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“NOTHING SACRED” AND THE IMPACT OF CATHARSIS, RELIGIOUS ICONOGRAPHY
AND SATIRE IN FILM

A Thesis
by
JAMIE DANIELLE TREVINO

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

Major Subject: Creative Writing

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
December 2021

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AND SATIRE IN FILM

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Committee Member

December 2021

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ABSTRACT

Trevino, Jamie, “Nothing Sacred” and the Impact of Catharsis, Religious Iconography and Satire in Film. Master of Fine Arts (MFA), December, 2021, 147 pp., references, 16 titles.

Writing, or art of any kind, can be cathartic, depending on the subject matter. The term catharsis here refers to the experience shared by the tragic hero and audience in a common emotional tension that gets released in a fictional process that provides clarity. I would assert that the author should be included in this aesthetic and intellectual process. Creative writing can also be cathartic work and can allow the author to release pity and fear and gain clarity. In *Nothing Sacred*, the thesis screenplay written and explored here, I aim to find if catharsis can exist in both the spectator and the writer.

Using a satirical deceptive hero, religious iconography, metanarrative, catharsis and exaggerated situations throughout, I cover the complications of identity crises. In a story of delayed self-discovery and miscommunication, *Nothing Sacred* details the pitfalls of Catholicism when the religion is wielded in an absolute fashion.

DEDICATION

The completion of my studies would not have been possible without the love and support of my family. My mother, Dr. Anysia Treviño, my father, Jaime Treviño, my fiancé, Marco Muñoz and my siblings Anysha Treviño and Christian Treviño. They all inspired and motivated me to accomplish this degree and the creation of the creative work *Nothing Sacred*. Thank you all for your love and patience.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I will always be grateful to Dr. David Carren, the chair of my thesis committee, for all his mentoring and advice. Dr. Carren has been a formative influence on me since I was an undergraduate student and has taught me more about film and the film industry than I ever expected to learn in an academic setting. With his infinite patience and guidance, Dr. Carren helped me with the editing of my screenplay and allowed the creative process to move forward constructively.

My thanks also go to my thesis committee members: Dr. David Anshen and Dr. Britt Haraway. Dr. Anshen's advice and input toward my critical introduction – and in my degree coursework – helped ensure the quality of my intellectual work. Dr. Anshen also recommended great films over the years that inspired my screenplay, *Nothing Sacred*. Dr. Haraway's teachings as I pursued my master's degree deepened my literary perspective, and also introduced me to incredible authors who still influence my writing. Dr. Haraway has also aided in my guidance toward professional publication. I would also like to thank the students I worked with in my graduate studies. Their constructive criticism lent much-needed perspective to my creative and academic work.

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CHAPTER I

“NOTHING SACRED” AND THE IMPACT OF CATHARSIS, RELIGIOUS ICONOGRAPHY AND SATIRE IN FILM

Introduction

Writing, or art of any kind, can be cathartic, depending on the subject matter. The term catharsis goes as far back as Aristotle, and refers to the tragic experience shared by the tragic hero and audience in a common emotional tension that gets released in a fictional process that provides clarity. I would assert that the author should be included in this aesthetic and intellectual process. Creative writing can also be cathartic work and can allow the author to release pity and fear and gain clarity. In *Nothing Sacred*, the thesis screenplay which this essay explores, I aim to find if catharsis can exist in both the spectator and the writer. This process involves exploring my own issues, but the objective of the screenplay aims at exploring broader questions of human frailty. Storytelling remains one of the most effective ways to provoke the attention of the audience. Simultaneously, the author dispenses intent and opinion – and speaks more to broad rather than particular truths. In this spirit, let me discuss the narrative.

Early on we meet Stella González and her family in South Texas – very kind, very Catholic, and very broken. She, along with her mother Yvette and sister Melanie, still grapple with the death of their patriarch, a father who died only one year before the events of the

screenplay. Yvette's insistence on following religion dogmatically, and Stella's self-imposed obligation to act as her mother's caretaker, creates a heated pot on the brink of boiling over. In an unexpected case of being in the wrong place at the right time, Stella sits outside her church, and prevents a massacre of its parishioners before it can happen. This action, coupled with a complete fabrication of the truth, sends Stella into a hell of her own making. The audience follows her on a global tour through some of Catholicism's most poetic locations, including the Vatican in Rome, the Basilica de Guadalupe in Mexico City, the Grotto of Massabielle in Lourdes and the Urakami Cathedral in Nagasaki. Each religious center is the historical site of either a miracle or great tragedy – in Mexico, a young man named Juan Diego was called by the Virgin Mary to build a shrine, in France, a young woman discovers a grotto that the Virgin Mary has graced with healing water, and in Japan, the Urakami Cathedral has been rebuilt after a nuclear bomb decimated the area decades ago. The popularity of these religious centers stems from the lore surrounding them, and the “holy grace” that is taken to surround the figures who are believed to have experienced miracles – and tragedy.

As her journey progresses, Stella's unraveling and forced internal reflection mirrors the distorted experience of what I view as misappropriated religious dogma. *Nothing Sacred* very quickly becomes about guilt – a feeling Catholics are known to carry like a cross. This is an externalization of my own personal guilt, and my own processing of it. The audience finds by the end of the story, true miracles come from the all-embracing magic of the human spirit. In my screenplay *Nothing Sacred*, I use a satirical deceptive hero, religious iconography, metanarrative, catharsis and exaggerated situations throughout. My goal is to cover the complications of personal, family and public identity crises. Here, the critics, film theorists and semiologists I reference all stress the importance of, in some form, the unique and complex relationship

between the film, the characters in the film, the audience and the author. In a story of delayed self-discovery and miscommunication, *Nothing Sacred* details the pitfalls of Catholicism when the religion is wielded in an absolute fashion. In this critical analysis, I assert that the relationship created between the author and the audience with *Nothing Sacred* manifests a cathartic release.

A Divine Lapse in Judgement: The Beloved Hero's Deceptions

Screenplays are meant to be read and performed on film by actors, along with the entire production team. The writer's awareness that an actor will speak their dialogue out loud informs their process when conceptualizing their characters. In a discussion of acting on the stage versus acting on the screen, the noted film scholar Leo Braudy brings up the importance of characters in a film and what they can accomplish if executed correctly. Though it is impossible to control the acting part of the filmmaking process as a writer, certain characterizations and events in the plot may lend themselves to one particular style of acting over another. Braudy says that a character can "absorb and reflect the life of the audience as much as bring the audience out of itself into another world" (Braudy 323). If a character is perfect and without flaws, the audience would find difficulty understanding and sympathetically identifying with the character.

Without conflict, particularly internal conflict, the characters and films fall flat. In film, when taking montage and photography into account, artists have the ability to add in subtle layers and craft nuanced characters. Braudy says in this way, we can get a "sense of mystery inside character, the strange core of connection with the face and body the audience comes to know so well, the sense of an individuality that can never be totally expressed in words or action" and a "character in film generally is more like character as we perceive it everyday" (Braudy 324). My character Stella is flawed, she is an individual with her own baggage, and she chooses to deal with most of her conflicts with half-truths or often total lies. The ultimate goal of

Nothing Sacred is to create realistic conflicts for Stella (both internal and external) that audiences, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, can connect to. By making Stella an everyday person with issues, I open the scope of the situation. Because *Nothing Sacred* is a comedy, the circumstances our protagonist finds herself in will lend to a kind of larger-than-life performance. Stella's actions and responses to her world echoes the feelings we experience when dealing with our own struggle with interpersonal relationships and self-identity.

For films to have that crucial core connection, the audience needs a "hero" of some sort – a conduit for the viewer to feel for and root for as their story progresses and they progress and develop as a character. In *The Song of Bernadette*, released in 1943 and directed by Henry King, the title character Bernadette acts as a hero and villain to the other characters in her world. Based on a legendary saint in Catholic doctrine, *The Song of Bernadette* follows a young woman who sees a vision of the Virgin Mary and leads a newfound wave of religious fervor in the world. Most of the people in the film do not believe her and consider what she is doing and saying to be absolutely appalling. When first met with the image of Mary, Bernadette is confused, but struck by the vision. The audience sees Mary as well, so there is never any doubt on the spectator's part that Bernadette is telling the truth. However, there are several characters whose main agenda is to uncover some hidden plot and reveal that the whole thing was made up. Memorably, Vincent Price leads the crusade against her, determined to unravel a lie that is not actually a lie.

Bernadette is so pious she had not even wanted the general public to know, but when she entrusted her secret to someone else it spread more rapidly than she could ever imagine. In comparison, in *Nothing Sacred* Stella is lying – and the audience is also made aware of this fact. Stella does not intend for the lie to spread, but still tells it and maintains it for selfish purposes. For Stella, it's easier to lie to her mother, but the guilt makes the following plot more difficult.

Conflicted about her faith, and unsure where her life is heading, it's almost as if Stella's unconscious minding guides her on a spiritual tour of the world, aiming to lead her to find her true self-actualization. As Braudy suggests, "film creates character by tantalizing the audience with the promise of the secret self, always just out of the grasp of final articulation and meaning" (Braudy 325). Bernadette's story is meant to inspire audiences with her innocence, fortitude and virtue, since for the whole film she has been dealing with a debilitating, painful illness and does not complain. Stella at first chooses to forego honesty, and therefore the character and the audience share a common secret. The complexity of her emotions, coupled with her refusal to face her real issues that result from the loss of her father, are more apparent to the spectator than they are to Stella herself. As *Nothing Sacred* progresses, Stella's willful ignorance gets thrown back in her face, and she cannot find a moment of rest and solace until she faces those issues head-on. Like Stella, I as a writer hope to find that self-awareness, through my own writing.

In "The Return of the Myths" from *A Short History of the Movies*, film historians Gerald Mast and Bruce Kewer write about how popular heroes can promote postmodern irony in mythic works and films. For example, in more serious works like Spike Lee's *Malcolm X* or Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*, the writers and directors "showed with minimal fictionalizing how real people, gifted and determined but not superhuman, could grow into heroes" (Mast & Kewer 631). In *Nothing Sacred*, Stella is not superhuman, she is very human and very flawed. She lies to the world, her family and herself, and she does not subscribe to the beliefs she promotes on her Catholic influencer tour of the world. Since the audience knows her secret, and the lack of sincerity behind it, she becomes a flawed hero the audience can relate to. When given the opportunity, Stella's heroism reveals itself organically within her. In Mexico, France and Japan, Stella proves her good nature through acts of service to others and chooses to use her newfound

influence to make their lives better. Audiences should love her for that. With a deceptive hero facing familial, faithful and romantic issues of grand proportions, *Nothing Sacred* pursues irony and “reflexivity into a truly Postmodern world of ungrounded textual play” (Mast & Kavin 633). Stella was unwilling to face her real demons and chooses to hide away within herself. By becoming the figurehead of a new Catholic miracle in the modern world, as a false figure struggling with self-identity, Stella leads the other characters on a global trek that comes with its own set of consequences.

Holy Haunting: the Role of Religious Iconography

Connecting to the character is crucial in keeping the audience’s attention. Films move quickly, focus on an imaginary world, and create strong emotional ties between the people watching and the fictionalized characters on screen. If successful, this enhances the viewing experience. Whether the audience is conscious of it or not, authors and film directors often employ religious iconography as an indicator of heightened moments in a film’s plot. Characters may notice specific iconic motifs, or embody them in their blocking, movement, staging, or posing. Audiences familiar with the religious iconography employed, in *Nothing Sacred* that of Catholicism, may notice the iconography and draw parallels between the original intention of the icon and how that icon is being reinterpreted by the film. In the screenplay for *Nothing Sacred*, I attempt to create disjunction between some of the holy settings and iconography typical of the Catholic faith and the religion’s effects on the characters under its influence. With Stella especially, this serves as a mechanism for the ironic nature of the film and the satire of presenting such revered images in a context that some fervent believers might take as blasphemy.

As in Federico Fellini’s well-known masterpiece *La Dolce Vita*, the statues and paintings can be considered what the great film scholar P. Adams Sitney calls “false idols, signs that point

to what has been lost” (Sitney 109). There are several fantasy sequences in which Stella places herself at the scenes of Catholic mythic miracle moments. But Stella does so out of selfishness, out of an insecurity with her current circumstances that she found herself in due to her own deceptions. Before the start of the film, Stella told her mother she would be attending mass. Rather than enter the church, she opts to smoke pot in the parking lot – affording her some escape from home while also avoiding her internal conflict with what happened to Stella in the church (the death of her father). Stella’s self-perceived sin makes her a saint to the Catholic public, an irony that she grapples with throughout the course of her story. Sitney writes about the use of religious iconography in Italian Neo-realist films, and states that “a Catholic theory of sin and forgiveness informs the plot. Sin is not only a violation of goodness, but it contains a medusan element of its own hardness. Each repetition of a sin inures the sinner to commit the same sin again. Confession, then, blots out the past chain and makes recurrence more difficult” (Sitney 113). In context with his writing here Sitney refers to *La Dolce Vita*, and the character Marcello’s choice to repeatedly lose himself in his journey. Similarly in my screenplay *Nothing Sacred*, Stella keeps finding herself in these larger-than-life experiences, and when she is called to the challenge, she decides to double down on her falsity. It is only upon confession, coming clean to her mother who means more to her than anything, that she finds true inner peace with the dogma she was brought up in. One of her biggest hang-ups, being honest with her mother, reveals itself from the first scene in which the mother Yvette gets introduced. Yvette is shrouded in darkness, kneeling by an altar and praying with incense as Stella attempts to hold everything together.

As the iconography is present throughout the story, and the audience is fully aware of Stella’s deception, I am trying to create something similar to what film theorist and semiologist

Christian Metz describes as “vicarious experiences like the narrator-as-God or the viewer-as-God; it is the ‘story’ which exhibits itself, the story which reigns” (Metz 231). Stella is the figurehead of the religious elements of the plot, and lies to achieve that status. She is the narrator, but her story is what drives the elements of conflict and resolution in *Nothing Sacred*. My lack of realism allows the viewer to craft their own version of events, as “the primary identification in the viewer operates at the level of the camera itself” (Metz 230). For Metz, this is the nature of film itself. I assert it is relevant to *Nothing Sacred* because of the viewers insight of Stella’s lie. Stella exists in a world where familiar real-life issues take place, but in a context of more heightened mystical and religious fervor. Stella’s actions and reactions to other characters and circumstances around her are executed not for the sake of being seen, but rather because of her yearning for real understanding and spiritual peace. Religious works of art and references to historical moments in Catholicism play out in humorous, often inappropriate ways to focus the spotlight on them. Stella and the entire family have been embedded within those references culturally, and it’s a source of conflict that further motivates the satirical approach to the screenplay.

Satire in Ideology and Genre: the Ironic Crisis of Faith

Approaching *Nothing Sacred* with a comedic tone allowed me to soften to my own feelings of guilt. The original ideas and tone for *Nothing Sacred* was darker and more dramatic, with Stella doing much harder drugs and facing a brutal investigation from the police while being manipulated by the church. The origin of that dark, seedy plot stemmed from my own guilt, as a cradle Catholic with my own secrets. Like Stella, I too, have chosen time and time again to stay in the church parking lot rather than enter. The guilt stems from my lack of honesty with my own family, from the lie, rather than the loss of personal belief in Catholicism. The

original concept for *Nothing Sacred*, therefore, manifested itself as a form of punishment.

Thanks to some much-appreciated advice, I found a better way to deal with my grappling with faith and teachings of the church. Stella chooses not to see the issue at hand and avoids dealing with her crisis of faith, but she should not be punished for questioning her own beliefs. The most mystical character in *Nothing Sacred* is known as “the Bag Lady,” a silent figure who Stella sees at every major event throughout the story. The Bag Lady is the catalyst for Stella’s first “miracle,” she essentially pushes Stella into stopping a horrific shooting from happening. This indicates that Stella is not being punished for questioning her belief – she is being rewarded for it. Stella needs some form of help to find the answers she seeks in the aftermath of great loss – great loss of her father, of her once-normal family dynamic, and of herself.

When reflecting on the film inspiration and coursework I have taken while working on my graduate degree, it was obvious in hindsight that much of my inspiration comes from surrealist, avant-garde comedy. Every story about religion I have seen on screen, particularly the Catholic religion, packs a bigger punch when treated as surreal and comedic. It allows the author and audience to face their demons with honesty and humor rather than guilt and provides understanding that these mythic cultural guides can be ridiculous in their fantastical nature. The art I am attempting to create in *Nothing Sacred* remains more of a reflection of the state of the church – it continues losing and remains somehow stuck in that traditional rut that seems easier to stay in. I chose to treat *Nothing Sacred* as a satire/comedy as it can more deftly convey my attitude toward organized religion and its effect on people (particularly people who have dealt with great complications in life). For reference, I have taken great lessons and felt cathartic release when watching films such as *La Dolce Vita* (1960), *Viridiana* (1961), *The Milky Way*

(1969), *8 ½* (1963), *The Song of Bernadette* (1943) and *The Little Hours* (2017). All these films inspired *Nothing Sacred*.

According to Leo Braudy in his discussion on genre, genre films can “arouse and complicate feelings about the self and society than more serious films, because of their bias toward the unique, may rarely touch” (Braudy 477). While other films inspire *Nothing Sacred*, it is an original work – not adapted from any previous story, unique in its premise. Even in the face of humor, we can be humbled by the circumstances laid out before us, brought into even more striking clarity by their hilarity or bizarre nature. Braudy also states that film serves as a respite for audiences from the world around them and the real issues being faced. They are more receptive to the larger-than-life nature of things and feel more compelled to learn from them. At the same time, filmmakers can also amp up a movie’s ability to capture the spectator in genre films (like satire) through an audience’s familiarity with the genre itself. The frame of genre “allows freedoms within the form that more original films cannot have because they are so committed to a parallel between form and content,” and the “most obvious focus of interest is neither complex characterization nor intricate visual style, but pure story” (Braudy 482). The story in *Nothing Sacred* is what bends the genre, makes the comedy more satirical in its parody of real-life circumstances and the influence certain images and moments can have on a collective audience.

A Funhouse Mirror: Dreaming Impressions of Reality

In Jean-Louis Baudry’s “The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema,” film theorist and semiologist Baudry discusses the structure and ideological function of film technologies and their links to psychoanalytic theories. According to him, there is a “metaphorical relationship between places or a relationship between

metaphorical places,” and each has a unique makeup that influences the knowledge that “defines for both philosopher and analyst the degree of relationship to truth or to description, or to illusion, and the need for an ethical point of view” (Baudry 149). As the characters’ ever-evolving environment shifts in *Nothing Sacred*, we see Stella especially straying in varying degrees from the truth of her narrative. As an impression of reality, and not a true (realistic) mirror of the religious world of Catholicism, Stella grapples with her own personal journey with a God and even her own personal set of belief.

Baudry also states that the character who is facing those “distortions” becomes a “prisoner” or “victim of an illusion of reality, that is, of precisely what is known as a hallucination, if one is awake, as a dream, if asleep; he is the prey of an impression, of an *impression of reality*” (Baudry 151). Cinema can create an impression of reality that manifests emotion within an audience. When characters manipulate the reality they inhabit, the hallucination becomes more surreal. Stella built up her own version of reality before the audience even meets her in the opening scene. The audience discovers her true hallucination, which she would at first be more comfortable staying in, as her sleeping self. Stella’s sleeping self is the one she thinks is helping her family – when it had ultimately just been extending the family’s sorrows further. As far as telling this story within a medium of storytelling, as a satirical work of fiction, the deadpan nature of the dialogue and commentary of the narrator can successfully be conveyed in a screenplay. As the spectator watching the film or reading the screenplay eventually processes in *Nothing Sacred*, the cinema is the only place that “makes possible a succession of images rapid enough to roughly correspond to our faculty for producing mental images” (Baudry 150). In other words, even framed in a satirical lens, film provides that instantaneous storytelling most effective in entertaining and revealing intention to the audience.

