make it easier on her.

KOSTOS

Who?

ALAINA

Eleni.

Kostos sucks his teeth.

KOSTOS

Do you have any children?

Alaina nods her head.

ALAINA

I have a daughter.

KOSTOS

What is she like?

Alaina switches the subject.

ALAINA

Why aren't you letting the nurses do your bloodwork anymore?

KOSTOS

I'm going to die anyway. It's better to die dignified. Not as a pin cushion.

ALAINA

What makes the process of dying so undignified to you?

Kostos doesn't answer.

ALAINA (CONT'D)

Welcoming death requires a courage and resolve that even the most dignified can't imagine.

KOSTOS

In all our talks, you speak so much about welcoming death. Do you know what it feels like to be dying, Alaina? It's not something you welcome.

Alaina pulls a small notebook out of her back pocket and reads Kostos a couple lines.

ALAINA

"I met death once, and it terrified me. All I could think about was everything I lacked. When we meet again, I'll embrace it, because I'll be thankful for all that I had."

KOSTOS

Who wrote that?

ALAINA

Me. When I was in the hospital. Stage 3, Esophageal Cancer.

KOSTOS

So you get it.

ALAINA

I do.

KOSTOS

...But Alaina, *you're alive*. You, are living, yet you spend all your days talking with me about dying...

Alaina feels this statement deeply in her bones.

KOSTOS (CONT'D)

Don't surround yourself with so much death that you forget what it means to really live.

Kostos reaches his hand out and holds Alaina's.

KOSTOS (CONT'D)

I am just happy to have known you, my friend. Especially in a time like this.

They sit in silence for a moment. Both watching the pebble fountain. The softness of the water contrasts the heavy emotions they feel.

Kostos coughs, covering his mouth.

Alaina turns to him.

ALAINA

You know, when I got sick, I would wake up in that hospital bed, and I would just stare at the water stained ceiling every morning and think...this is it. This is how I'm going to go.

KOSTOS

In the hospital?

ALAINA

No, unhappy.

KOSTOS

Are you happy now?

INT. OFFICE, HILLAND HOSPICE CARE - LATE AFTERNOON

Eleni cries into some tissues.

Across from her, sitting at a desk with a plaque that reads "hospice program director", is MARGRET (Late 50's).

Alaina sits in the chair next to Eleni on the opposite side of the desk. Alaina stares at a water stain on the office ceiling. A few drops of water drip down into a bucket positioned underneath the leak.

MARGRET

--We will continue to make him as comfortable as possible until his time comes.

Eleni wipes her tears.

MARGRET (CONT'D)

It seems as though his sessions with Alaina are keeping him in good spirits. Wouldn't you say, Alaina?

Alaina still stares at the water stain.

MARGET

Alaina?

Alaina snaps out of it.

ALAINA

Oh. I believe so. Yes. He is truly
a wonderful man.

Eleni blows her nose, throws her tissue in the trash, and
stands up and leaves without another word.

Margret turns to Alaina.

MARGRET

Your willingness to volunteer your
time as an End of Life Coach is
admirable, honestly. The patients
here need someone that can relate
to what they're going through. I
have to say, I am so happy they
have you.

Alaina lets out a small smile.

MARGRET (CONT'D)

However, losing your first patient,
although inevitable, can be very
hard. Just make sure you're taking
care of yourself.

Alaina nods.

INT. CAR , OPEN ROADS - 8 PM

Alaina drives back home in her scrubs.

She listens to CIRCLE GAME by JONI MITCHELL. She pretends to
smoke a fake cigarette, she opens the window, sticking her
hand out of the car window, flicking the fake embers off her
imaginary cig.

She turns into her driveway. She exits the car and then walks
up to her front porch.

EXT. FRONT PORCH, CASITA - CONTINUOUS

Alaina walks up to the door. She takes her keys out of her
bag, but something catches her eye. The cat food she set out
earlier, undisturbed.

EXT. BACKROADS, ALAINA'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Alaina, wearing a shawl over her clothes, uses a flashlight
and walks along the backroads of her house, making clicking
noises to attract the cat.

ALAINA

Cat! Cat!

She looks frustratedly, until she sees something up ahead. She walks swiftly down the road, illuminating the path with her flashlight.

Alaina spots the mangled Tabby Cat on the side of the road.

She walks up to it, and looks at it's lifeless, bloody, body.

Alaina's eyes fill up with tears but still, she stares at Cat for a few more moments, letting its death register.

ALAINA (CONT'D)
(Softly)

Oh, Cat...

She takes off her shawl and places it over Cat's lifeless body. She slowly sits on the ground next to it as tears roll down her face.

Alaina begins to sob, unsure of whether or not the tears are for her beloved stray cat, or for herself.

She puts her head in her hands and wipes her face dry.

She takes her phone out from her pocket, dials a number and puts it up to her ear.

The LINE RINGS, and RINGS, until it goes to voicemail.

ALAINA (CONT'D)
Hi honey. I bet you're probably at work... again. I just wanted to call and say hi-

Alaina starts to get choked up.

ALAINA (CONT'D)
The cat. The cat that I told you comes by to see me, he got-- He got hit by a car, and I-

Alaina collects herself.

ALAINA (CONT'D)
Anyway, I'd love it if maybe you could come by one day and visit. It's been a while since we talked and--

Alaina wipes the tears that are flowing down her face. She breathes out, trying not to sound as distraught as she feels.