Baudry writes on the work of Sigmund Freud in *Interpretations of Dreams* and the role of the unconscious absorption of the image and desire in dreams. Baudry states that it is common sense to see the parallel between dreams and cinema, that “the cinematographic projection is reminiscent of dream, would appear to be a kind of dream, really a dream, a parallelism often noticed by the dreamer when, about to describe his dream, he is compelled to say, ‘It was like a movie...’” (Baudry 157). In other words, we are taken into a state of new understanding when watching a film. It’s important to note that Baudry adds that “the conditions for dream formation” should still be determined, and it can become regressive to a point that we channel that dream state more easily depending on the film (Baudry 157). Those “mental perceptions are taken for perceptions of reality” a lot of the time in the dream state, and a dream is “capable of taking over consciousness, but, because of the subject’s inability to rely upon the reality test, they are marked by the very character of perception and appear as reality” (Baudry 158). If a character is experiencing a similar dream state a film can affect the audience more. Stella is in a constant dream state throughout *Nothing Sacred* – her issues stemming from the death of her father and subsequent caretaking of her mother drive her inward, and she chooses to numb the pain with weed in the hope that everything will work itself out. From the moment her first “miracle” is discovered, Stella is taken on a ride she has little to no control over – but one that she ultimately chose for herself. *Nothing Sacred* is meant to be a satirical comedy, so the reality even in a dreamlike state becomes distorted and exaggerated. The dream becomes a reflection of Stella’s inner conflict with herself and begins to eat at her, as she sees the distortion pull her away from the good intentions she started out with when the screenplay begins.

In Sigmund Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the concept of wish fulfillment is explored, particularly in dream psychoanalysis. Jerrold Brandell discusses Freud’s viewpoint on

dreams and the dreamer in “Eighty Years of Dream Sequences: A Cinematic Journey Down Freud’s ‘Royal Road.’” According to Brandell, the dreamer’s wishes “form the latent content of dreams,” which “calls forth opposing forces whose aim is to disguise, repress, or otherwise censor the disturbing wish” (Brandell 60). Stella manifests multiple fantasy (or dream) sequences throughout *Nothing Sacred*, placing herself and the characters of her life in the stories of Catholic miracles of the past like Mexico’s Juan Diego and France’s Bernadette – who both were said to have seen the Virgin Mary and spoken at length with her. Both Bernadette’s and Juan’s stories have been taken as gospel, despite the lack of verifiable proof. While subconsciously Stella is seeking to be an honest person, at peace with the death of her father, she chooses to repress that wish and lie for the comfort of her mother. Her fantasies take a darker turn when she places herself in Nagasaki, Japan, where an atomic bomb decimated a church. Instead of placing herself as the saint who creates positive change in the environment, Stella in this fantasy is the person who dropped the atomic bomb and destroyed the Urakami Cathedral. Stella’s guilt is an opposing force, one that forces Stella to tell the truth and find that true freedom. Brandell refers to this conflict and undertaking as “the dream work,” and states that the operations of the dream work “involve modes of primary-process thinking such as displacement, condensation, substitution, and symbolic representation, as well as secondary elaboration,” (Brandell 60). The symbolic representation of Stella as two saints, and then a major sinner, emphasizes her internal conflict with herself. As she grows as a character and makes her arc through *Nothing Sacred*, that guilt and conflict weigh more heavily on her, and she knows self-disclosure is her real path to salvation and liberation.

Brandell’s work uses cinema as a psychoanalytic medium for dream interpretation, and it also can give the audience more insight to their conflicts in their reality. Impactful works and

“cinematic renderings offer us a new vantage point from which we may view familiar terrain” (Brandell 74). In other words, we “can learn about our work and about ourselves from the movies” (Brandell 74). Film is an established medium by which people can learn and absorb new perspectives and information, therefore audiences can suspend their disbelief and still take certain lessons with them after the film is over.

Therapy or Indecent Exposure? Metanarrative Discourse

Writing from a place of personal significance can feel a bit self-indulgent. When discussing my screenplay in relation to metanarrative, I am referring to the metanarrative of Catholicism – on one level, this story of a particular character (Stella) who shares some things with me, the author, and on another level with the mine and the character’s relationship to the function of Catholicism to society. *Nothing Sacred* attempts to explore a story that analyzes (through satire) the modern influence of religion and family in the social media world. As critic Tom Gunning writes when discussing narrative discourse and the narrator system, “the selection of the things that make up the image plays an extremely important role in conveying narrative information,” so we can fully understand how it would look in real life, playing out before our very eyes (Gunning 346). Each description of location, costume, or extra character information contributes to the narrative and the plot of *Nothing Sacred*. A major sign of narrative realism is film’s “innate tendency toward mimesis,” a way of “naturalizing the process of storytelling as the inclusion of apparently useless detail” (Gunning 345). Somehow, the narrativization uses film discourse to deliver a new sense to its realism, so the “filmic image, without losing (indeed, using) its capacity for showing, defines its unique way of telling” (Gunning 345). It is easier for the audience to absorb and relate to the story itself if there is a clear narrative happening that is

both familiar and unexpected. It should rise in action, motivation and stakes as we make our way to the climax and ultimately satisfying (or cathartic) ending.

Gunning states that the three aspects of film discourse (the pro-filmic, the enframed image, and editing) “almost always work in concert and represent the medication between story and spectator in film” (Gunning 348). The screenplay is the place where all of these elements are based off of – it gives direction and a mapping for the filming, acting and editing process, and allow the film to be more easily dispensed to a wide number of audiences. As this is how the film tells its story, by letting the dynamic elements play out, the elements (particularly editing) “constitute the filmic narrator” (Gunning 348). *Nothing Sacred* is a film written without any traditional narrator, so as all the elements play out and become realized, it will create its own because of the perspective of the narrative and its meta roots.

Aristotle’s *Poetics* is often referenced by filmmakers and screenwriters as a foundation for the structure, characterization and action in a film. Aristotle uses the broad term “poetry” to refer to artistic mediums – and states that poetry conveys or should convey what is universal. Tragedy is the focus of *Poetics*, but the concept of universality and the release of literary suspense can also be applied to works of comedy, drama and satire. In *Poetics*, Aristotle discusses the component parts of tragedy as plot, character, thought, diction, spectacle, and song, with plot being the “most important thing in Tragedy” (Aristotle 350 Part VII). The principal characters in *Nothing Sacred* are developed through the plot, and are purposeful in what thoughts they make known to one another. Because the audience is aware of most of their secrets, they have an insight toward the action being taken by the characters. The few secrets the audience is not privy to serve as a reveal at the end, an understanding that no one is all-knowing. The choices made by Stella are not always obvious, but Aristotle says the “success or failure” of actions

made by a character are dependent on action – particularly action in plot (Aristotle 350 Part VI). Stella is making a moral choice when she tells her mother the truth. Even revealing her secret to the world is nothing compared to revealing it to her mother. Her mother is the catalyst for the lie, the reason Stella has become shelters. Surprisingly, she will also be the key to setting Stella free.

Aristotle also writes about the concept of catharsis in *Poetics*, still in relation to tragedy. Catharsis here is a result of the artistic work rendered – not the purpose. A writer’s goal is to move the audience, but true catharsis, even in a comedy, comes naturally if written correctly. As the story of *Nothing Sacred* is told, and more lies sustain the group, there is a steady increase of pressure on the main characters, questions about what will happen to them as a result of their immaculate deception. According to G. R. F. Ferrari’s “Aristotle’s Literary Aesthetics,” Ferrari writes that “The pleasure of catharsis is the pleasure that the audience feels when the suspense that has been tightening throughout the play is suddenly released. It is the pleasure of relief” (Ferrari 196). As Stella spins a more and more complicated web of lies and participates in the “miracles” she is unwittingly creating, she is “brought to a crisis,” and the audience “is so relieved,” because there is an “emotional condition” of “sympathetic fear for the hero and his impending fate” (Ferrari 196). The relief comes from the emotion being “stimulated,” and “tragedy resembles a purging drug” as a means of catharsis (Ferrari 196). Tragedy is not the only way to purge a drug or cure an illness. Comedy has shown to be effective for people who are sick, who are grappling with heavy subjects and require another form of relief. As a daughter who also plays a caretaker role for her mother since the death of her father, Stella is dealt a hand many would not choose to take. She feels isolated in her fear and hurt, and the audience can understand her initial choice to conceal her honest activities of the day because there is a universal tendency toward hiding things from parental figures – often, for their benefit. Tension

and internal conflict still exist within the characters of *Nothing Sacred*, particularly with Stella, and it should come as a relief to see her finally release that pent-up tension.

When discussing the author of the fiction, in this case the screenwriter, Pam Cook writes on the idea of “self-expression” and its part in the filmmaking process. In using self-expression, a filmmaker creates a “private language to convey the personal fantasies and obsessions of a single individual,” and will this be “under attack from ‘structural’ film-makers in America and Europe with their formalist concerns” (Cook 272). *Nothing Sacred* is told from a personal perspective, and as Cook writes, in regard to the feminist movement, it acts almost like a “personal diary” that is a “means of self-expression for women to whom other avenues were closed” (Cook 272). As a writer and author, I think the story is best served as a means of self-expression, and that includes the “breakdown of conventional divisions by which women remain locked within the family and men control the public sphere” (Cook 272). The women run the show the entire film, and when it is revealed there has been outside interference by two patriarchal men, the women outsmart them and reclaim their power and individuality. In this sense, I also view *Nothing Sacred* as a feminist film.

I attempt to create a new language in *Nothing Sacred* that “questions point-of-view, memory and fantasy,” particularly with the inclusion of the “Bag Lady” and what she represents (Cook 276). Like other filmmakers, in writing this screenplay I am aiming to show that “the family, the home, personal and sexual relationships were the site of drama and struggle, and the relationship of film-maker to film was equally dramatic” (Cook 276). This is done in an attempt to make the screenplay more active and less passive – despite being from a personal point of view, the actions of the characters indicate narrative arcs and transformations required in a satisfying meta narrative film.

Uncredited – Notes on the Role of the Audience, and Pacing

One of the main proponents that can make or break a screenplay, and therefore a final film, is pacing in the narrative and plot. The tempo of a story, told well, can keep the audience in tune with the emotional arcs of the characters and therefore will stay emotionally engaged. Though a comedy, I intend to heighten the stakes of *Nothing Sacred* by keeping a steady pacing in the plot and narrative that supports the changing circumstances, actions and characters. In *Nothing Sacred*, either a miracle or major revelation is made every seven to ten pages. Stella should not have the chance to sit down and catch her breath – she is moving in a space, out of her control, making her inner turmoil and horrible guilt more intense as the film progresses. As she becomes increasingly self-destructive and conflicted, the pacing will mirror her lack of mental stability.

Baudry discusses the role of the spectator or audience in their work and writes about Plato and the description he uses for the human condition. Baudry draws on Plato's allegory of the cave, and agrees that the "forced immobility" of the film-watching audience is a "valuable argument" for "the coincidence of religious and idealist conceptions" (Baudry 152). Baudry compares forced immobility to that of a "postnatal state and even intrauterine existence," and makes clear that audiences in a theater are taken to that state of mind (Baudry 152). Therefore, "the spectators' immobility is characteristic of the filmic apparatus as a whole" (Baudry 152). When brought to that state, spectators feel obligated to stay chained to their seats, as the light in front of them is sending an artistic message or interesting imagery that informs through narrative. It's not to say that a film is dependent on the audience's presence, but the connection is part of the filmmaking and filmgoing experience. The creation of audience reaction, whether it be what the artists intended or not, adds a new layer of discussion and analysis to a film.

Federico Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*, for example, created an uproar and sharp controversy in Italy, particularly in Rome with the Catholic Church. A post Italian neorealist film, surreal and dripping with satire, *La Dolce Vita* tackles Fellini's complicated relationship with faith and identity through the protagonist Marcello (played by Marcello Mastroianni)'s wandering journey as a member of the paparazzi. In an archive article from *The Guardian*, notes of the film's controversy were immediately apparent. *La Dolce Vita* brought forth the seedy underbelly of high society, the "corruption, debauchery, perversion, and the aimlessness among the high society, the intelligentsia, and the film and press worlds of Rome" (The Guardian 2012). While fellow artists and writers praised the film, the Catholic Church "launched a full-scale attack" on *La Dolce Vita*, saying Fellini was attempting to "trying to 'moralise through immorality'" (The Guardian 2012).

I am not claiming that the audience has a final determining power in a film's meaning, and it is also not the only influence to consider. But audience reactions can make a film political, by virtue of relating to the dreamlike state it inspires. Fellini places a magnifying glass to the upper echelon of Italian high society in *La Dolce Vita*, the hypocrisy that operates in the church and its followers and highlights how ego can get in the way of one truly reaching self-actualization and discovery. As Marcello struts, stumbles, smoothly glides and stampedes through the episodes of the film, we are struck by the imagery, dialogue, action and dreamlike realism Fellini exudes. The character Marcello in *La Dolce Vita* is the anti-hero/conduit character that Stella is in *Nothing Sacred*. Similarly, they start in one place, with one frame of mind, and with the aid of actualized supporting characters, false pretenses, and religious iconography. While Marcello's internal conflict originates with his father, Stella's manifests from her relationship to her mother. In contrast to one another, Marcello and Stella take different

approaches as they seek redemption and hope – Stella strides toward honesty, and Marcello runs further into the inferno. They end up in different places but find an inner peace in their respective conclusions.

The controversy of it all spawned countless articles and discussion from all parties, but *The Guardian* notes that Fellini himself was not actually called to give his true intentions with *La Dolce Vita*, and “confesses himself nonplussed by the fuss his film has caused and amazed that so many have interpreted it as a national indictment” (The Guardian 2012). In an interview with Charlie Rose not long after Fellini’s death, American director Martin Scorsese discusses the “stir” started from the first frame of the film (Scorsese 1993). In the open, a helicopter flies a statue of Jesus Christ tied beneath it, arms outstretched, over a rooftop of sunbathing women who are subsequently hit on by Marcello from above. Scorsese points out that “from the opening of the film, you begin to realize that the symbolism is going to be very, very strong. And, the film is episodic, and just really goes through and analyzes a life where the values are gone, a lifestyle where the value is nothing” (Scorsese 1993). Marcello is instantly likable and relatable in that he is flawed, and interesting. We are drawn into his world and horrified at what we discover. In other words, Fellini is not platforming the debauchery, but calling out the hypocrisy that stems from it. That it caused a public conversation helped bring that art to a new level of cultural discourse (as most films Fellini made did and do). In *Nothing Sacred*, there is an attempt to pay homage to *La Dolce Vita*’s controversy and simultaneously highlight the same grappling with one’s belief system and its relation to personal and public identity. From the open of the screenplay Stella is parked in front of a Catholic Church, smoking cannabis and avoiding attending mass – an image totally opposed to the one she is giving out to the world. Her inadvertent “miracle” gives her a choice: be honest and stay trapped or lie and find a way to free

herself. She lies to herself for a while, and to the world even longer – and, hopefully, the audience will love her for it.

Conclusion

It would be disingenuous to not acknowledge the perspective I am coming from in the writing of this screenplay. Growing up in the Catholic Church, in the Rio Grande Valley, I was raised with a certain interpretation of Catholic doctrine that I do not currently agree with. Like Stella, I lied – a sin I have yet to confess to my current priest. I chose to lie to my parents for weeks, months at a time, and skip mass to “medicate” in a church parking lot. It was a temporary patch over the wounds I felt from years of anti-sex teachings and intolerance, perpetuated by a people purposefully misinterpreting the love, affirmation and purity that Catholicism can provide when taken as figurative rather than literal. Catholics tend to take things literally – that the Body and the Blood are turned into the Body and Blood of Christ every mass, that the parables Christ told were factual and not meant as another means of moral understanding. The fictional depiction of my past guilt over how I was living my life came through expression, through analysis of interpersonal communication and power structures.

I grew up with misgivings about the church – overwhelmed with questions I had about what it takes to be a good Catholic, and what deems a person worthy of their concept of heaven or this concept of hell. There were countless religious retreats I attended, each with a particular brand of torture – torture as a means of indoctrination. I fell into it and began to despise very natural feelings of sexuality as I went through puberty. I kept my mouth shut and put on a brave face. It’s always easier to hide from the world - I spent nearly every night praying myself to sleep, afraid of the eternity of damnation I would surely face for my “impurity.” In my

household, a young woman's purity was seen as the single most important thing in the world – the one thing that made you worthy of respect and honor. It wasn't until midway through high school that I began to forgive myself for something that should not need forgiving. I would not fully forgive myself until college, which allowed me to see clearly for the first time. I still lived at home and was still bound by the obligation of weekly mass, but I opted to lie to my parents and sit in the parking lot for an hour, smoking what weed I had, listening to music, finding my own rhythmic spirituality that I felt God would understand. Stella is an amalgamation of that, a person unwilling to ask questions out of fear for the answer. As I wrote the screenplay, it became clear that Stella was manifesting her own issues – but then, so was I. The audience will find, along with Stella, that the fear is unfounded. True faith and understanding includes forgiveness, tolerance and true acceptance. Just because her way of believing does not match up precisely with that of her family's does not make her experience with it less valid. It makes it hers.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX: “NOTHING SACRED” ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY

“Nothing Sacred” Original Screenplay follows: pp 26-146

NOTHING SACRED

Written by

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INT. ANIMATED MAP SEQUENCE

Open on an animation of an old, yellowing paper map of the globe a la Luis Buñuel's *The Milky Way*. There is no narration, just music.

The map is centered on Rome, marked with golden crosses. As we pull away from Italy, we are taken on a "route" over Nagasaki, Japan... Lourdes, France... and Mexico City, Mexico... All covered and marked with crosses.

Finally, the sequence lands on the Rio Grande Valley in South Texas, dotted with a few small crosses of its own.

FADE IN.

EXT. ST. JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC CHURCH - MORNING

A cross rises off a ledge above the entrance to a church, jutting over massive doorways. Stained glass windows cover the front of the building, semi-transparent and delicate.

Across the street is a prayer garden, where an old gardener clips the hedges. He stands by a tall statue of St. Jude.

Several parishioners mill into the church. A used, beat-up gray Honda pulls up front and parks by the curb.

INT. USED HONDA - CONTINUOUS

The driver - STELLA GONZÁLEZ, 23 - is wearing a flattering blue dress with pockets. She parks the car and observes...

EXT. ST. JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

...a YOUNG FAMILY: PAPA, MAMA and BLANCA (3/4). Blanca sits on her Papa's shoulders and pulls his hair.

PAPA (IN SPANISH)
Hold on, Blanca!

Laughing, he reaches up and lifts Blanca over his head, bringing her down to his chest and cradling her.

BLANCA (IN SPANISH)
I wanna stay up here!

Mama leans over and brushes a few strands of hair out Blanca's face.

MAMA (IN SPANISH)
Wait until after mass.

Mama smiles warmly at Blanca, and Papa gives her a big kiss on the cheek. They enter the church.

INT. STELLA'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Stella looks at the closing doors and breathes deeply before turning away. She grabs her phone. Over her shoulder we see her screen as she scrolls.

Several articles: Op-eds by divisive political pundits, scoops on the private lives of reality TV stars, the death toll of the latest natural disaster.

Stella pauses briefly on the headline "Catholic Bishops under fire (again) for mishandling of clergy sex abuse." Click.

Before the article can load her phone starts buzzing. The name of Stella's sister MELANIE pops up. As they speak on the phone, they will often overlap - sisters who know each other all too well.

MELANIE (FROM PHONE)	STELLA
Hi.	Morning.

Stella opens the middle console next to her seat...

MELANIE (FROM PHONE) (CONT'D)
What are you up to?

...and pulls out a small pink bag dotted with white daisies. As she speaks, Stella unzips the bag.

STELLA
I just got to St. Joseph's.

MELANIE (FROM PHONE)
St. Joseph's?

In a Mary Poppins-esque fashion Stella pulls out a grinder, lighter, some hemp wick, a vacuum-sealed stash box and finally a pink glass pipe.

STELLA
Yeah?

MELANIE (FROM PHONE)
Fuck that place.

STELLA
Mel...

MELANIE (FROM PHONE)
You're actually going in? I'm
impressed.

STELLA
Uh - well -

Stella opens the stash box, revealing about an eighth of
weed, sticky and green.

MELANIE (FROM PHONE) STELLA (CONT'D)
I knew it. What?

MELANIE (FROM PHONE) (CONT'D)
What's the point of going to mass
if you're not even *going* to mass?

Outside, a BLACK JALOPY passes slowly by the front of the
church, close to Stella's Honda. She doesn't notice it.

STELLA
I *am* going in, just not right
away...

Muffled church bells ring from St. Joseph's outside.

MELANIE (FROM PHONE)
You're not, and we both know it.

Stella breaks up a few pieces of the flower, putting it
between the blades in the grinder. She twists the top around.

STELLA
I don't wanna to talk about it.

Stella pinches some of the ground weed and delicately places
it into the pipe.

MELANIE (FROM PHONE)
You never do.

Stella locks her car doors and turns off her vehicle, which
sputters before going silent.

MELANIE (FROM PHONE) (CONT'D)
You don't even believe any more.

STELLA
Most of the time I do! I think.

MELANIE (FROM PHONE)
Yeah, yeah.

Stella takes her first hit - it feels good.

STELLA
Did you end up getting the time off
after all?

MELANIE (FROM PHONE)
Yeah.

STELLA
(surprised)
Mom will be thrilled to see you.

MELANIE (FROM PHONE)
You know, I'm just passing
through... stopping by to see
y'all... I don't know if I'll have
enough time to stay more than a few
hours.

STELLA
I was counting on some relief, Mel.
San Antonio's not *that* far away.

MELANIE (FROM PHONE)
Let's talk about it later. Give me
a call when you're done.

STELLA
Bye.

Stella hangs up and takes a long, deep hit from the pipe.
Coughs. Freezes as she sees the gardener working across the
street.

She relaxes as she notices his earbuds. He turns away to trim
another corner of the garden, his head bobbing to unheard
music. Stella scans her surroundings as she smokes.

EXT. ST. JOSEPH'S PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

A disheveled, older-looking lady in a blue hoodie stumbles
into frame. She cradles a brown bag that seems to be encasing
a glass bottle. The woman lies down on a nearby bench and
passes out.

The black jalopy passes the front of the church again,
faster.

INT. STELLA'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Stella finally takes note of the car, but it doesn't raise
any flags. As she takes another hit she ducks below the
window to evade view.

EXT. ST. JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

Birds chirp as the gardener clips the hedges. Stella puffs away discreetly in her car.

The black jalopy drives by the front of St. Joseph's for the third time. Stella sees the jalopy coming before it passes her car, and tries to sneak a peek at the driver, but fails.

INT. STELLA'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Stella blinks a few times, finally concerned with the jalopy. She takes one more big hit from the pipe before tucking all her supplies - except for the pot - into the middle compartment. She surveys the street.

STELLA

Oh shit.

The jalopy passes by her one more time - slowly. It rolls to a stop near Stella.

Realizing she forgot to put away the eighth of pot, she stuffs it into one of her pockets.

The driver peers out through the passenger's side wearing a black ski mask, staring at St. Joseph's - maybe at Stella? He grins, snorts, and rubs his nose over his mask.

He gestures for Stella to roll down her window. She shakes her head - no - as he lowers his passenger's window.

SKI MASK GUY

(muffled)

Do you believe in God?

STELLA

What?

He grins again. Yells inarticulately. Stella grimaces.

EXT. ST. JOSEPH'S PRAYER GARDEN - CONTINUOUS

The gardener sees the jalopy stopped near Stella's car. From his perspective, it looks as though they are having a conversation.

The bag lady, still sleeping, adjusts her position on the bench.

The Ski Mask Guy's jalopy pulls away, making one more turn around St. Joseph's. Startled, Stella grabs her keys and pushes open her car door...

EXT. ST. JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

...as the jalopy rounds the corner. Stella climbs out and drifts toward the front doors of St. Joseph's.

Stella gets about a foot away from the doors before she stops. Her hand rests on the door handle. She pauses. Feeling the energy of the church, Stella frowns.

Still high, Stella turns and presses her ear against the door. She hears the voices of the choir, parishioners and priest.

PARISHIONERS (O.C.)

(muffled)

Por mi culpa, por mi culpa, por mi gran culpa.

Her heart in her ears, Stella looks around and waits a few moments. The jalopy is nowhere to be seen.

Stella moves away from the entrance. Pauses to look through the stained glass windows in front. In the closest aisle she sees the young family from earlier.

Inside, Blanca is still carried by her father. She cuddles into him, her head in the crook of his neck.

Outside, Stella coughs, strides back toward her car, rips the door open and gets back in.

EXT. ST. JOSEPH'S PRAYER GARDEN - CONTINUOUS

The gardener watches Stella, frowns. Removes his earphones. A faint corrido emanates from the buds.

EXT. ST. JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

From around the corner of the church a figure wearing black and camouflage tactical gear appears. Carrying a cartoonishly large AK-47, loaded with rounds in an extended banana clip in both hands, he makes a beeline for the front of St. Joseph's.

It's Ski Mask Guy.

EXT. ST. JOSEPH'S PRAYER GARDEN - CONTINUOUS

The gardener pulls out his cell phone and begins dialing, his eyes landing back on Stella in her Honda, front and center.

INT. STELLA'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Stella sees nothing, her face in her hands. Still very high, she is talking herself down from a panic attack.

STELLA
- I don't even have to go in. It's
fine. Mom won't find out - I won't -

Stella stops herself. Takes a deep breath.

STELLA (CONT'D)
This is ridiculous.

Wiping her face, eyes down, she does not notice Ski Mask Guy moving past her car on the sidewalk.

Ski Mask Guy raises his gun, takes aim, finger on the trigger. Facing St. Joseph's, he points the AK-47 at the stained glass window, straight at the backs of the young family inside, oblivious to it all. Ski Mask Guy takes aim.

INT. ST. JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

Blanca looks up from her father's arms to peer through the windows. She spots Ski Mask Guy outside, slightly distorted by the stained glass.

EXT. ST. JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

Stella, who still does not see Ski Mask Guy, grabs the gear shift and slips her car into reverse.

She looks back into the rearview mirror and sees what she thinks is a *glowing Virgin Mary* standing a few feet behind the Honda, looking directly at her. Her eyes go wide.

STELLA
AHHHH!

Her hand still on the gear shift, eyes still on the Virgin, Stella yanks her car straight into drive.

Her foot slams down on the gas. Screaming, she spins the steering wheel wildly. Stella's car jumps over the curb and onto the sidewalk, careening forward...

EXT. ST. JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

...just as Ski Mask Guy squeezes the trigger of the AK-47!

Stella's Honda hits him, and he flies backward over the hood of the car and onto the pavement.

The AK-47 wildly fires a few very loud rounds that strike the face of St. Jude's statue across the street, missing the church, and the gardener, entirely.

The gardener ducks beneath the hedges. He panics as he yells into his cell phone.

GARDENER
HE JUST SHOT AT -
(pause)
No, I have no idea - I DON'T KNOW -

INT. STELLA'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Stella's foot hits the brakes, and she fumbles the gear shift into park. The dust settles around the Honda as she catches her breath.

Her eyes flit back to her rearview mirror, where she sees the *bag lady* instead of the Virgin Mary standing right behind Stella's car. The brown bottle peeks out from the top of her bag, glass flickering in the sunlight.

Stella realizes her vision of the Virgin was a glare from the glass. The bag lady stares at her for a beat before shuffling away. Stella sighs with relief. Then she looks ahead.

Stella sees Ski Mask Guy and reacts in horror.

STELLA
No. No. NonononoNONONO!

EXT. ST. JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

Stella climbs out of her Honda, now parked on the sidewalk, and sees the body lying on the street. Fresh panic explodes inside her. She stresses, tries to control her breathing.

Stella gropes at the Ski Mask Guy on his back, one arm contorted and clearly broken.

SKI MASK GUY
(moaning)
Uhhhhh...

STELLA

Fuck! Shit! Fuck! Sir! I am so, so sorry.

SKI MASK GUY

... sorrrrry ... ?

Stella sees the AK-47 a few feet away. She looks up to see St. Jude's shattered face across the street. Stares at the gardener incoherently yelling into his cell phone. Back down at Ski Mask Guy.

STELLA

What the fuck?

Ski Mask Guy weakly reaches his good arm toward the AK-47, whining wordlessly. She kicks it further away from him.

STELLA (CONT'D)

Oh, fuck you dude.

Ski Mask Guy passes out, his head hitting the pavement. Stella's heart is racing and she looks wildly around.

PARISHIONERS from St. Joseph's - the young family, a short, old priest (FATHER BOB), a few ABUELITAS, various others, burst through the large front doors.

STELLA (CONT'D)

Father Bob! Uh -

Father Bob reaches Stella first.

FATHER BOB

What in Heaven's name happened?

Father Bob reacts to Ski Mask Guy's AK-47.

FATHER BOB (CONT'D)

Holy shit!

The churchgoers gasp.

FATHER BOB (CONT'D)

Uhh - *perdona me*.

Father Bob does the sign of the cross.

FATHER BOB (CONT'D)

(to Stella)

Stella, right? Yvette González's daughter?

Stella flinches. Officially, there are witnesses to her skipping mass now. Stella nods, shaking.

FATHER BOB (CONT'D)
Are you okay? What happened?

Stella is freaking out, the adrenaline pumping through her veins. She is incoherent. Her mother *cannot* find out she was skipping mass.

STELLA
It all happened so fast - and then
I saw that lady -

FATHER BOB
Lady? What lady?

STELLA
I lost control - seriously, you
won't believe...

A cop car, lights and siren screaming, pulls up to St. Joseph's. An couple of on-duty POLICE climb out of the car.

Stella continues to panic as the cops enter the scene.

Some of the CHILDREN, let loose from the grips of their parents, circle Stella's Honda. Blanca crouches over the AK-47 for a moment to get a better look at it.

One of the cops jog over to secure the gun as Blanca is swept up by her father. One cop speaks into a walkie talkie.

The other cop wordlessly starts taking notes on a microscopically small notepad. They also make a quick call on their cell phone.

BYSTANDER
Officer, you should have seen it -

COP #1
Hold up, lady. The real brains are
on their way.

BYSTANDER
What the hell does that mean?

The two officers assess Ski Mask Guy. One speaks into his walkie talkie, requesting an emergency medical technician.

COP #1
(to Stella)
What seems to be the problem here?

Before Stella can respond, the gardener pushes past her.

GARDENER

Not to worry officer- I can explain.

Stella holds her breath. She angles herself away from the cops, hoping they don't smell the weed on her.

FATHER BOB

(to the gardener)
Pedro?

GARDENER

It's Felipe. I saw the whole thing from the prayer garden.

STELLA

The whole thing?

FELIPE

(pointing at Stella)
This señorita - she was in on it.

STELLA

What?!

FATHER BOB

You just decided to hit this guy with your car?

STELLA

No -

(to the cops)
And I wasn't "in on it." I've never even seen that guy in my life, I swear - I was *in church*, then something came over me and I felt like I needed to step outside, and I got in my car and...

COP #2

I don't buy it.

FATHER BOB

She said she saw a lady.

COP #1

A lady?

As if on cue, an unmarked car pulls up to the scene. DETECTIVES MUÑIZ and RUIZ jump out.

The two street cops begin conferring with Muñiz and Ruiz off to the side. Stella needs to get ahead of this.

STELLA

Yeah, a lady! Something just came over me. And then I saw that lady in the rearview mirror - I think she wanted me to stop that guy...

An ABUELITA, wearing a lacy hair scarf and long dress, approaches. She reaches out to Stella with a frail hand.

ABUELITA

What did she look like?

STELLA

I don't know, I think she was -

Lost for words, Stella looks around for the bag lady. She is nowhere to be found.

STELLA (CONT'D)

She was...

A couple of the kids start peering into Stella's vehicle. The cops follow suit. Stella, panicked, stumbles over her words.

STELLA (CONT'D)

(loudly)

She was blinding - glowing, ethereal... I saw... I saw...

She looks at Father Bob. The young family. Felipe. The detectives. Stella blurts out...

STELLA (CONT'D)

(not thinking)

I saw the Virgin Mary!

...total bullshit. Stella knows it, but they don't. If her mother finds anything out, at least she'll be covered in terms of her mass attendance.

FATHER BOB

What?

FELIPE

La Virgin?

The crowd gasps, and immediately begin conferring with each other. Detective Muñiz approaches Stella with a stern look on their face.

MUÑIZ

Stella González?

Stella nods hopefully.

MUÑIZ (CONT'D)
You're under arrest.

Muñiz slaps handcuffs on Stella, who is now dissociating, mouth agape.

FATHER BOB
Oh shit!

The crowd gasps again.

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE INTERROGATION ROOM - ONE HOUR LATER

Stella sits in a bare-bones room, handcuffed to a table. She is scared shitless. Trying not to look like every other murder suspect on those True Crime late night shows. She is failing.

Across from her sits Detective Ruiz, scratching notes on a steno pad.

STELLA
I swear to God I have nothing to do with the guy in the ski mask.

RUIZ
Catholics aren't supposed to swear.

STELLA
We aren't *supposed* to do a lot of things that we do. Fuck. Smoke. Lie. Then we do anyway, and the guilt eats us alive slowly, every day, until we rot from the inside out and die. It's the circle of life.

Ruiz stares at her. She blinks, still nervous.

STELLA (CONT'D)
Sorry. That's rude of me. But I am telling the truth about the not-knowing-Ski-Mask-Guy thing.

Muñiz enters the room. Stares at Stella, doesn't say a word. The detectives look at each other. Pause.

Muñiz walks over to Ruiz. Whispers in their ear.

STELLA (CONT'D)
Look Muñiz - I mean Ruiz - I didn't
do anything.

They both turn to Stella.

STELLA (CONT'D)
What?

Muñiz turns and exits without another word. Ruiz is still
staring at Stella.

STELLA (CONT'D)
Can someone please tell me what's
going on?

Muñiz reenters the room, carrying a cardboard box.

STELLA (CONT'D)
Am I being arrested?

MUÑIZ
No, just *detained.*

STELLA
(sarcastic)
That makes me feel so much better.

Muñiz and Ruiz look at her, stoic. She shrinks down again.

MUÑIZ
Stella...

RUIZ
Ski Mask Guy - Don Turner - He just
confessed.

MUÑIZ
Solo operation.

Ruiz pulls out a key and unlocks Stella's handcuffs. Stella
stands and immediately makes a break for the door.

RUIZ
Hold on.

Stella pauses, eyes wide. Muñiz and Ruiz look at each other
again. Stella, still nervous, gulps.

RUIZ (CONT'D)
We're sorry.

Now Stella is confused.

MUÑIZ

You did right today. We did wrong
by keeping you here for so long.

RUIZ

You've got enough to deal with now.

Stella is about to ask what they mean when Ruiz takes the box from Muñiz and hands it to Stella. She takes it and looks inside, jumping slightly.

There is her purse, her car keys, her phone and the eighth of weed she had stuffed in her pocket earlier. Stella looks back up at the detectives, more worried than ever.

RUIZ (CONT'D)

Oh, we don't care about that.

MUÑIZ

Considering Turner, I for one would
rather avoid the extra paperwork.
We'll chalk it up to CBD, say you
lost the receipt.

RUIZ

Good luck out there.

Stella, not wanting to start anything else, nods.

STELLA

Thanks.

Stella closes the interrogation room door behind her.

MUÑIZ

She's gonna need it.

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE STATION LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Stella enters the main lobby of the station, carrying her purse.

Felipe sits on one of the benches. Upon seeing Stella, he springs up excitedly.

FELIPE (IN SPANISH)

Señorita González!

STELLA (IN SPANISH)

Yes?

FELIPE (IN SPANISH)
They told me everything! That
gringo did it all by himself.

STELLA (IN SPANISH)
I know that. But I was arrested -

FELIPE (IN SPANISH)
They said you were just detained.

STELLA (IN SPANISH)
Regardless, now I have to explain
to my mother why I spent the
afternoon at the police station.
That should go over well.

FELIPE (IN SPANISH)
I want to apologize.

Stella pauses. Tired and hungry, she smiles faintly at Felipe.

STELLA (IN SPANISH)
It was definitely suspicious.

FELIPE (IN SPANISH)
But, you saved us all.

STELLA (IN SPANISH)
No I - I'm just glad everyone's
okay. We can put all this behind
us.

FELIPE (IN SPANISH)
Put it behind us? No way. It was a
miracle. We witnessed a *miracle*.

STELLA (IN SPANISH)
Okay.

Stella shakes his hand awkwardly, turns away and heads toward the front door to the station.

FELIPE (IN SPANISH)
(calling to her)
Don't worry! I fixed everything!

Stella only has a second to ponder what Felipe means when...

EXT. POLICE STATION - CONTINUOUS

...she opens the station doors and is nearly knocked back by an avalanche of people: reporters, cameramen, religious abuelitas, etc.

ABUELITA 1

That's her! STELLA GONZÁLEZ!

Chaos. Cameras focus on Stella. Clicks everywhere. Microphones are immediately thrust into her face.

STELLA

What the fuck?!

A young reporter wearing a shirt with a logo for "News Channel 7" leaps forward, elbowing through the crowd.

CHANNEL 7 REPORTER

Did you really see the Virgin Mary?

Another reporter, wielding a recorder, pushes themselves up front next to the Channel 7 Reporter.

PRINT REPORTER

How did she appear to you? Can you comment on any of the events of today?

STELLA

(under her breath)

Shit.

(louder, into the mic and recorder)

Uh. No.

Stella is cornered. She tries to move but the crowd presses closer in on her and she is flush against the station doors.

STELLA (CONT'D)

I don't think I want to answer -

ABUELITA 2

Was she as beautiful as all the images we've seen?

ABUELITA 1

What did she say to you?!

The shock settles in as Stella is barraged with several questions. She freezes, eyes nearly glazed over. She is tired, hungry, and dead sober.

Suddenly A HAND shoots out to grab Stella by the arm.

MAN

Back off!

The MAN, wearing a dirty t-shirt, pulls Stella away from the crowd of people, who follow her with fervor.

Stella goes with him - still totally shocked and scared and confused and needing to get away. She is still silent, and looks ridiculous.

MAN (CONT'D)

Come on!

Stella is guided away from reporters and abuelitas. She stares at them as the man leads her away.

He leads Stella to a white van, parked on the street in front of the police station. It all happens so fast Stella doesn't realize what she is being led into, until...

CUT TO:

INT. INVESTIGATION SKEPTIC VAN - CONTINUOUS

...the van door slams shut. Stella blinks a few times, and turns to see the mob of reporters and people rushing to the windows. Stella whips around and shuts her eyes, trying to control her breathing.

STELLA

Shit. Shit shit. Fuck me.

The man climbs into the driver's seat and buckles up. Puts the key in the ignition. Turns it. It sputters and does not start. He repeats the process - same result. After a couple of tries he manages to start the van and drive away from the station.

MAN

Don't worry, you're safe.

Stella, breathing more quickly again, opens her eyes. She blinks a few times, the van coming into focus.

STELLA

Where am I?

Stella looks around and sees some creepy items: a large camera with a long lens, ropes, duct tape, headphones, cheap surveillance equipment.

MAN

We have some business to attend to.

(pause)

What does the Virgin Mary look like?

STELLA

What?

MAN

If you saw the "Virgin Mother," what does she look like?

STELLA

Who are you?

The man turns back to look at her. Stella notices his shirt for the first time. It reads "Investigation: Skeptic." An eye-shaped necklace dangles from his neck.

MAN

Robert Vasquez. Founder and CEO of -

STELLA

(realizing)

Oh shit!

CUT TO:

INT. STELLA'S BEDROOM - FLASHBACK

Stella's eyes are bloodshot, and she is high out of her mind. She sits wrapped up like a burrito in front of her desk, which is littered with Hot Cheetos, pot, a pipe and Dr. Pepper.

Stella takes a hit from the pipe as she stares at her laptop. A video by ROBERT - THE MAN IN THE VAN - is playing on YouTube.