ALAINA (CONT'D)

Well, anyway. I love you, Evie. I
hope you're having a good night.
Hopefully we'll, um, talk soon.

Alaina hangs up the phone. She takes a big breath in, and a big breath out.

INT. SHOWER , ALAINA'S CASITA - LATER THAT EVENING

Alaina stands in the shower as steam fills the room and hot water runs over her.

INT. BEDROOM , ALAINA'S CASITA - MOMENTS LATER

Alaina stands in her bedroom in her towel. She opens a drawer in her dresser and pulls out a photo album.

Inside are photos from her wedding day. A YOUNG ALAINA and her husband, RICHARD hold hands, looking happy and full of life.

She turns the page to photos of a YOUNG EVIE, Alaina's daughter. Silly, happy, and carefree.

Alaina takes out one of the photos of her holding Evie on her lap, she looks at it for longer than she should.

EXT. SMITH'S BAR - MIDNIGHT

Alaina pulls up in her car to Smith's Bar.

The red glow from the lights illuminate her as she walks towards the front door.

INT. DANCE FLOOR, SMITH'S BAR - CONTINUOUS

A dive bar that's beloved by locals. The Thursday night bar crowd is dying down and only a HANDFUL OF PATRONS remain.

A GUITARIST plays the chords to ALWAYS ON MIND. An OLD COUPLE dances, holding each other close. And A DRUNK YOUNG MAN sways to the music holding his beer.

Alaina walks her way up to the bar top, where the bartender RAUL is working.

RAUL

What can I get you?

ALAINA

Is Evie working tonight?

RAUL

Evie? Oh, no. She hasn't been on shift in a couple months.

ALAINA

Oh... Okay. Any reason?

Raul shrugs.

RAUL

You know, you look just like her.
You her mom?

Before Alaina can answer.

RAUL (CONT'D)

Oh, no. My bad. I forgot her mom passed away when she was a kid or something.

Those words rock Alaina, but she keeps it together. She nods her head.

ALAINA

I'm just an old friend... I'll do a Maker's on the rocks.

Raul gets Alaina's drink. She hands him her card. From the opposite end of the bar we hear a WOMAN GROANING

WOMAN (O.S.)

More!!

Raul rolls his eyes, he walks towards the other side of the bar. We're revealed to Eleni, sloppy, drunk, and slurring her words.

RAUL

Listen, I already told you. I have to cut you off.

ELENI

I ordered another drink!

Alaina walks towards the other side of the bar, diffusing the situation.

ALAINA

It's okay. It's okay. I know her.

RAUL

Look, I've been trying to get her out of here for hours, I just want to make sure she doesn't go home with any creeps.

ALAINA

I can take her. It's okay.

INT. FRONT SEAT, ALAINA'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Alaina drives her car. Eleni sits in the passenger seat. Eleni reaches into her bag and lights up a cigarette.

ELENI

Do you smoke?

Alaina rolls down the windows.

ALAINA

No. I used to. Tried to get rid of some bad habits.

ELENI

Fuck it.

Eleni sticks her head out of the window and blows the smoke out.

ALAINA

You really should get back in the car.

Eleni screams at the top of her lungs out the window. Alaina tugs on her shirt, pulling her back in.

Eleni laughs.

ELENI

Before I left today, you said "He truly is a wonderful man."

ALAINA

I'm sorry? I'm not following.

ELENI

My father. You said he was a wonderful man. Was he? I mean, really. Was he?

Eleni starts to cry.

ELENI (CONT'D)

Everyone always said that about him. But why did I never know him that way? I hardly even knew him at all.

Alaina slows down the car.

She comes to a stop.

ALAINA

Knew him?

Eleni sobs. Alaina reaches out her hand and places it on Eleni's. They stay like that for a moment before Eleni opens the car door and pukes. Alaina sits there in silence.

EXT. PARKING LOT, HOTEL - 1:30 AM

Alaina pulls into the hotel parking lot. She helps the very drunk Eleni out of the car.

Eleni drops her bag. Her lipgloss, wallet, cigarettes and keys scatter on the ground. Alaina scrambles to grab her things.

ELENI

You are lucky.

ALAINA

Why is that?

ELENI

You understand death.

Alaina hands her the purse.

ALAINA

I don't. I just accept it.

Eleni stumbles. Alaina wraps her arm around her and helps her walk.

INT. BED , HOTEL ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A dark, dreary, and depressing hotel room.

Eleni plops down on the bed, drunkenly laying down.

Alaina places Eleni's things on the table. She passes her a bottle of water that sits on her nightstand.

ELENI

Please. Don't leave.

Alaina sits on the corner of the bed.

ELENI (CONT'D)

What is it like to be so loving, so patient, so kind? You are so kind, Alaina... What is it like?

ALAINA

I'm not sure anyone's ever asked me that before.

ELENI

It must be so lovely. To care so deeply.

ALAINA

It can be... But it's also painful to care in the ways that I do. I care because I'm hurting. Because I've hurt others.

Eleni is half listening, her eyes start to close. Her lids flutter, but she forces herself to stay awake.

ELENI

I have no one. No mother. No father. I am alone. I don't want to be alone.

Eleni curls up on Alaina's lap.

ELENI (CONT'D)

I wish you were my mother.

Alaina places her hand on Eleni's head.

Eleni shuts her eyes. She falls asleep.

ALAINA

No. You really don't.