ROBERT (FROM LAPTOP)

- and these politicians - they're elf midgets who stack themselves on top of each other and wear flesh-suits and RUN THIS NATION. See, there's these things called the grey: aliens who control these other aliens called -

Stella snorts.

STELLA

Okay, right.

Stella clicks away from the video as she pops a Hot Cheeto in her mouth.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. INVESTIGATION SKEPTIC VAN - CONTINUOUS, PRESENT

Stella is now alert, looking wildly around the van. She turns back to Robert. Points at him dumbly.

STELLA
You're that conspiracy guy online!
The one all over YouTube and
Twitter!

ROBERT
I'd call myself an enlightened
investigator - but sure. That's me.

STELLA
Why the fuck am I in here?!

ROBERT
I just wanted to ask you a few
questions. Namely, what *really*
happened today?

Stella shrinks back.

STELLA
Uhh...

Stella is scared now. She needs to get out of this van, and fast. She is hyperventilating now, but trying to control it.

STELLA (CONT'D)
I gotta go.

Robert pulls up to a stop sign. Now's her chance. Stella slams against the van door and pulls it open.

ROBERT
Hey!

Stella leaps outside and onto the street.

STELLA
(over her shoulder)
Fuck off!

Stella takes off in the opposite direction of the van. Robert tries to turn it around quickly, but the van stalls.

ROBERT

Shit!

(calling out to Stella)

I'll find out, Stella González! You won't get away with this!

CUT TO:

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD SIDEWALK - CONTINUOUS

Stella is running. She can't control it anymore, her breathing is hard and she is definitely hyperventilating. Her eyes are wide open, crazy, frantic.

Stella pulls out her phone and taps on the screen, quickly. She puts the phone up to her ear as it starts ringing.

CUT TO:

EXT. YUM YUM BURGER STAND - SAME TIME

Melanie is paying at the burger stand, which is outside in a flat clearing. It is calm, serene, and various people are enjoying greasy Mexican burgers and cheese fries on picnic tables.

As Melanie is handed her food, her phone starts ringing. She answers it, smiling at the cashier.

MELANIE (INTO PHONE)

Hey. I'm at Yum Yum. I tried calling you but you didn't answer. Want anything?

Pause. Melanie blinks a few times.

MELANIE (INTO PHONE) (CONT'D)

I don't understand - what happened?

CUT TO:

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD SIDEWALK - SAME TIME

Stella is still running, a few tears escaping the corners of her eyes as she screams -

STELLA

I DIDN'T SEE THE VIRGIN MARY!

CUT TO:

INT. MELANIE'S PT CRUISER - MINUTES LATER

Melanie drives as Stella loses it.

Stella is at times stoic, confused, laughing. Melanie sips on a soda from a paper cup and offers Stella some Yum Yum fries to no avail.

MELANIE

You need to eat something, Stella.

STELLA

Heh... heh... Haaa!

Melanie shoves a few fries in Stella's mouth. She chews slowly, her brow furrowed. Once she swallows, the laughter resumes.

STELLA (CONT'D)

Hahahahahaha!

Melanie offers Stella the soda. Stella shakes her head, no. Melanie shakes the paper cup in Stella's face, the ice rattling.

Without looking at her sister, Stella sips from the straw before cackling once again.

STELLA (CONT'D)

HA!

As the landscape rolls by we see several Catholic churches - this South Texas town is clearly religious.

INT. GONZÁLEZ HOME - DAY

Stella and Melanie enter through the front door. The adjacent wall is covered with various metal crosses.

Stella sighs, closing her eyes and leaning back against the doorframe. She takes several deep breaths.

MELANIE

(calling into the house)

Ma?

STELLA

(hushed)

Wait! What am I going to tell her?

MELANIE

You wanna give her a heart attack?
She's just getting over Dad.

STELLA
No, she's not.

MELANIE
What are you talking about?

STELLA
You've been gone way too long, you have no idea what it's been like here. I've been dealing with this for a year.

MELANIE
I couldn't handle it!

STELLA
Well, *I* can't handle *this*!

MELANIE
Don't worry, I've got this. MA?!

YVETTE
(from the other room)
In here...

Stella and Melanie exchange knowing glances. Stella takes a deep breath in, looks at Melanie with doubt.

MELANIE
There's no way she knows *anything*, Stella, it's Sunday.

CUT TO:

INT. GONZÁLEZ LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

YVETTE GONZÁLEZ (48), their mother, kneels in front of an altar set up in the corner of the darkened living room. Her hands are clasped in prayer, with a wooden rosary between her fingers. It looks like her hair hasn't been brushed in days, and she wears sweatpants.

All the lights are off apart from the burning candles - marked with images of the Virgin Mary and various other saints. The windows are drawn with heavy, dark curtains.

More picture frames on the altar, filled with photos of Stella and Melanie's father. The couple's wedding photo, a father carrying the girls when they were little, a couple of dashing solo shots all flicker by the candlelight. There is also a framed obituary and funeral pamphlet with his picture on it.

Also, incense is burning, a tendril of smoke rising from it and filling the room with an oakly smell.

Yvette does the sign of the cross before standing slowly, grasping the corner of the altar. She leans forward and blows out the candles and incense one by one.

Finally, she makes her way to her daughters. Yvette is clearly depressed.

YVETTE
How was your day?

STELLA
You haven't seen the news?

YVETTE
You know your father never watched
TV on Sundays until after 5.

MELANIE
That's good, Ma!

STELLA
Yeah, maybe don't watch TV at all
today -

MELANIE
Maybe not for the next week!

Yvette looks at her daughters strangely for a moment. She turns to Melanie.

YVETTE
It's good to see you. When did you
get in?

Yvette looks Melanie up and down, gently taking her face with one hand and moving it side to side.

MELANIE
This morning. But I'm not staying
too long.

YVETTE
You look thin. Have you been
eating?

MELANIE
Good to see you too, Mom.

Yvette turns to Stella, and notices her state - somewhat manic, jumpy. She tucks a strand of hair behind Stella's ear. Notices the clock on the wall behind her, and the time.

YVETTE

What? It's 3:30? Where have you been?

STELLA

Mass, then -

MELANIE

The police station -

YVETTE

The police station?!

Melanie freezes, sheepishly looks back at Stella. Stella looks at her with shocked anger. So much for "I've got this." Melanie mouths "I'm sorry."

YVETTE (CONT'D)

Why were you at the police station?

Suddenly, from outside, a few cars can be heard screeching down the street. A small roar can be heard from the living room.

Stella's cell phone starts buzzing. She picks it up and sees an inordinate number of missed calls and messages - some from numbers she recognizes, most from numbers she doesn't know.

YVETTE (CONT'D)

(putting it together)

The TV... Why don't you want me watching the TV?

Yvette rushes to grab the TV remote control and clicks on the TV. The Channel 7 news reporter who was at the police station earlier is doing a live shot outside of THEIR HOUSE. Yvette screams.

YVETTE (CONT'D)

That's our house!

MELANIE

Fuck, that was fast.

STELLA

(scrambling)

Don't worry, Ma, I fixed it already! Really! It doesn't matter, it's fine, you can relax.

Yvette stomps over to a nearby window and thrusts open the curtains. A cloud of dust bursts from the fabric. The trio all squint into the light.

MELANIE

Honestly Ma, when was the last time you opened these?

They look through the window and see...

EXT. GONZÁLEZ FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

...the mob of reporters, including Robert, camped out on the road by their front lawn.

Some Catholics, healthy and sick alike, have spread out blankets on the grass. They carry crosses and rosaries, clasping their hands in prayer.

INT. GONZÁLEZ LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The trio stare out the window, watching the continuing chaos unfurl.

YVETTE
(softly)
Oh...

She turns away from the window and the girls, retreating back into the darkness.

Some of the reporters notice Stella in the window and begin frantically waving at them and taking photos. Melanie whips the curtains closed again.

Yvette stumbles back, overwhelmed. She pulls herself together again, newly invigorated by the mystery of Stella's stint at the police station.

YVETTE (CONT'D)
(firm)
What happened today?

STELLA
I can explain -

The news station on TV cuts to a cell phone video of Stella being pushed into a police car outside of St. Joseph's. She looks pretty, but the shot is not all that flattering. Stella, watching herself, frowns in disgust.

STELLA (CONT'D)
That's a horrible angle.

YVETTE
You were *arrested*?!

STELLA
I wasn't arrested... I was just detained!

Yvette flicks through the channels, shaking her head.

YVETTE

I pray every day that you and
Melanie can make your father proud.
Now you've been arrested? For what?

Melanie rolls her eyes.

STELLA

I wasn't -

Back on Channel 7, the shot cuts to b-roll shot in front of
St. Joseph's Catholic Church at the scene from this morning.

YVETTE

And at *St. Joseph's*, no less!

STELLA

Ma!

CHANNEL 7 REPORTER (FROM TV)

...shooting prevented. Some
bystanders and police are saying it
was an act of God.

The news package cuts to Father Bob, who appears to have
pulled himself together.

FATHER BOB (FROM TV)

She saw the Virgin Mary. And the
Virgin told her to stop him - that
horrible shooter.

The station cuts to an interview with Felipe the gardener
outside the police station.

FELIPE (FROM TV)

It was a *miracle*. If it weren't for
Stella, there would be a lot of
dead bodies at St. Joseph's today.

B-roll of the church, the shot up statue of St. Jude, and
Stella exiting the police station plays as the reporter
continues their praise.

CHANNEL 7 REPORTER (FROM TV)

We haven't been able to get a
comment from González yet, but we
are eager and ready to hear things
from her perspective.

Yvette looks at Stella with new eyes.

STELLA

Mother. It's not a big deal.

YVETTE
Not a big deal?

Stella and Melanie prepare for Yvette to lose it, when...

...she throws her arms around Stella, wrapping her in a tight embrace. They hug for a few moments.

YVETTE (CONT'D)
(tearfully whispering)
Did you really see the Virgin Mary?

Stella looks at Melanie. What should she say? Melanie looks at their mother, and looks around at the den of mourning Yvette is trapped in.

STELLA
Uh-huh.

MELANIE
Yes. She did.

Yvette pulls away. A few tears fall from the corners of her eyes. Her hands grasp Stella's arms.

YVETTE
You heard God!

Stella blinks. Nods slowly. Yvette cries out in joy. She beams, smiling for the first time in a long time.

YVETTE (CONT'D)
Ai, *gracias a Díos*! Your father
would be so happy - and to have you
both here again! It really is a
miracle!

Stella looks back and forth between Melanie and their mother.

YVETTE (CONT'D)
I have to light a candle!

Yvette dashes to the altar, picks up a frame with her husband's photo and kisses it.

Stella turns to see her own face still on the television, in a particularly unflattering candid shot. Nervous, she rushes out of the living room, entering...

INT. GONZÁLEZ HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

...the hallway. Her room is at the end.

Stella passes more crosses on the wall, along with photos of the family - including her father. Yvette has also hung up a photograph of Pope John Paul II. As she walks, we move to...

CUT TO:

INT. STELLA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Stella flicks the light switch on. Her phone buzzes again. She clicks the top notification - from Twitter. It's a video from Investigation: Skeptic. Stella is in Robert's van, looking confused and disheveled.

STELLA

Another bad angle! Ugh, how did he even get that shot...?

She grabs a pillow from her bed and shoves her face into it, her screaming muted by the fabric. Melanie enters the room and shuts the door behind them.

Melanie warily grabs one of Stella's old stuffed animals, a small purple Easter Bunny with large ears, from her nightstand.

MELANIE

(offering toy, in a funny voice)

Floppy the Bunny says, "don't be sad, Stella!"

Stella grabs Floppy from Melanie protectively and smooths its ears down.

STELLA

Why didn't I just tell her the truth?

MELANIE

When was the last time you saw her smile like that?

STELLA

One year, three months, and two days ago.

MELANIE

You never saw the grave, did you? Have you gone back to the cemetery at all?

STELLA

No, and I don't need another lecture about it. Might I remind you that the day we buried Dad was also the last time Mom saw you for any meaningful amount of time?

MELANIE

It's been hard.

STELLA

No shit!

Stella begins pacing in the room, biting her nails.

STELLA (CONT'D)

Why did I say all of that? As if the Virgin Mary would appear to *me*.

MELANIE

There wasn't *anything* else you could have said to those Catholic nuts? Now you're the fucking miracle worker, fucking Mother Teresa.

STELLA

Yeah and I'm a big, fat, liar, just like she was.

Stella buries her face in her pillow again, stifling a scream.

MELANIE

Maybe it'll blow over. You know those news cycles! Maybe there will be a murder, or a natural disaster or something!

STELLA

(hopeful)

You think so?

MELANIE

Yeah!

STELLA

Oh, thank God.

YVETTE (O.S.)

(yelling)

Stella!

The sisters jump. Yvette opens Stella's bedroom door and enters, collected. Her hair has been brushed. She has changed into nicer clothes. Her daughters stare at her.

MELANIE
Everything okay, Ma?

YVETTE
More than okay. *The Vatican* is here.

STELLA
...the *Vatican*?

YVETTE
(with emphasis)
The Vatican.

Stella and Melanie exchange a look. Yvette has lost it.

STELLA
What have I done? I broke her!

MELANIE
(whispering)
Pretty sure she was already broken...

Yvette steps to the side and three figures appear from the dark hallway.

A WOMAN enters, dressed modestly (but expensively). She is both small and elegant, and carries a certain energy that sucks a lot out of a room. She stands in the middle of two TALL PRIESTS, who both swipe through feeds on iPads.

Stella shrinks back in fear, leaning in closer to Melanie. The church has descended on her.

YVETTE
She's from *the Vatican*.

The woman smiles warmly at Stella, Melanie and Yvette. Confident and fluid, she steps up to Stella.

SISTER ALICE
Not quite the Vatican – but Vatican-adjacent. I deal in American cardinals, mostly. I'm Sister Alice Aloysius. This is Father Ed and Father Mike. They don't say much.
(pause)
I'm sure this is all quite the shock.

MELANIE

No shit.

SISTER ALICE

Maybe I can help.

STELLA

How?

SISTER ALICE

Press, PR, that sort of thing.

Stella's phone continues to buzz. The muffled sounds of the crowd and reporters continues from outside. Sister Alice raises a small hand and cups Stella's face delicately.

SISTER ALICE (CONT'D)

I'm here to make it all better.

CUT TO:

EXT. GONZÁLEZ HOME - MOMENTS LATER

Stella, Yvette and Melanie are escorted out of their home by SISTER ALICE and the two priests. FATHERS ED AND MIKE have actually stopped scrolling through their tablets - and now focus on keeping the mob away from the family. They plow through the crowd, cutting a pathway to a stretch limosine waiting for them on the street.

SISTER ALICE

(to a cameraman)

Hey - HEY - this is private property, sir. Any photos taken of these women here are illegal unless they have given their express permission. Which they have not.

In the back of the press mob stands Robert, still wearing his Investigation: Skeptic t-shirt. Ignoring Sister Alice, he records the family, zooming in on Stella.

CUT TO:

INT. STRETCH LIMOSINE - A FEW MINUTES LATER

The limo drives down bumpy residential roads slowly. Sister Alice, Fathers Ed and Mike, Stella, Melanie and Yvette are crammed inside.

Stella sits in the center of them all, pressed in from all sides. She seems to be surprised at the swift change in scenery.

STELLA
How did we get here?

SISTER ALICE
(ignoring that)
Did you know that the Church has
its own social media?

MELANIE
The Pope has a Twitter?

SISTER ALICE
My job has a lot to do with the
modern image of the church...
Including its online presence. At
least, the American presence. Now,
I think I'm ready to make more
international moves. That's where
you come in.

Stella blinks at Sister Alice. Her eyes dart back and forth between her and her family. Yvette looks more and more excited. Melanie looks more and more suspicious.

STELLA
I'm not sure what you want me to
do.

SISTER ALICE
You're smarter than that, Stella.

STELLA
Let's pretend for a second I'm not.

SISTER ALICE
This is a very important moment.
Did you see that mob outside your
house? It's even bigger online.
What you've done today is a
bonafide miracle *gone viral*.

STELLA
I didn't do anything.

SISTER ALICE
You did *everything*.

STELLA
But I didn't mean to!

YVETTE

Stella, mi'jita, this is a big deal. Your father would be so proud of you - *I'm* so proud of you. Why not the world? The world needs you!

Stella sighs deeply, blinking back tears. There are a million things she wants to say that she just can't say in front of her mother.

STELLA

Ma... *I can't...*

SISTER ALICE

We have an opportunity before us, Stella. Let me guide you. With your help, we can revitalize the Church and everything it stands for.

Stella has become frantic. She looks wildly around. Sees no escape. Stella hits the roof of the limo a few times with an open hand.

STELLA

(calling)

Driver? Can we stop the limo?

The driver ignores her.

STELLA (CONT'D)

(louder)

STOP THE LIMO, PLEASE.

SISTER ALICE

Stop the limo, Carl.

The limo rolls to a stop and Stella comically scrambles out. Her heart is racing, and she is breathing heavily again. She pushes open a door and climbs out to find herself...

EXT. VALLEY CEMETERY - CONTINUOUS

...outside the cemetery where her father is buried. Stella takes a few shaky steps toward the low fenceline and stops. She is hyperventilating again, and hugs herself tightly.

The wind swirls around her and she shudders. Stella blinks and a few tears stream out of her eyes. The sun is setting in the distance - pinks and oranges swirl over the landscape.

Sister Alice gets out of the limo and glides over to Stella, an image of calm and control. They stand side by side.

STELLA

I'm not cut out for what you need.

SISTER ALICE

We want you just as you are. Just as God made you.

STELLA

I'm not...

Stella seems at a loss for words.

SISTER ALICE

Nothing bad has happened. Only good. And you are responsible.

Stella doesn't respond.

SISTER ALICE (CONT'D)

Why were you at St. Joseph's, Stella?

STELLA

I grew up at that church. We used to go every week, all of us, with...

SISTER ALICE

With your father?

Stella nods. More tears now, and she doesn't move to wipe them away.

SISTER ALICE (CONT'D)

How did he pass?

INT. ST. JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC CHURCH - FLASHBACK

As Stella describes her father's death, we see a flashback of her, her mother and her father inside St. Joseph's.

They sing a hymn together. Hold hands for the Our Father prayer. Then... Stella in distress. Yvette crouched down on the ground, shaking.

STELLA

At mass... a year ago. Everything seemed fine... Until it wasn't. It was a heart attack. Right there. In the middle of the gospel. He died in my mother's arms.

EXT. VALLEY CEMETERY - CONTINUOUS, BACK TO PRESENT

Stella still looks out over the cemetery. Her tears have stopped, but she looks tired and sad.

STELLA

And now, he's buried out here.

SISTER ALICE

That must have been *hard*.

She places a gentle hand on Stella's shoulder.

STELLA

It was awful. He was perfectly fine before then, then suddenly...

(pause)

I could have used a *miracle* then. What was that? How could God... *If* God...

SISTER ALICE

For the last year, your mother needed you, and you were there. Today, all those people needed you. You were there. Even if you don't believe in it, Stella, God is within you.

STELLA

I can't uproot just my mother -

SISTER ALICE

She needs this too. Life is change, Stella. What, you're going to stay here forever? The Lord only grants us a precious few years on this planet to move it in some way. Don't waste it.

STELLA

I can't even go to my own father's grave without spiraling - and now I'm supposed to be the face of some noble campaign? I can't help you.

SISTER ALICE

Yes, you can. Stella - you were meant for this.

Sister Alice grips both of Stella's shoulders now, and turns her away from the cemetery to face her.

SISTER ALICE (CONT'D)
 Where you were going wasn't
 working. Where you are going will.

Stella looks back, toward her small town. She looks at the limo, at her family, and finally back at Sister Alice.

CUT TO:

EXT. AIRPORT RUNWAY - ONE HOUR LATER

The González women follow Sister Alice and the priests on the runway.

MELANIE
 I've never gotten to skip TSA
 before.

STELLA
 (whispering)
 I still have my stuff on me.

MELANIE
 What the hell, Stella?

STELLA
 I didn't empty my purse, and I
 thought we were going back home!

MELANIE
 You have a problem.

Stella rolls her eyes. They approach a large private plane. "Aria Cattolica," Catholic Air, is emblazoned on the side of it along with a golden cross.

MELANIE (CONT'D)
 Well, now we know where all those
 donations go.

STELLA
 (to Sister Alice)
 Oh, darn. I don't have any other
 clothes. Guess we should just
 forget the whole thing and -

SISTER ALICE
 Don't worry about that.

She winks at the women.

A TALL MAN, around 35 years old with kind eyes, wearing a turtleneck sweater, exits the side of the plane and begins making his way down the stairs connected to the runway. He smiles at the women.

SISTER ALICE (CONT'D)

Excuse me.

Sister Alice bustles past the man and pats his shoulder briefly. She is followed closely by Fathers Ed and Mike. Yvette, giggling, rushes after them.

YVETTE

Is there anything I can help with?

The tall man approaches Stella first. The two stare at each other for a moment. We get a close-up look at Stella and the man's eyes upon seeing each other - and their pupils dilate. Melanie notices and jumps in.

MELANIE

Are you the pilot?

TALL MAN

I'm Gregory.

GREGORY is clearly struck by Stella. Melanie walks past him and turns to roll her eyes at her sister.

STELLA

I'm Stella.

GREGORY

Nice to meet you. No bags?

STELLA

We didn't know we needed to pack.

Gregory smiles.

GREGORY

You'll have plenty to choose from in Mexico City.

STELLA

That's where we're heading?

GREGORY

That's where we're heading *first*.

Stella blinks up at him. Before she can say anything else, Sister Alice has returned. She smiles brightly at the pair.

SISTER ALICE

Good, you've already met Father Gregory Martin.

Stella looks at Sister Alice in surprise, then at Gregory - FATHER Gregory. She looks as if she is about to speak, but recovers quickly and decides against saying something stupid.

Father Gregory tugs at the edge of his turtleneck - revealing the black and white clerical collar tucked away beneath. He looks back at Stella, sheepishly? Guiltily? She can't tell.

STELLA

Father - ? Ah. Yes.

SISTER ALICE

Father Martin likes to keep it casual when it comes to travel.

Sister Alice plucks at his sweater disapprovingly.

GREGORY

I get cold easily, especially in the air.

Stella follows Father Gregory and Sister Alice onto the plane. As they reach the stairs, Gregory offers a hand to help Stella up, which she accepts.

CUT TO:

INT. ARIA CATTOLICA - CONTINUOUS

Stella and Father Gregory board the plane, which is lavish and ornate. It's a first-class cabin for an international flight, with partitions for individual beds and tables.

Melanie, already making herself at home, notices the looks exchanged by Stella and Father Gregory. The priest nods at Stella before moving to the back of the plane.

Gregory walks past Sister Alice, Father Ed and Father Mike, all consulting their various devices in their seats.

Yvette is thrilled, just happy to be there. She smooths out her clothes and settles into her seat. Melanie is by Stella's side in an instant. Before she can ask --

STELLA

(whispering)

No.

MELANIE
(whispering)
No?

STELLA
(whispering)
Priest.

MELANIE
(whispering)
Priest?!

Stella looks at Gregory again. She is at a loss for words.

STELLA
(whispering)
Fuck me.

MELANIE
(whispering)
Don't tempt him.

INT. ARIA CATTOLICA - ONE HOUR LATER

Sister Alice types furiously away on a laptop. Fathers Ed and Mike nap, their seats reclined all the way back. Yvette reads a bible, content in her prayer.

Melanie scrolls absently on her phone, sipping on a flute of champagne. Three other empty flutes still sit on her seat table.

Stella sits a few rows up on her own, biting her nails. She's a bundle of nerves, uncomfortable. Father Gregory, who has taken off his turtleneck and simply wears the standard black vestments with the white collar, walks down the aisle and hesitantly approaches Stella.

GREGORY
They've got movies.

STELLA
Really?

GREGORY
Anything you want.

Father Gregory presses on the wall in front of Stella, and a sleek flat screen slides out. Stella watches in awe.

Father Gregory finds a remote in the side compartment and clicks it on.

A queue of show titles and film covers pass over the screen as he scrolls. The poster for *The Terminator* appears, and Stella brightens.

STELLA
Terminator! Nice.

Melanie peers out of her cabin. Father Gregory and Stella seem to be getting awfully chummy.

STELLA (CONT'D)
Used to watch it all the time with
my dad...

Stella trails off, a memory playing in her head.

GREGORY
Should I keep scrolling?

STELLA
No - I think I'll watch it.

Father Gregory nods and clicks on the title.

STELLA (CONT'D)
What about you? *Terminator* fan?

GREGORY
I've never seen it.

STELLA
Oh, we *have* to watch it then!

He smiles broadly at her, and is about to respond, when Melanie bursts their quickly forming bubble. She coughs.

MELANIE
Stella - hi, *Father* - Stella, could
I have a word with you? In private?

STELLA
Kinda hard to find privacy around
here...

Melanie grabs Stella's arm and...

INT. ARIA CATTOLICA BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

...pulls Stella into the bathroom on the plane, which is surprisingly clean and spacious. She sits Stella down on the edge of the sink countertop and takes a large swig of her drink.

MELANIE
We need to come up with a
game plan.

STELLA
- in the middle of a
conversation -

MELANIE (CONT'D)
That's a good place to start - stop
making googly eyes at the priest.

STELLA
I - I'm not.

MELANIE
You have some serious daddy issues.

STELLA
He's not *that* much older -

MELANIE
He's a literal "father." You're
fucked psychologically no matter
what angle you look at it with.

STELLA
Melanie, it's not like that!

MELANIE (CONT'D)
Whatever. Focus. We need to figure out how you're going to handle this. I do know that even the *hint* of you doing anything with this priest will screw everything up.

STELLA (CONT'D)
What's got you so nervous, Miss
"I'll have another round!"?

MELANIE
We've got to keep our heads down.
Get through this one day at a time.
If we fuck up, it's bye-bye Aria
Cattolica and hello economy flights
all the way home.

STELLA
This is a lot of pressure.

MELANIE
Smile for a few photos, whip out
that Sunday School trivia knowledge
and get us through the next few
weeks in one piece.

STELLA
Can I go now?

MELANIE

I've got my eyes on you. And *Father*
Gregory.

Stella rolls her eyes and brushes past Melanie.

MELANIE (CONT'D)

(whispering)

He's a man of the cloth!

INT. ARIA CATTOLICA - CONTINUOUS

Father Gregory is still standing by Stella's "cabin," *The Terminator* paused. He looks hopeful, and for a moment, so does she.

GREGORY

Popcorn?

Stella is about to respond when Melanie brushes past them both, clearing her throat obnoxiously. As she passes Father Gregory, she looks back at Stella with a death glare.

STELLA

Actually, I'm getting a bit tired.
Rain check?

GREGORY

Of course.

They stand in front of each other for a moment, looking everywhere but one another. Stella finally makes the first move to sit down.

They have to maneuver around each other, and there is unmistakably something there. As they look at one another, the lights in the plane begin to dim.

STELLA

Goodnight.

Stella turns away and slides into her compartment. Father Gregory walks to his, a few rows back.

CUT TO:

INT. ARIA CATTOLICA - LATER

The lights are completely off in the cabin now. It's silent - the crew and passengers sleep. Stella is curled up, also sleeping, wrapped in a soft blanket.

Father Gregory, the only one still awake, watches *The Terminator* from his own cabin. He wears headphones. In one hand he absently messes with the clerical collar around his neck, tugging at it with two fingers.

KYLE REESE (IN HEADPHONES)
 You seemed just a little sad. I
 used to always wonder what you were
 thinking in that moment.

The light from the movie flickers across Father Gregory's face as his eyes flit to Stella briefly. He tugs at his collar again, looks back at the screen, then again at Stella.

KYLE REESE (IN HEADPHONES) (CONT'D)
 I memorized every line, every
 curve... I came across time for
 you, Sarah. I love you; I always
 have.

CUT TO:

INT. ANIMATED MAP SEQUENCE

The animated map sequence from the beginning continues. The Aria Cattolica plane, a new addition to the holy map, crosses the border of the United States and enters Mexico.

The little plane lands in a bed of crosses on the map around Mexico City.

CUT TO:

INT. RENTED VAN - DAY

Stella and Melanie sit in the very back row of a large black van, driving through the roads of MEXICO CITY. Yvette is in the passenger's seat up front with the driver, chatting excitedly with him in Spanish.

In the row directly in front of them sits Sister Alice and Father Gregory, who wears his clerical collar.

Melanie holds up a cell phone on a portable, transformable tripod. She records the scene from the phone.

STELLA
 (awkwardly)
 Today we are heading to the
Basilica de Guadalupe.

Melanie turns the camera to Sister Alice, who smiles warmly, a natural.

SISTER ALICE
(to the camera)
That's where Juan Diego saw the
Holy Mother in person.

MELANIE
Juan Diego?

GREGORY
Juan Diego was an indigenous
Mexican man from Tepeyac Hill.

Melanie turns to face Gregory, who directs a lot of his comment toward Stella. As they speak, an fantasy story sequence plays out on screen.

EXT. TEPEYAC HILL FANTASY SEQUENCE - CONTINUOUS

Gregory, as Juan Diego, treks up Tepeyac Hill. Once he gets to the top, he sees Stella, dressed as the Virgin Mary. They act out the description in the fantasy as the real Stella/Gregory narrate.

GREGORY (NARRATING)
In 1531, on Tepeyac Hill, on the
outskirts of what is now Mexico
City, Juan Diego saw the Virgin
Mary on his way to church. She
spoke to him in his language and
told him to build a shrine on the
top of the hill.

STELLA (NARRATING)
But when Juan Diego went to the
Bishop, the Bishop didn't believe
him. He went back to the hill and
told the Holy Mother, who then told
Juan Diego to pick some roses and
take them to the Bishop.

Gregory/Juan Diego speaks with Father Mike, who is dressed as a Mexican bishop. He returns to Stella/Mary, who directs him to a nearby rose bush. Somehow, their chemistry is endearing, despite the subject matter.

GREGORY (NARRATING)
When he did, he dropped his cloak -

A snort from real-world Stella. Shot from behind at first, Gregory/Juan Diego opens his cloak almost like a flasher on the street, and we see Father Mike/Bishop's shocked reaction before cutting to see Stella/Mary's image on the cloak.

GREGORY (NARRATING) (CONT'D)
And miraculously, a beautiful image
of the Virgin was on the inside, as
the petals fell to the ground.

Cut to Gregory/Juan Diego, Father Mike/Bishop and several Mexican men and women working to build the first chapel on Tepeyac Hill. Gregory/Juan Diego looks up to see Stella/Virgin Mary in the sky, who waves at him happily.

STELLA (NARRATING)
They ended up building the church,
and now, it's a basilica. That's
where they keep his cloak.

Sister Alice cuts in. Back in live action.

INT. RENTED VAN - CONTINUOUS

SISTER ALICE
At the Basilica we're going to be
meeting some dignitaries, church
leaders, community members... It's
a very popular pilgrimage site in
Mexico. They've all heard great
things about Stella's...

YVETTE
Miracle.

CUT TO:

EXT. BASILICA DE GUADALUPE - DAY

The Basilica de Guadalupe, an ornate round shrine, mills with tourists and Catholics, who pray the rosary and talk quietly.

Tourists and locals alike populate the open square, including ROBERT from Investigation: Skeptic, who is taking his own b-roll of the Basilica. No one notices him.

Stella and Melanie can't help but marvel at the stunning architecture. The pair stand off to the side as Gregory and Sister Alice assess the scene.

Yvette is snapping photos on her phone. She gestures for Stella and Melanie to stand together in front of the basilica so she can take a picture of them, and grins.

STELLA

Now one with you, Ma!

Yvette pushes the phone into Father Ed's hand. He takes the phone and obligingly takes their picture.

SISTER ALICE

Melanie! Can we get a shot of this?

Melanie jogs over to Sister Alice as Gregory backs away, joining Stella further back. Sister Alice begins directing the scene, instructing Melanie with confident precision.

STELLA

I think we left out the part about Juan Diego's uncle being sick...

GREGORY

Oh, yeah. He got better, though, after they built the chapel.

STELLA

That's right.

She turns to him, trying to look him up and down without being too obvious.

GREGORY

We also forgot to mention he was married.

STELLA

María Lucía. She died like two years before he ever saw Mary. And, well...

GREGORY

...they never consummated their marriage.

STELLA

They both died as virgins. Which sucks. Oh -

She realizes who she's talking to.

STELLA (CONT'D)

Sorry.

GREGORY
 (laughing)
 It's okay.
 (pause)
 It is... a controversial issue. A
 lot of debate within the clergy of
 the efficacy of celibacy.

STELLA
 Oh?

GREGORY
 Behind closed doors, yes.

STELLA
 Where do you stand? In the debate.

GREGORY
 It doesn't make things easy... But
 I also think, if a priest were to
 say settle down and get married,
 have a few kids... It's already a
 great responsibility to have a whole
 congregation call you father. And
 that's without the dynamics of
 fathering an actual child.

STELLA
 Okay, *Father Gregory*.

He laughs again.

GREGORY
 Just - just Gregory.

STELLA
 Okay, Gregory.
 (pause)
 Do you usually ask people to call
 you by your first name?

GREGORY
 No...

Gregory seems uncomfortable with the conversation all of a sudden, as if her questioning him is leading to him having a few questions of his own.

GREGORY (CONT'D)
 I better - uh - see if they need -

He gestures awkwardly toward Sister Alice, Yvette and Melanie, who record the dignitaries parking and climbing out of their vans. Gregory strides to their vicinity as the dignitaries climb out of their SUVs.

Stella watches him dash away, even more confused about her feelings. After a moment she begins to look around the open square.

Robert notices that Stella is alone again, and makes a move toward her before having to stop short as a mob of foreign private school children in uniforms passes in front of him.

In the distance, Stella spots that same old bag lady from St. Joseph's. The bag lady, staring at her, wears the same hoodie and carries the same brown bottle.

Stella jumps in a start, her heart racing. The bag lady starts to turn the round corner behind the Basilica.

STELLA

Hey! Wait!

Stella darts toward the lady, running away from everyone and around the large circular shrine...

CUT TO:

EXT. BEHIND THE BASILICA DE GUADALUPE - CONTINUOUS

...finding a secluded sitting area. It looks sort of well-maintained, but frayed at the edges. The grass is short and dry.

No visitors seem to be in the immediate vicinity. The bag lady is gone. There are a couple of white stone benches, bleached by the sun. One of them is framed by two bushes.

A young homeless woman is sitting and curled up on that bench, her chin resting on her knees. She smokes a joint alone.

Stella realizes the woman isn't the bag lady.

STELLA (IN SPANISH)

I'm sorry...

The woman jumps up, hiding the joint behind her back unsuccessfully. Stella picks up her arms, signaling she is okay, before speaking Spanish.

STELLA (IN SPANISH) (CONT'D)
 Wait, don't worry. Uhh - My name is
 Stella González. What's your name?

The woman looks as if she is about to dash away, but decides against it. Shrugging, she takes a drag of her joint.

ESPERANZA (IN SPANISH)
 I am Esperanza.

STELLA (IN SPANISH)
 How are you today, Esperanza?

Esperanza looks around, unsure. She clutches at her clothes, dirty and worn from an unstable, nomadic lifestyle. She looks down at herself then back at Stella.

STELLA (IN SPANISH) (CONT'D)
 Sorry.

ESPERANZA (IN SPANISH)
 It has been... a hard day. To say
 the least. They don't make it any
 better.

Esperanza gestures to the church. She kicks a few pebbles in its direction before spitting.

Stella sighs, agreeing with her. She plops down on the bench.

STELLA (IN SPANISH)
 They really don't, do they?

Esperanza warily sits down next to Stella. The joint is still lit in her hand, smoke tendrils wafting out the tip.

Esperanza takes a long drag before offering it to Stella. Stella looks at it, chuckles, and takes it.

STELLA (IN SPANISH) (CONT'D)
 (toasting Esperanza)
 Thank you, Esperanza. You just made
 it my lucky day.

Stella takes a hit and returns the joint to Esperanza. Esperanza takes a hit and passes it back.

ESPERANZA (IN SPANISH)
 I could use one of those. A lucky
 day.

Stella takes one more hit before passing it back to Esperanza.

ESPERANZA (IN SPANISH) (CONT'D)
 My whole life has been shit. If
 only I could catch a break... a...

STELLA (IN SPANISH)
 Miracle?

Esperanza holds the joint up to her mouth and nods.

As if out of nowhere, Mexican officials appear, along with Melanie, Gregory, Yvette and Sister Alice. Melanie is walking with her back toward Stella and Esperanza, recording the dignitaries.

Esperanza stuffs the lit joint into her mouth, trying to swallow it. Stella's eyes go wide.

Esperanza begins loudly choking on the joint, gasping for air as she stands up in a panic. Stella, closest to Esperanza, leaps up next to her.

Stella begins performing the Heimlich maneuver on Esperanza, to the shock and confusion of the group. Melanie swings the camera around to capture the whole thing.

The soaking butt of the joint flies out of Esperanza's throat, landing several feet away in a grassy spot. A few of the Mexican officials rush to her side to check if she is okay.

MELANIE
 What the hell happened, Stella?

STELLA
 Uh - I was just sitting out back
 with Esperanza here.

Esperanza coughs loudly, sputtering. A small crowd begins forming around them all as bystanders take notice of the group. Among them - Robert - who rushes over to get the scene on camera.

ESPERANZA (IN SPANISH)
 (raspy, high)
 I made a pilgrimage to the Basilica
 de Guadalupe today... I just needed
 something... But I'm okay now.

Esperanza moves to walk away, eyes filling with tears. Stella looks at her and speaks before Esperanza can leave.

STELLA (IN SPANISH)
 Esperanza came here to get some
 help.

(MORE)

STELLA (IN SPANISH) (CONT'D)

She's had a rough time, and no one is giving her a chance. I would hope - no, I would *pray* - that the church steps up and does something to help her.

The dignitaries nod, impressed by Stella.

MEXICAN OFFICIAL (IN SPANISH)

Señorita, what do you need?

ESPERANZA (IN SPANISH)

A decent job? Somewhere to sleep?

MEXICAN OFFICIAL (IN SPANISH)

Done.

MELANIE

That easy, huh?

Esperanza beams at Stella, and wraps her in a tight hug. The group applauds, some awestruck by the whole thing. Stella coasts on the high of it all - and the pot.

Gregory is walking around the spot where Esperanza's dislodged joint landed, looking intently at the ground. He pushes the front of his shoe into the ground, burying the joint roach into the ground.

Robert notes Gregory's movement, marking the spot where he stands in his mind. Sister Alice, just happy to have some good moments on camera, speaks to Melanie.

SISTER ALICE

Did you get all that?

CUT TO:

EXT. BASILICA DE GUADALUPE - LATER

Robert, lingering at the now-empty scene, begins taking shots of the benches and bushes.

He walks over to the spot where Gregory was standing earlier and crouches down, looking closely at the dirt.

Robert records with one hand and begins pushing dirt around with the other. After a few moments of "digging," Robert unearths the joint roach, crumpled, still slightly damp from Esperanza's throat.

INT. BASILICA DE GUADALUPE - SAME TIME

Stella and company sit in the ornate basilica, studying the cloak Juan Diego supposedly wore. The frayed fabric still holds the supposed miracle image of Mary - standing, white, the usual pose she holds in all Mexican depictions of her.

Stella looks around at the architecture, admiring the lights and structure of the building more than the priest explaining its significance.

Her eyes find a window, that shows part of the back sitting area behind the Basilica. Stella spots Robert, who holds the joint butt between his fingers. He appears to be recording himself vlogger-style, speaking animatedly into the camera.

Stella, trying to mask her fear, turns back to the Basilica priest, inching closer to Gregory.

INT. MEXICAN HOTEL - EVENING

Stella and Melanie lay on a large bed in a beautiful villa. It is warm and well-decorated. A door is open, and in the next room Gregory and Sister Alice sit on sofas and read.

Stella is scrolling down Twitter on her phone. She pauses at a post from Investigation: Skeptic.

Stella frowns and plays the video. Robert holds the wet roach between two fingers. As he speaks, there seems to be more footage of Stella and company at the basilica.

ROBERT (FROM PHONE)

This Stella chick - as holy as they're making her out to be - sure seems to enjoy the *Devil's Lettuce*.

STELLA

How does he keep getting those shots from all those angles? He's by himself.

Stella turns off the video and throws her phone onto a nearby chair. Melanie glares at her sister.

STELLA (CONT'D)

What?

MELANIE

You need to be more careful.

STELLA

I'm trying to be...

MELANIE

That was the opposite of what we agreed! You're supposed to lay low!

STELLA

I got the woman a *job*, Mel. Chill out.

MELANIE

Whatever. Now *this* guy is breathing down our necks -

STELLA

He already was.

MELANIE

Well let's not give him more of a trail to follow.

Melanie gestures as if she is smoking a joint. Stella groans.

STELLA

You don't have to worry about that. I'm out now.

A woman - dressed to the nines, all made up, hair done, expensive clothes - bursts into the room, arms full with designer shopping bags and boxes of shoes.

The girls jump up and look at her quizzically.

MELANIE (IN SPANISH)

Excuse me, ma'am - I think you have the wrong room.

The woman sets the boxes and garment bags on the bed and turns to face Stella and Melanie. They gasp - it's Yvette!

STELLA

Mom, you look great!

MELANIE (CONT'D)

Holy shit!

YVETTE

Thank you!

STELLA

I didn't realize you'd be doing so much shopping.

YVETTE

We needed clothes, right? And it's been so long since I've been in Mexico...

Sister Alice enters their room and smiles. Melanie begins taking out beautiful dresses and blouses and bottoms.

YVETTE (CONT'D)

And Stella's going to be on camera -
she needs to look her best.

Yvette shoves a large MAC Cosmetics bag in Stella's arms.

STELLA

Ma, how could we afford all this?

YVETTE

Sister Alice gave me the card and
said to go nuts!

Yvette fishes out a credit card from her purse, and shows it to Melanie and Stella. On the side it simply reads "Vatican."

Yvette begins rifling through some bags, and pulls out a sleek box.

YVETTE (CONT'D)

And *look*.

Stella and Melanie squint at the box - which looks awfully like it contains a vibrator.

MELANIE

Uhh - Ma? What's that?

YVETTE

It's *mace* - more attention, more
crazies.

CUT TO:

INT. ANIMATED MAP SEQUENCE

It's back to the animated map and plane sequence. This time, we fly across the ocean and land in a bed of crosses around Lourdes, France.

CUT TO:

EXT. GROTTA OF MASSABIELLE IN FRANCE - DAY

Establishing shots of the grotto, which is built into large, rocky boulders. A large statue of the Virgin Mary stands in the crook above the grotto, looking down on visitors.

Stella, Melanie, Gregory, Yvette, Sister Alice and the Fathers Mike and Ed have arrived in France.

They stand by the dazzling pool of water now designed for healing - filled with Holy Water. Melanie is filming Stella and Sister Alice on her cell phone tripod.

SISTER ALICE
The Grotto of Massabielle!

The nun gestures around. Hundreds of visitors mill about. As they tell the story, another fantasy sequence plays out like at the Basilica of Juan Diego - this time, Sister Alice is also involved.

EXT. GROTTA OF MASSABIELLE FANTASY SEQUENCE - CONTINUOUS

Stella, as Saint Bernadette, emerges from the brush. The Grotto cavern and stream, from years past, is beautiful, untouched. Stella/Bernadette wears clean peasant clothes from the time period, and appears quite worn out from the walk.

SISTER ALICE
(narrating)
The Grotto of Massabielle is historic for the church. Saint Bernadette - before she was canonized, of course - first saw the Virgin Mary here in 1858.

She approaches the stream and kneels down to wet a cloth with the water, and dabs it on her forehead. As she looks up through the beams of sunlight, across the way, she sees the Bag Lady, now dressed as the Virgin Mary, standing there. She gestures to Stella/Bernadette, who looks confused at how the sequence is turning out.

STELLA
(narrating)
Mary told Bernadette to drink the water from the spring. It is said that the water's healing properties cured her asthma.

Stella/Bernadette drinks from the spring.

SISTER ALICE
(narrating)
Bernadette went back to her village and told her family about what happened. She pledged to return to the grotto every day and pray in thanks.

Stella/Bernadette returns to a small cottage, where Yvette plays Bernadette's mother and Melanie plays Bernadette's sister.

STELLA (NARRATING)
But no one believed her. Word got
around, and she became a
laughingstock.

Yvette/Mother and Melanie/Sister shake their heads in disbelief.

Cut to villagers, played by Fathers Ed and Mike, Robert Vasquez, Gregory and various others, gossiping and laughing as she passes by.

STELLA (CONT'D)
(narrating)
It took the help of one brave
nun...

In the sequence, Sister Alice, as a French nun, steps through the crowd. She takes Stella/Bernadette's arm and they march to the grotto together.

STELLA (CONT'D)
(narrating)
...to get the people rallied behind
her. She did end up going back,
every day. It made quite the
difference, and they eventually
built a shrine for Mary there.

EXT. GROTTA OF MASSABIELLE - BACK TO PRESENT, CONTINUOUS

Back to the real world. Stella pauses to smile at a gaggle of small children who run by, seemingly unaccompanied by parents. The present grotto is very different from the past grotto, with manufactured walkways and informational plaques, swarmed by people and adorned with new statues.

She notices several people sitting by the spring, vigorously drinking the water, dousing their bodies in it, soaking towels with it and dabbing the cool cloth on their sick relatives laying beside them.

SISTER ALICE
The Grotto of Massabielle has
unfortunately seen a decline in
visitors in recent years... Then
Stella came along! Now more of the
ailed have returned and found holy
sanctuary here, as well as healing.

Stella looks guilty at this, and confused.

STELLA
Shouldn't they go to a hospital?

Gregory nods to himself. Sister Alice shoots him a look, but luckily he is off camera.

SISTER ALICE
No harm in a bit of *spiritual* aide -
you should know, Stella.

Stella looks across the glittering springs.

SISTER ALICE (CONT'D)
Perfect spot for a photo!

It couldn't be a worse spot for a photo - there are a few seriously ill people at this area of the spring, all seem to be suffering from some illness or debilitating disability.

STELLA
Ummm...

SISTER ALICE
This is real life, Stella. Not
every miracle is flashy and pretty
and wrapped up nicely in a bow.

STELLA
Okay...

Stella stands awkwardly by the edge of the spring. Sister Alice begins to pose her, and notices a pretty young French girl pushing an elderly man in a wheelchair across the water's edge.

Sister Alice approaches the girl and begins speaking to her in French. As she does, she gestures for Stella to take over with the older man. The French girl nods and smiles at Stella excitedly.

Stella hesitantly takes the handles of the elderly man's wheelchair and continues slowly down their path.

As Melanie takes candid photos of Stella and the older man, more attention is drawn to Stella. The elderly man looks up to her, and they both smile at one another.

OLD MAN (IN FRENCH)
Parles-tu français?

STELLA (IN SPANISH)
No... Hablas español?

OLD MAN

No.

They both shake their heads and laugh.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

English?

STELLA

Works for me!

The pair look out over the grotto.

STELLA (CONT'D)

I'm Stella.

OLD MAN

I know.

Stella is confused for a moment before realizing she must be more well known at this point, particularly in the Catholic community.

STELLA

(guilty)

Oh, yeah.

OLD MAN

My granddaughter Bridgette is a fan of yours. I'm Louis.

Stella smiles at Louis, and at Bridgette.

STELLA

It's a beautiful day.

LOUIS

Yes, it is.

Louis looks back at Bridgette, who is chatting with Yvette and Father Gregory, and smiles.

STELLA

Do you two come here often?

LOUIS

Yes. She is a true believer.

STELLA

What about you?

LOUIS
 I've been here four times now.
 Tried the water, even taken some
 home...

Louis gestures to his legs.

LOUIS (CONT'D)
 It doesn't really do me any good.

He looks back at Bridgette again.

LOUIS (CONT'D)
 But, I do it for her. I'll never
 miss out on a chance to spend time
 with my little angel... who isn't
 so little anymore.
 (pause)
 Is it awful of me to keep her hopes
 up?

STELLA
 (smiling, looking at
 Yvette)
 I don't think so.

Random people start taking photos of Stella as well,
 exclaiming to each other. Among the crowd Stella spots the
 bag lady, who seems to have a glint of something in her eye.

Stella takes a few steps forward toward the crowd - photos be
 damned.

STELLA (CONT'D)
 Sorry, I thought I just saw...

Stella is about to break away from Louis completely to
 confront the bag lady, but the bag lady disappears into the
 crowd.

LOUIS
 What?

STELLA
 Nothing...

Suddenly, Robert bursts forth from the crowd. Carrying a
 camera and recording the whole thing, he makes a few
 determined steps forward, startling Stella.

ROBERT
 Stella! I know the *truth* -

Father Ed and Father Mike step forward, attempting to block Robert, who charges toward Stella anyway.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
It's all bullshit, isn't it?

The crowd watching the scene unfurl begins to grow larger, drawn into the spectacle of Robert, who waves his camera around wildly. Stella takes a few steps back in a rush, not bothering to look behind her.

Melanie still has the camera on Stella. As Stella backs away, she bumps into Louis's wheelchair, which rolls toward the water slightly.

STELLA
I am so sorry, Louis!

Stella grabs the guiding handles behind Louis, pulling him back and away from the water. Fathers Ed and Mike approach Robert, ready to hold him back. Father Ed grabs Robert's arm.

In a fit of frustration, Robert slaps Father Ed, who stumbles back slightly. The crowd gasps.

Robert rushes at Stella. Still holding Louis's wheelchair handles, Stella takes off in the opposite direction, running away from everyone.

STELLA (CONT'D)
Oh! My! GOD! AHHHH!

Louis yells with her. She pushes him along the water's edge until...

...Stella loses her footing and falls, thrusting the handles of the wheelchair forward.

Louis flies out of the wheelchair, smacking hard into a nearby statue of Saint Bernadette, who's arms are outstretched.

A sharp crack. The crowd gasps even louder. Crumpling like a dead mosquito, Louis falls backward into the grotto with a loud splash. An even worse crack is heard as he lands face up on his back in the pool. Louis doesn't move as the water swirls around him, rippling.

Stella stands in shock, half covered in the grotto's water. She yelps, looking down at Louis and breathing heavily. Bridgette screams, clinging onto Father Mike.

Gregory, Sister Alice and Yvette dash to Stella's side. Melanie is shocked. She stops recording.

STELLA (CONT'D)
 (whispering)
 I killed him! Oh my God I killed
 him...

SISTER ALICE
 Don't panic...

Robert continues to point his camera at them, zooming in. Melanie's phone buzzes, and she notices that he is already live streaming the entire event.

She clicks on the stream, which is somehow being cast from two different angles of the scene. Melanie squints and looks a little closer.

MELANIE
 (whispering)
 That other angle...

Melanie looks back up to assess Robert again, in person.

ROBERT (FROM PHONE)
 (narrating)
 As you can clearly see, Stella
 Gonzalez has just committed
 involuntary manslaughter -

Stella begins to cry, kneeling down. Shaking, she pulls Louis up onto her lap, the pair posing like the iconic Pietà statue on display at the Vatican. Sunlight streams behind her, rays beaming like a halo. Robert streams the whole thing.

STELLA
 (murmuring to Louis)
 I'm so, so sorry.

Stella looks up and spots the bag lady again, this time adjacent to the crowd, across the water. Sister Alice and Yvette do the sign of the cross. Gregory kneels next to Stella and places a hand on her shoulder.

SISTER ALICE
 God help us.

Bridgette runs over to the group. Sister Alice looks like she is about to do some damage control when...

...a shuddered breath comes from Louis. He snaps upright like Frankenstein's monster, totally alert. Stella and company gasp, as does the crowd of onlookers, who are all recording now.

Gregory makes a move to pick up Louis, who instead brushes him off.

LOUIS (IN FRENCH)
Hold on, hold on...

Grasping Stella and Gregory's hands, Louis shakily rises to his feet *on his own*. His knees wobble a bit before strengthening, holding him up and allowing the man to stand.

GREGORY
Holy shit...

ROBERT
That's impossible!

Robert quickly shuts his camera off in a rage. As he turns to go, Melanie pushes through the crowd and up to Robert, yanking Fathers Ed and Mike behind her.

MELANIE
This is the guy. He's got a secret
body cam somewhere - I just saw him
using it online!

Without a word, Father Mike begins handling Robert, who unsuccessfully tries to push the priest away. Father Mike grabs Robert's main camera and smashes it on the ground. Father Ed yanks at the eye necklace around Robert's neck and looks closely at it. Silently, he tugs it off of Robert, drops it on the ground next to the main camera and stomps on it, smashing the lens.

ROBERT
Fuck! My Mini-Go-Pro!

Robert scrambles down to scoop up the broken equipment.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
You assholes will pay for that!

FATHER MIKE
Send us the bill.

Fathers Ed and Mike walk away without another word. The crowd has paid no mind this whole time, their gaze still focused on Stella's scene.

Bridgette slowly steps toward her grandfather, clutching her heart. Now that he can stand, she has to look up at his face.

BRIDGETTE (IN FRENCH)
It worked! The water!

LOUIS (IN FRENCH)
Not the water - Stella!

Bridgette looks with teary eyes at Stella and the group.

BRIDGETTE (IN FRENCH)
He has not stood on his own in
three years!

Murmurs from the crowd become louder as the old man takes a few shaky steps forward and reaches out to Bridgette, who takes his hand.

LOUIS (IN FRENCH)
(crying)
It feels so good to walk again.
(to Stella, in English)
Thank you.

Louis and Bridgette embrace, and the crowd begins cheering, rushing forward to mob Stella. Robert is swept up in the chaos, not sure which way to go or how to handle the sudden change in dynamics.

Bridgette lets go of Louis and they both cry out in joy.

BRIDGETTE (IN FRENCH)
It's a miracle!

LOUIS (IN ENGLISH) (CONT'D)
It's a miracle!

CUT TO:

INT. FRENCH NUNNERY BEDROOM - NIGHT

Stella and Melanie sit on adjacent twin beds, set up in a plain, modest room.

MELANIE
WHY?!

STELLA
How was I supposed to know I'd end up fixing his back? I thought I had killed him!

MELANIE
You made the lame walk, Stella.

STELLA
I'm not doing it on purpose!

MELANIE
Everything is going to go to shit.
It always does.
(MORE)

MELANIE (CONT'D)
 Just when things get good...
 Whatever you're doing - or not
 doing - needs to stop.

Stella shakes her head, at a loss for words.

MELANIE (CONT'D)
 And I need to shower.

Melanie exits the room and shuts the wooden door behind her.
 Stella lays back on her bed, sinking into a pillow.

A few moments later, a LETTER is slipped under the doorframe
 on the floor. One sharp knock raps against the door. Stella
 shoots up and whirls toward the door so fast she falls off
 the bed.

She spots the letter and crawls toward it. Picking it up, she
 stands and opens the door. Stella looks down the dimly lit
 hallway on both sides, and sees no one. She opens the letter,
 which reads "I know who you are. I know what you've been
 hiding. Meet me at the prayer garden at midnight." The letter
 is not signed.

Stella leans back into the door and sinks down.

STELLA
 Fuck.

INT. FRENCH NUNNERY BEDROOM - MIDNIGHT

Stella lays face up in her twin bed. Melanie in the next bed
 sleeps soundly.

Stella carefully climbs out of the bed, leans down and pulls
 out the mace Yvette gave her. She sneaks out of the bedroom.

CUT TO:

EXT. FRENCH PRAYER GARDEN - MOMENTS LATER

Stella walks along a large stone wall, covered in vines. She
 presses herself against it as she approaches the gated
 entrance to the prayer garden.

Her heart is racing. She prepares the pepper spray in one
 hand and pauses before the gate. After one moment, she steels
 herself and opens the entrance slowly.

GREGORY
 (whispering)
 Hey Stell-

STELLA

Ahh!

Stella sprays the mace at Gregory, who falls back, hacking and coughing. He tries to stay quiet as he does so. Stella, realizing her mistake, blinks in shock.

STELLA (CONT'D)

(whispering)

Oh my God! Oh my God! I'm sorry - I thought you were that Skeptic guy!

GREGORY

It's okay -

STELLA

Let me help you!

Stella falls forward to Gregory on the ground.

GREGORY

No, don't!

As she does moves toward him, she passes through the residual mace mist and begins coughing herself, then rubbing her eyes.

STELLA

Oh shit!

GREGORY

(laughing)

I told you -

STELLA

We're both blind.

They giggle on the ground together, rolling over on their backs, faces up toward the stars.

GREGORY

I'd say we crawl to the pond, but I don't know if I trust the water.

STELLA

Maybe it's for the best. So, why'd you slip me that cryptic letter?

She glances at him before looking up at the sky again.

GREGORY

(whispering)

I thought it was obvious.

Stella feigns ignorance.

STELLA
 (whispering)
 Nope. All it said was that you know
 what I've been hiding...

GREGORY
 (whispering)
 Oh, yeah.

Gregory begins fishing around in his pocket.

STELLA
 (whispering, about to
 confess)
 Look, it's not what you think...

Gregory sits up a bit, turning toward Stella. He rubs his eyes and props himself up on one elbow. Finally pulls a small baggie filled with weed out of his pocket. Stella breathes a sigh of relief.

GREGORY
 (whispering)
 I like to live dangerously.

EXT. FRENCH PRAYER GARDEN - LATER THAT NIGHT

Stella and Gregory share a joint under the moonlight, blues and whites washing over them as the clouds shift in the night sky.

A few lanterns are lit: hanging from the main platform with an altar, suspended next to various saint statues, by a marbled Virgin Mary, who stands surrounded by pink and red roses that cascade from her open hands.

Stella and Gregory are engulfed by a faded cloud of smoke they've created together. They pass the joint back and forth as they speak, the burning cherry at the end flaring up with every puff.

They look somewhat tired, but relaxed. Everyone else in the convent is asleep - the pair whispers all the same.

STELLA
 I really needed this.

GREGORY
 (trying to stifle a cough)
 It is quite the vice.

STELLA
 One of several.

GREGORY

From where I'm sitting, you don't
have that many.

Stella rolls her eyes.

STELLA

I have too many.

Stella takes a long drag, looking away. She is ashamed, but trying to mask it. She passes the joint to Gregory with two fingers.

STELLA (CONT'D)

But this is one I can live with.

GREGORY

You shouldn't feel guilty about a
little pot.

STELLA

I shouldn't?

She looks at Gregory. Her eyes are red, but he can't tell if it's from the pot or if those are real tears.

GREGORY

Of course not.

Gregory takes the joint.

GREGORY (CONT'D)

Does it give you no comfort to see
a man of the cloth partaking?

Stella snorts, a smile breaking across her face.

STELLA

I'm shocked you were even able to
get this in the first place.

GREGORY

After Mexico, I figured you'd be
interested.

STELLA

And you delivered. How, exactly?

GREGORY

Did you know I would?

Stella is taken aback. Gregory passes the joint back to her. His eyes are focused entirely on hers.

STELLA

I didn't. I was just saying - I didn't think you'd - anything.

Eloquent. Stella takes a hit to recover. Smiles.

GREGORY

But I did.

STELLA

You didn't answer my question.

Gregory takes the joint and hits it, twice, before responding. He looks like a pro. Stella is impressed.

GREGORY

I'm a priest. I've made my connections. Never really felt the need to use them, until...

Pause. He looks at her. Hands her the joint.

STELLA

So I've corrupted you?

GREGORY

I wouldn't say that. You've *motivated* me. How about that?

STELLA

Still makes me responsible.

Stella takes two shaky hits as Gregory talks.

GREGORY

Only partially. I was standing by the cliff. Just waiting for a push.

He takes the joint from Stella, who watches him.

GREGORY (CONT'D)

And I have to admit, it's exhilarating to fall.

STELLA

I can't believe I corrupted a priest.

He laughs. She grins at him, but insists.

STELLA (CONT'D)

That's a pretty major sin.

GREGORY

I have just as much free will as
you do. Give me some credit.

STELLA

Only some.

She takes the joint and a puff. Sighs.

STELLA (CONT'D)

I think I need to confess.

CUT TO:

INT. ARIA CATTOLICA - THE NEXT DAY

Stella boards with Yvette, who holds her arm. Stella looks a
bit tired from the lack of sleep.

YVETTE

Where are we are going next?

STELLA

No clue.

Melanie runs up behind them, a few bags in tow. They all take
their seats on the plane.

MELANIE

Home, I hope.

Father Ed and Father Mike pass by them down the aisles, each
carrying JAPANESE DIALECT BOOKS in their hands.

MELANIE (CONT'D)

But something tells me that's not
the case.

Sister Alice and Gregory are next. Gregory is wearing his
vestments now, but he looks great. As they pass by the women,
he and Stella share a secret smile...

...that isn't so secret. Melanie catches Stella and shoots
her an angry look before rolling her eyes and turning away.

YVETTE

Isn't all of this just lovely?

CUT TO:

INT. ANIMATED MAP SEQUENCE

Back to the animated map and plane. The Aria Cattolica flies across the globe and lands in a bed of crosses in Nagasaki, Japan.

CUT TO:

EXT. URAKAMI CATHEDRAL IN JAPAN - EVENING

Stella and company stand outside a grand cathedral in Japan - known as the Urakami Cathedral or Immaculate Conception Cathedral. It is ornate and gorgeous, and very quiet.

Robert sneaks behind the corner, following the group, avoiding being seen.

STELLA

I'm not as versed in Japanese
Catholicism...

SISTER ALICE

Believe it or not, it's not much
different from European
Catholicism.

Sister Alice gestures for the group to go inside, which opens up to...

INT. URAKAMI CATHEDRAL - CONTINUOUS

...a grand church with tall ceilings. Off to one side is the entrance to a small museum.

A thin Japanese priest stands in the entryway. He bows as Stella enters, and she responds in kind.

SISTER ALICE

Stella, this is Father Kenji Aota.

STELLA

Hello, father.

FATHER KENJI

Welcome to Nagasaki. Shall we?

MONTAGE SEQUENCE - URAKAMI CATHEDRAL GROUNDS - CONTINUOUS

Father Kenji leading Stella and the rest around the main church. It is beautiful, and they clearly treat the place with love and care.

Father Kenji introducing them to altar servers, a deacon, other members of the Urakami church. Father Kenji leading them all to large wooden doors and pushing them open...

EXT. BACK OF URAKAMI CATHEDRAL - CONTINUOUS

...to a stunning garden. Tall, worn statues of saints stand. old. Some are missing limbs, one even stands without a head. All are speckled, the stone strange in color.

Stella tilts her head to one side, curious at their appearance. Yvette asks the question she wouldn't dare to, out of fear of offending the priest.

YVETTE

What happened to these statues?

MELANIE

Ma -

FATHER KENJI

It's alright.

Father Kenji looks sadly at the statues. Robert, listening in from outside the garden, takes a few notes.

FATHER KENJI (CONT'D)

The Urakami Cathedral has been entirely reconstructed. It sits only 500 meters from where an atomic bomb landed in 1945.

Stella and Melanie blink at him.

STELLA

That's horrifying...

They all seem at a loss for words.

FATHER KENJI

Come.

Father Kenji leads them across the street, to...

EXT. PEACE PARK - CONTINUOUS

...the front of a park. Beautiful, crumbling ruins stand tall, in front of trees that grow steadily thicker.

Stunning photographs of the destroyed cathedral, and masses of people gathering to mourn, are displayed by the ruins of old church walls.

As Father Kenji tells the story, another fantasy sequence plays out in Stella's mind that we see - this one more somber and slow, not comical in the slightest.

FATHER KENJI (NARRATING)
It was August 9, 1945. Preparations were underway for the Feast of the Assumption of Mary, so there were dozens of parishioners here for confession before mass.

This time, another fantasy sequence plays out - only this one isn't just a myth. It's history.

EXT. URAKAMI CATHEDRAL HISTORICAL FANTASY - CONTINUOUS

Exterior look of the Urakami Church in Japan back in 1945. Japanese Catholics mill about in the gardens outside, and two priests enter the building.

FATHER KENJI (NARRATING)
Chief priest Father Saburo Nishida, and assistant priest Father Fusayoshi Tamaya, were in the hall with them.

In the distance, an atomic bomber plane sails toward the church silently, ominously. We cut to the interior of the plane, where Stella and Gregory man the cockpit.

Stella in particular looks forlorn, questioning what they are doing but moving forward anyway. It's a manifestation of her own guilt over the lie she has continued to build in the present.

FATHER KENJI (NARRATING) (CONT'D)
Just after 11 in the morning, the bomb dropped - and -

Father Kenji stops. But they all know what happens next.

Stella/Bomber Pilot presses *the* button. A bomb falls toward the hilly landscape, and as they fly away light beams through the small windows. Stella looks back, the explosion lighting up her eyes.

FATHER KENJI (NARRATING) (CONT'D)
The blast destroyed nearly everything, and the roof came down, burying everyone. Many lives were lost. Most of the Christians in the area came together to rebuild it.
(MORE)

FATHER KENJI (NARRATING) (CONT'D)
Several statues were salvageable,
except for one of the Virgin Mary.

EXT. PEACE PARK - BACK TO PRESENT, CONTINUOUS

Back in the real world. Everyone's faces are crestfallen. Stella has silent tears streaming down her face as Father Kenji speaks.

FATHER KENJI
City government wanted to preserve
the area as a heritage site, and
offered the congregation a new
location to rebuild... But they
wanted to keep it here as a symbol
of their persecution and suffering.
So it is.

Stella, Yvette and Melanie hold each other as the priest continues.

Father Kenji walks the group back across the street, to the front of the Urakami Cathedral. Robert peeks at them from behind some tall trees, also appearing to be saddened by the history Father Kenji told.

EXT. URAKAMI CATHEDRAL - CONTINUOUS

The group stands outside as the sun sets, bathing gorgeous light over the scene.

FATHER KENJI
In the 1800's a French priest came
to the village of Urakami and found
most of the people were persecuted
Christians, who were banned from
practicing Catholicism. After the
ban was lifted, he helped them
build the church. At the time, it
was the largest Christian structure
in the region.

STELLA
I don't know what to say. What a
testament to their resilience. And
to your efforts.

FATHER KENJI
We're glad you can visit. This
church doesn't get much traffic.

YVETTE

That's a shame.

SISTER ALICE

You know, with Stella maybe we can shoot a video - I bet the Japanese Catholic population would be thrilled to see a tour that we could publicize globally...

Stella breaks away from the group, and goes to look at the dilapidated statues from the original cathedral a few feet away. Gregory follows her.

Robert, still spying, follows them, pulling out his phone. He still wears the eye necklace, but it's still clearly broken.

Stella and Gregory stand next to each other, close but not touching. Stella is clearly emotional as they look at the statues that stand over them.

STELLA

I shouldn't be here.

GREGORY

What do you mean?

STELLA

Why haven't I heard of this cathedral before? It's tragic - it's beautiful... The church should be promoting Urakami *without* me.

Their hands are close to touching. Without thinking, they reach for each other.

Robert covertly records the whole thing.

GREGORY

I don't know why you don't think you can help.

STELLA

I don't *deserve* to. My opinion doesn't have any more worth than anyone else's.

GREGORY

Not true.

Their fingers brush. Stella turns away from the statues and looks up at Gregory, when she spots the bag lady turning a corner on the street behind him.

Stella steps away from Gregory. He looks crestfallen for a moment, then genuinely upset at his own impropriety.

GREGORY (CONT'D)

I'm sorry -

STELLA

No - Gregory - it's not - it's -

Stella takes off after the bag lady, determined to talk to this woman.

STELLA (CONT'D)

(calling out to Gregory)

I'll explain later!

GREGORY

Stella!

EXT. JAPANESE ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Stella rounds the corner the bag lady did and enters a dark alley. It's eerily silent.

There, crouched in a corner, is a Uyghur Chinese family huddled together. The bag lady is nowhere in sight. Stella looks at them curiously. They are dirty, almost gaunt, and have a desperate look in their eyes. The youngest, a small girl, runs up to Stella and tugs on her shirt.

None of them say anything. Stella looks at the mother of the family, a woman with big eyes, head covered in a hijab. They look up at Stella, when the sound of running footsteps approaches from behind Stella.

Gregory has found them.

GREGORY

Stella!

As he turns the corner into the alley, the little girl sees him and shrinks away from Stella, then darts down the alley in the opposite direction.

UYGHUR MOTHER

Patime!

GREGORY

What's going on?

UYGHUR MOTHER (IN MANDARIN)

(to Stella)

Patime - my daughter - she's all we
have left. Please, you have to
help!

Stella seems to understand the woman despite not knowing a
lick of Mandarin.

Stella can't help herself - she turns to run after the little
girl just as...

...Robert bursts onto the scene.

GREGORY

(to Robert)

You managed to follow us all the
way to *Japan*? Does lying on the
internet pay that much?

ROBERT

Hell yeah.

Not caring that Robert's been following them, Stella yells
over her shoulder.

STELLA

Keep them safe - and find Father
Kenji!

Stella runs out of the other side of the alley to see the
little Uyghur girl dashing into the trees surrounding an
adjacent park. Stella chases her.

STELLA (CONT'D)

(calling out)

Patime! Wait!

EXT. PARK FOREST - CONTINUOUS

Stella follows the girl into the trees. As they make their
way through the thick and brush, cut up by branches and
twigs, they both get more and more desperate, out of breath
and teary.

EXT. BUSY JAPANESE STREET - CONTINUOUS

Patime bursts out of the other side of the forest park and
onto the street sidewalk. Not looking back, delirious from
hunger and exhaustion, she throws herself onto the street,
where traffic is flowing fairly quickly.

Stella exits the forest after her, then stops at the edge of the roadway.

STELLA

Patime!

The little Uyghur girl whirls around, finally out of breath. Her chest is heaving, and she trips over herself. She crumbles in the middle of the road. She sobs.

Stella looks past Patime for a moment and notices the bag lady again, who looks sadly at Patime on the street. As if on cue, a car comes honking down the roadway. Patime's head whips up at the car, frozen in fear.

At the same time, the Uyghur parents, Gregory, Robert, Father Kenji, Sister Alice, Yvette, Melanie, Father Ed and Father Mike enter the scene, rushing toward Stella down the sidewalk. Stella doesn't even notice them.

Stella drops her gaze away from the bag lady and runs onto the road, even more car horns blaring around her. Patime's head turns to the headlights when -

- BAM. Stella throws herself in front of Patime, scooping her up and rolling across the roadway just in time for the car to miss them entirely. The pair roll until they reach the opposite sidewalk.

Stella lifts up Patime and brushes some sweaty hair from her face. Crying and shaking, they cling to each other.

STELLA (CONT'D)

It's okay.

Stella starts to laugh, adrenaline pumping through her.

STELLA (CONT'D)

You're fast, kid. Ever think about running track?

Patime gives Stella a small smile. The pair sit there and catch their breath.

The entire camp finally catches up to them. They sigh in relief, and the Chinese Uyghur parents reach out to Patime, who holds them tightly.

Sister Alice smiles at Stella, then turns to see Robert. She jumps.

SISTER ALICE

See? It's a *miracle*.

STELLA
No. No it's not.

Sister Alice looks shocked at this dismissal. Stella stands.

STELLA (CONT'D)
Look at them.

She gestures at the Uyghur family.

STELLA (CONT'D)
It's not a miracle that this little girl almost got hit by a car. She shouldn't have had to run into the street in the first place.

Robert pulls out his camera and begins filming. Stella - ignoring him, looks at the Uyghur family, and turns to see Father Kenji frowning sadly.

FATHER KENJI
Uyghur Muslims. Fleeing China. It's pretty common in Japan, but they don't often get asylum. They may be homeless.

ROBERT
(sarcastic)
Maybe the church can help.

GREGORY
They're refugees. It's one of the Church's main missions.

Stella looks down at Patime. Robert turns the camera toward Stella.

STELLA
(to Father Kenji)
Can you give them someplace safe and warm to sleep until they can work out their status here?

FATHER KENJI
Of course.

Sister Alice steps forward. Father Mike and Father Ed watch on from behind her. She looks uncomfortably at the Uyghur Muslims, particularly the mother's hijab.

SISTER ALICE
Stella - you already saved young Patima here.

STELLA

Patime.

SISTER ALICE

This is *Japan*, Stella. This is not -

Stella turns to Father Kenji, who seems confused at Sister Alice's dismissal.

STELLA

They're protecting their family and their faith, by whatever means necessary. Catholic Japanese people have done the same for decades. What can we do?

FATHER KENJI

We can give them shelter. I'll testify on their behalf, but to be honest, it's incredibly difficult to get asylum in Japan on a good day.

Stella turns to Robert, who has been recording the entire exchange. She thinks for a moment.

STELLA

I cannot believe I'm saying this - but we need your help.

Robert looks at Patime and her parents.

CUT TO:

INT. URAKAMI CATHEDRAL - ONE HOUR LATER

The Uyghur family is sitting in the pews of the church, holding each other close. Stella sits across from them. Robert and Gregory are setting up a few old-looking lights around them, along with Robert's official camera.

Fathers Mike and Ed stand off to the side with Father Kenji, talking. Yvette, Sister Alice and Melanie stand in the corner, looking somewhat nervously at the situation unfolding.

Stella locks eyes with Sister Alice, who gestures to her. Stella stands and joins Sister Alice at the far corner of the church, away from everyone.

SISTER ALICE

You shouldn't be doing this. The church is putting a lot behind this project - behind you - and you don't want to rock the boat here. Or anywhere, for that matter.

STELLA

I've rocked the boat *everywhere*. Since day one. Isn't that why you picked me?

SISTER ALICE

Well, yes, but no.

STELLA

You've given me a voice. God has given me a voice. I intend to use it. They're just going to testify.

Stella turns away. Sister Alice reaches out and grabs her arm gently.

SISTER ALICE

I can't promise anything moving forward. In terms of our travels.

STELLA

You're going to leave my family stranded in Japan because I'm trying to help... a family in need? Very Catholic of you.

Stella turns for a moment, then turns back to Sister Alice.

STELLA (CONT'D)

Don't worry about it. We'll figure it out.

Stella strides away. She's upset, but determined to see this through. Gregory and Robert are putting the finishing touches on the shot.

Robert nods and looks back and forth between Stella and Gregory, who are avoiding eye contact with each other.

ROBERT

I'll - go check the light again -

He awkwardly shuffles away.

STELLA

(to Gregory)

Thank you.

GREGORY

For what?

STELLA

For all this. For helping me. I know Sister Alice doesn't approve...

Gregory tugs at his clerical collar as he speaks.

GREGORY

I'm happy to help. This is one part of my vocation I actually agree with -

He catches himself. He's said too much. Stella heard it.

Gregory stumbles away, flustered. Stella watches him go. She turns away for a moment to see Sister Alice walking out of the cathedral, followed closely by Fathers Ed and Mike.

Yvette and Melanie to stand there, confused and concerned.

Stella starts to get even more nervous. She looks back at the Uyghur family. Patime gives Stella a beautiful half-smile.

She stands up a bit straighter and walks to Patime and her parents.

CUT TO:

INT. URAKAMI CATHEDRAL - TWO HOURS LATER

Father Kenji helps Patime's mother stand from the pews, and leads the family toward the back of the chapel.

Stella and Gregory stand with them.

FATHER KENJI

(to Stella)

We have some room for them here for the night. I can find them a better shelter we oversee tomorrow.

STELLA

Thank you for all of your kindness and help. It's a warm reminder of what the church is supposed to stand for.

They bow to each other. As Father Kenji turns to the family, Patime lets go of her mother's hand and runs back to Stella. Stella kneels down and embraces the little girl.

Stella brushes hair out of Patime's face. The little girl grins before returning to her parents.

As Stella stands, she turns to see Robert snapping his camera off in a huff. He bends over and starts furiously looking through his equipment and bags. Stella makes her way over to him, Gregory not far behind.

STELLA (CONT'D)
Everything okay?

ROBERT
The drive... Missing... Gone.

GREGORY
What are you talking about?

ROBERT
The interview. Their testimony.
Gone.

STELLA
(whirling around)
It has to be around here
somewhere...

Stella crouches over and starts rifling through Robert's things as well.

ROBERT
I knew this was too good to be
true.
(to Stella)
Why'd I expect something *honest*
from a liar like you?

STELLA
I didn't lose the drive -

ROBERT
Well *I* didn't lose it either, you
charlatan!

GREGORY
You'd do well not to ignore all of
Stella's miracles.

Robert looks at the pair.

ROBERT
You two are a lovely couple. Bit
twisted, and wrong considering your
vows and all, but hey, that's the
one thing I like about you.

Robert turns away. Stella stares, incredulous.

STELLA
Back up. What changed?

ROBERT
The sister. I knew she couldn't be trusted.

GREGORY
Sister Alice is -

ROBERT
A dirty thief. She took it.

STELLA
What?

ROBERT
The drive. It had everything. I can't find it, and I *know* I put it back in my bag. She must have taken it when I was in the car or something.

GREGORY
She wouldn't.

STELLA
She might've.

ROBERT
This is on you, Stella. You align yourself with her, and you continue to defend her. In the court of public opinion, and my own, that's just as bad.

With that, Robert exits the cathedral. As he opens the doors, Melanie enters through them. Stella is in shock, clearly distressed.

Spotting Stella, Melanie bustles toward her, clearly annoyed. Melanie looks back and forth between Stella and Father Gregory. She crosses her arms.

MELANIE
We need to talk.

STELLA
No shit.

The sister stomp toward the doors and push their way...

EXT. URAKAMI CATHEDRAL - CONTINUOUS

...outside. It's dark, but the neon lights from the nightlife in the city glow brightly in the distance.

Melanie tries to slam the door shut behind her, but it's so large and heavy it doesn't make much of a sound.

MELANIE

(loud)

What the actual *fuck*, Stella?!

STELLA

Did Sister Alice say something?

MELANIE

She disappeared!

STELLA

She has the tape -

MELANIE

We also couldn't find Tweedle Priest and Tweedle Deacon - what if they left us here?

STELLA

I thought she was bluffing.

MELANIE

Are you kidding? You got all wrapped up in this *bullshit* miracle work that isn't even real and let it get to your head. You actually think you're God's chosen human.

STELLA

That's the dumbest shit you've said this whole trip - which was *your* idea, by the way! We wouldn't be here if it wasn't for you!

MELANIE

I didn't think you were going to do all this! You're in way too deep now, *miracle worker*! And on top of that you're still pushing things with Father Gregory. Stella. He's a priest. By Catholic standards, a married man. He will *never* leave the church for you.

Stella is hurt, and defensive.

STELLA

I wouldn't ask him to.

MELANIE

But you thought about the question.
And while you're feeding that sick
fantasy in your head, you've
completely abandoned me and Ma.

STELLA

You're the one who abandoned *us* in
the first place!

MELANIE

Don't give me your sanctimonious
bullshit. "Oh, poor me, I'm so
traumatized I can't even take my
own mother to visit *our father* in
his own *grave*." You don't think
that might have helped her at all?
You encouraged her to lock herself
up, then you neglected her!

STELLA

Neglected her?! I've been with Ma
this whole year, Mel. You're the
one who disappeared and left me to
deal with all the bullshit. I'm the
one who has been in that house with
her alone - feeding her, washing
her clothes, brushing her hair when
she can't even get out of bed,
getting her fucking votive candles
and bibles and incense doused with
Holy Water - whatever *she* wants.
Whatever *she* needs. Alone. You'd
think, being in your mother's
company this whole time, we'd get
closer, I'd still have some
semblance of human interaction. But
when I say I've been with the
woman, *even then* I'm still
completely and utterly ALONE!

Stella and Melanie are both crying at this point.

STELLA (CONT'D)

I don't want to be ALONE anymore!
Can't you understand that?

MELANIE

You're not... You've never been...

Stella looks around. Sees a taxi approaching. Flags it down.

STELLA
What's one more night?

MELANIE
We're not done.

STELLA
I am.

Stella moves to the taxi. Melanie stands there, defeated.
More tears.

MELANIE
Stella -

STELLA
Get away from me.

Melanie takes a deep, shuddered breath. She turns on one heel and runs down the street, flagging down another approaching taxi cab and climbing in.

Stella opens her own taxi back door. As Melanie's taxi drives away, Gregory exits the cathedral. He sees Stella's state and trips over himself getting over to her, clearly concerned.

GREGORY
What can I do?

Stella looks at him. Contemplates a million things. Decides she is tired of stopping herself.

STELLA
Come with me.

Gregory hesitates for a moment.

STELLA (CONT'D)
Great. You hate me now too.

GREGORY
No - no. I want to. Believe me. I
do. I just...

He stops. Clearly grappling with a lot. Stella wipes the tears away from her face with the back of her hand and looks up at him.

Gregory is frozen by those eyes. He knows what getting into that cab means... the issue is not the idea of what might happen, it's that whatever it is, he wants it to.

Stella sits in the cab and slides deeper in, disappearing from the frame. After one more pregnant pause...

...Father Gregory slides in after her.

CUT TO:

INT. JAPANESE KARAOKE BAR - LATER

Stella and Gregory, alone in a small room lit with neon. A lot of empty drink glasses sit on the small table in the corner.

They both belt out their favorite songs - off-key, giddy. They eventually choose a duet and sing together, getting closer and closer as they do. The music is louder.

The music swells over the scene. At one point in a particularly bass-heavy song, Stella and Gregory trip over themselves and fall onto a sofa, very close, almost nose to nose, clinging to one another.

The pair don't move. They have an urgent, suddenly tense conversation. Because the music is so loud, we have no idea what they talk about. It's a quiet, intimate moment. The calm before the storm.

CUT TO:

INT. ARIA CATTOLICA - THE NEXT MORNING

Sister Alice, flanked by Fathers Ed and Mike and Ed once again, form an intimidating triangle in the back seats of the plane. They pointedly focus on their mobile devices, phones, iPads. They don't speak to Yvette or Melanie, who fidget nervously in their middle seats.

Stella enters the plane, not wearing any makeup, eyes shaded by large sunglasses. She carries a large carry-on bag and shuffles to a seat.

A few moments later Father Gregory enters, full black vestments and clerical collar on, a large coffee in his hand. He sits across from Stella. Everyone clicks on their seatbelts.

It's an eerily silent take-off. The "Fasten Your Seatbelt" lights click off. As if on cue, Sister Alice stands, Fathers Ed and Mike forming an arrow behind her, and the trio strut down the center aisle of the plane.

Sister Alice takes an open seat next to Stella.

SISTER ALICE
(softly)
The testimony will not be shared.

Stella sits up, her heart in her throat. Father Gregory watches in shock.

SISTER ALICE (CONT'D)
This is not getting out.

STELLA
It was you!

SISTER ALICE
Be grateful we're in the air together, Stella.

STELLA
This isn't like you, Sister.

SISTER ALICE
It's been decided.

CUT TO:

INT. ANIMATED MAP SEQUENCE

We return to the animated map and Aria Cattolica plane. It flies across the globe again, now landing on a bed of golden crosses in Rome, Italy.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROME AIRPORT RUNWAY - DAY

Stella, Yvette and Melanie step out of the Aria Cattolica all dressed up. They are instantly swarmed by paparazzi - it's their *La Dolce Vita* black and white entrance moment.

Father Gregory, Sister Alice and the Fathers Ed and Mike follow behind.

EXT. MONTAGE SEQUENCE - ROME LANDMARKS - CONTINUOUS

More Italian romance and religion everywhere.

Laughing, beautiful people. Glistening gelato and perfect pizza. A different flavor in the air.

Stella catches up with her mother and sister, and all three look on over the entrance to the Vatican. Sister Alice glides in and gestures to Fathers Ed and Mike behind her.

EXT. VATICAN CITY - DAY

Even all dressed up, it's clear the group's groove is off-whack. They're masking their total uncertainty when it comes to the task at hand.

An official greets Stella and the gang, handing out passes on lanyards to Stella, Melanie, and Yvette. They look down at them to read "Clearance Level 1."

Tourists, Italians, priests and nuns filter around the group, some stopping in interest, most paying no mind. Resolved to move forward, they close ranks and weave through the crowds, toward the heart of the Vatican.

INT. VATICAN CITY - CONTINUOUS

Stella lingers back with Yvette by her side.

STELLA

I'm not the girl for this.

YVETTE

You are so obviously her.

STELLA

Do you think he'll be as nice as he seems on TV?

YVETTE

We'll see.

CUT TO:

INT. VATICAN CITY GUEST CHAMBERS - LATER

Stella has a room to herself, here. It's ornately decorated, beautiful, somehow delicate and strict all at once. She chews on her nail anxiously as she paces. This is a whole other level she never expected, and this time, she is alone...

...Or so she thinks. A note, very much like the one Gregory slipped under her door in France, slides on the floor from her closed door. It stops directly in front of her. She crouches down. It's Gregory's handwriting. Stella smiles.

INT. PAUL VI AUDIENCE HALL - RESURRECTION STATUE - NIGHT

Stella stands facing the scary statue, which looms over her. She breathes deeply, wrapping her arms around herself.

STELLA
He couldn't have picked a more
horrifying place to meet. Is this
The Devil's Advocate?

Footsteps echo behind her. Stella stays looking at the massive art piece, trying to play aloof and cool.

Silence. Stella turns around and comes face to face with Sister Alice.

Stella blinks at the nun, and chuckles nervously. Her mouth hangs open dumbly.

STELLA (CONT'D)
Sister...

SISTER ALICE
What are you doing here, Stella?

Stella sighs. Maybe Sister Alice doesn't know.

STELLA
I'm just looking around. I can't
sleep.

Not a total lie.

STELLA (CONT'D)
Being here... It's all so
overwhelming. I feel like it's
impossible to breathe.

SISTER ALICE
Why is that?

STELLA
I don't know.

SISTER ALICE
Don't you?

STELLA
It's the guilt. I'm a horrible
person. I can't deal with all the
shit I've done to get here. I'm not
a miracle.

Stella keeps talking, rambling, unable to stop her thoughts from slipping out. She's tired of hiding.

SISTER ALICE

Stella...

STELLA

I know I fucked up, and there's no way I can just get away with it - but I never thought I'd end up all the way in Rome...

SISTER ALICE

Stella.

Stella snaps out of it. She looks at Sister Alice, who cannot meet Stella's eyes. She is nervous herself, sad, almost fearful.

SISTER ALICE (CONT'D)

Stella.

Sister Alice looks like she wants to say more, but all she says is...

SISTER ALICE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

STELLA

What?

Before she can say anything else, Fathers Ed and Mike step out from the shadows. They hover by Sister Alice and loom over her.

Sister Alice shrinks down, frightened. Stella can't help it, and her mouth hangs open.

STELLA (CONT'D)

Uhh... I'm confused.

SISTER ALICE

We've known about what happened at St. Joseph's... What *really* happened... the whole time.

STELLA

You *three* have known this *whole time*? Why let me do this?

FATHER MIKE

Generally, you've been doing more good than bad.

Father Ed snaps at Stella in Italian.

FATHER ED (IN ITALIAN)
And it mostly has *looked* good for
us. The Church. That's the point.

FATHER MIKE
With some gentle coaxing you've
been coming out of this whole trip
more and more popular. The church
is more popular. You've humanized
it.

FATHER ED (IN ITALIAN)
And then, even after all God has
given you... You're still greedy.

FATHER MIKE
Ungrateful.

STELLA
(to Sister Alice)
After everything you've done for
me... For my family... I'm more
than grateful, please believe that.

SISTER ALICE
I'm sorry, Stella. I can't help
you.

STELLA
What do you mean? You're the
Vatican. You're in charge...

SISTER ALICE
Officially, I don't work for the
Vatican itself. I've *never* been in
charge.

CUT TO:

INT. - FLASHBACK MONTAGE - SCENES FROM A NEW ANGLE

Stella recalls the moments she thought indicated Sister Alice
was in charge:

Immediately after Stella climbed out of the limo before
leaving home, before Sister Alice followed after her. As
Stella exits, Fathers Ed and Mike look at Sister Alice
pointedly.

Yvette returning the Vatican credit card in Mexico. When Sister Alice leaves their hotel room, she hands the card to Father Ed.

Fathers Ed and Mike pointing out Bridgette and Louis in Lourdes to Sister Alice.

Fathers Ed and Mike stealing the video card/storage from Robert's equipment after the Nagasaki family interview.

INT. PAUL VI AUDIENCE HALL - RESURRECTION STATUE - PRESENT

Stella stares incredulously at Sister Alice and the two priests.

STELLA

You've been there. This whole time.

FATHER ED (IN ITALIAN)

We tend to operate better that way.
The point is, there is no room for
error any more.

STELLA

What?

FATHER MIKE

You're going to finish up this
trip, meet the pope, take a few
pictures and we are sending you all
home.

STELLA

That's all I want. To go home.

FATHER MIKE

You are to tell no one of what you
did. Or did not do.

STELLA

And what if I do? I'll be talking
to the Pope myself, you know. I may
feel called to confess.

FATHER MIKE

You can't even confess to your own
mother, let alone His Holiness.

STELLA

What good is any of this if I made
it all up? How can you consider it
divine?

Stella looks pointedly at Sister Alice.

STELLA (CONT'D)
I don't think God would ask me to
do this.

Fathers Ed and Mike step ever closer to Stella, blocking out Sister Alice from view. They are intimidating, scary, furious.

FATHER ED (IN ITALIAN) FATHER MIKE
He's not asking. He's not asking.

Stella can't help it. She shrinks back. The priests see her hesitate, and turn to Sister Alice.

FATHER ED (IN ITALIAN) (CONT'D)
You've been a big help, Sister.

FATHER MIKE
Here.

Father Mike hands Sister Alice an envelope. She opens it with shaky hands. Inside is a thick, folded up contract. She looks up at the priests with wide eyes.

SISTER ALICE
Is this...?

FATHER MIKE
A contract. To work here, for us.

FATHER ED (IN ITALIAN)
It's signed by His Holiness.

FATHER MIKE
Congratulations.

Sister Alice stands awkwardly, proud and guilty all at once. Stella looks at her, heartbroken, betrayed.

CUT TO:

INT. VATICAN CITY HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Stella runs past several marble statues, each more tragic than the last. Her breathing is short and sharp. Her eyes struggle to focus, her mind is racing too much.

She stumbles across a statue of Mary, perfect and pure and wonderful, everything Stella is not. She kneels over, catching her breath. Looks back up at Mary.

STELLA
 (crying)
 I don't know what to do.

Stella looks up at the statue and shudders. Out of the corner of her eye, she thinks she sees movement. Stella whips around to see a figure duck around the corner.

She stands up and chases after the figure. When Stella rounds the corner, she sees a flash of the Bag Lady zipping down an adjoining hallway. Without thinking, she follows her, shadows and flickering candlelight interchanging across her face.

Stella finally makes it to where the Bag Lady stood, and spins around, frantically looking around.

Suddenly, Stella sees a doorway in front of her. Recognizes it. Stella can see the light is on dimly. Now she understands. Takes a deep breath.

Who's room is it? Gregory? Yvette? Stella knocks tentatively, softly. She waits half a second before turning to dash away, when the door swings open.

It's Melanie. She wears comfortable pajamas, but still looks exhausted. Melanie notices Stella looks almost exactly the same, except her makeup is streaked with tears. The sisters stare at each other silently for a moment, before...

MELANIE
 Can't sleep?

STELLA
 (sniffling)
 No.

MELANIE
 Me neither.

Melanie moves to the side, an invitation for Stella to join her. Stella steps in. All is forgiven here.

CUT TO:

INT. MELANIE'S VATICAN ROOM - LATER

Stella and Melanie sit cross-legged across from each other on Melanie's bed. Stella is biting her nails.

MELANIE
 You've got to confess.

STELLA

These guys seemed like they were getting orders from the Pope himself. How can I go against his word? It's the closest to divine we've got.

MELANIE

I don't believe that, and neither do you.

STELLA

But *Mom* does.

MELANIE

No, Stella - You've always been hell-bent on pleasing Mom, but this is beyond that. She deserves the truth, no matter how ugly.

STELLA

I can't do this to her.

MELANIE

Stella... I'm sorry.

Stella looks at her sister.

MELANIE (CONT'D)

I put too much pressure on keeping her calm for this one. This whole time, this last year... I left you there to take care of everything. I abandoned the family. And I made you think all Mom's sanity was dependent on you. That's not fair, or right of me. But I thought about it, and I think she'll be okay this time.

Stella nods, but is still clearly unsure.

STELLA

I'm sorry too. I should have been more vocal about what's been happening.

MELANIE

I still can't believe those fuckers took the tapes.

STELLA

You hated I made that video.

MELANIE

I thought they were going to strand us there. But I do agree with what you were trying to do.

STELLA

Well, it's all for nothing, now.

MELANIE

Just know, whatever you choose to do, I'll be on your side.

STELLA

I love you.

MELANIE

Love you too.

CUT TO:

INT. VATICAN CITY HALLWAY - THE NEXT DAY

Stella nervously shuffles, alone in the hallway. She scratches her arm, eyes darting around, alert. She jumps when she hears footsteps coming from the hallway.

She braces herself for Fathers Ed and Mike, and closes her eyes. When they open, she is face to face with Gregory, who looks tired. He wears his collar, and black vestments.

Stella is surprised to see him.

GREGORY

I have to... confess something.

STELLA

What?

GREGORY

Me being here this whole time, us meeting in the first place - it's not by coincidence. I volunteered.

STELLA

Do priests have a quota for acts of charity, to keep their clergy card?

GREGORY

In those first pictures that came out of you in front of your church that day... You looked like a true miracle to me. But you also - "You seemed just a little sad.

(MORE)

GREGORY (CONT'D)

I used to always wonder what you
were thinking in that moment."

Stella looks up at Gregory, a grin spreading out over her face. In this moment, she can forget the real issue.

GREGORY (CONT'D)

"I memorized every line, every
curve..."

STELLA

You quote *Terminator* at me and
think I won't notice?!

GREGORY

I'm putting my *soul* on display here
just for you!

STELLA

I'd hardly call this life a post-
apocalyptic sci-fi thriller. But I
appreciate the sentiment. We could
all use a little more cliché.

She playfully pushes Gregory, who catches her hand with cool confidence - as if it was natural and necessary for them to touch. Then, Stella thinks back. Remembers what Fathers Ed and Mike said.

Stella pulls away, suddenly cold. Her heart sinks, and she awkwardly shuffles back.

STELLA (CONT'D)

I haven't been very honest this
whole time.

GREGORY

Neither have I.

Stella is about to bare her soul, let it all out, when Sister Alice rounds the corner. Spotting Stella and Gregory, she falters. She looks sorry to have interrupted.

SISTER ALICE

Stella. His Holiness will see you
now.

Before Stella can respond, Sister Alice pulls her away from Gregory. The pair bustle away and turn down...

INT. VATICAN CITY HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

...a vast, ornate hallway. It is gilded in gold and red velvet, almost glowing. Stella blinks in surprise, being yanked along by Sister Alice as they speak.

STELLA

I thought I was going to meet him
with all the press around.

SISTER ALICE

He said he prayed on it this
morning, and he felt it best you
two met privately first.

STELLA

What does that mean?

SISTER ALICE

I don't know.

(pause)

Stella - I didn't - What Father Ed
and Father Mike were - I didn't get
into this world for that.

STELLA

Sure seems like it.

Stella and Sister Alice have reached a massive wooden door,
clearly carved from some ancient wood.

Two Swiss Guards stand there, silent, poised. They are
dressed just as ornately as the hallway decor - brightly
colored, with sloping black berets.

Stella blinks awkwardly at them, and takes a deep breath
before twirling back to Sister Alice.

STELLA (CONT'D)

I can't do this.

SISTER ALICE

You will.

With that, the Swiss Guards open the door. Stella steels
herself and stands up a bit straighter. She steps forward...

INT. POPE'S CHAMBER - VATICAN CITY - CONTINUOUS

...into a room lit beautifully with natural lighting,
streaming in from the windows. Despite the lavish hallway and
Vatican in general, this room is plain, bare-bones. This Pope
is a Jesuit.

The walls are white, and there are a couple of simple, delicate paintings hanging. A wooden cross is also featured.

The Pope sits on a chair by one of the windows, looking outside at a bird chirping in the sun. A glass of water sits on a small table at his side. There is an empty seat next to him.

When the door closes behind Stella, the Pope turns to face her. A calm, almost serene smile spreads across his face.

POPE (IN SPANISH)
Stella. Please, come sit.

Stella shuffles over to him, unsure of the protocol. He extends a hand to her, and she takes it. Without thinking, she moves his hand around.

STELLA (IN SPANISH)
Isn't there supposed to be a ring
for me to kiss?

POPE (IN SPANISH)
(laughing)
I have no use for that.

Stella is at ease at once. The Pope gestures for her to take a seat, which she does.

STELLA (IN SPANISH)
I should have guessed once I saw
the room. Very different from your
hallway.

The Pope rolls his eyes.

POPE (IN SPANISH)
I requested they take it all down,
you know, we don't need that here.
It's uncomfortable. But they only
allowed me to change my own room.
In case the next pontiff has a
different ideology. You should have
seen it before I got here.

Stella admires the room. Despite how bare it is, there is a spiritual sense of calm here.

STELLA (IN SPANISH)
I like what you've done with the
place.

POPE (IN SPANISH)
Can I offer you anything to eat, or
drink?

STELLA (IN SPANISH)
Cherry Coke Zero?

The Pope chuckles at that.

STELLA (IN SPANISH) (CONT'D)
(grinning)
I had to ask. I'm okay, thank you.

The Pope studies Stella for a moment. She fidgets in her
seat.

STELLA (IN SPANISH) (CONT'D)
Is there a reason you called me in
today?

POPE (IN SPANISH)
I had a feeling.

STELLA (IN SPANISH)
What kind of feeling?

POPE (IN SPANISH)
You know, Stella, I may have people
running my online accounts, but I
do see them. I've been watching
your ascent...

STELLA (IN SPANISH)
More like *descent*.

POPE (IN SPANISH)
Interesting. I had the same
thought.

The Pope takes a sip of his water. Stella gulps. Maybe she
should have asked for a drink after all.

STELLA (IN SPANISH)
Excuse me?

POPE (IN SPANISH)
I just had this sense... In all the
photos and videos, it's like you're
holding a part of yourself back.
You're very good at hiding it, and
you have helped so many people, but
you seem sad. Like, you're on the
brink and aren't sure which way
you'll land.

STELLA (IN SPANISH)

I am sad.

POPE (IN SPANISH)

Why?

STELLA (IN SPANISH)

Maybe I could get some water after
all?

The Pope smiles, and nods at her. He gets to his feet.

STELLA (IN SPANISH) (CONT'D)

Oh no, you don't have to -

POPE (IN SPANISH)

Don't deny me the movement, dear.
It's one of the few things that's
still my own.

With that, he hobbles out of the room. Stella takes several deep breaths. If she's going to confess, it's now or never.

The Pope returns, carrying a tall glass of water. He places it on the table in front of Stella, and returns to his seat.

POPE (IN SPANISH) (CONT'D)

What's troubling you?

Stella lets out a shaky breath.

STELLA (IN SPANISH)

(whispering at first, then
louder)

I've been lying. To you, to the
world, and to myself. I didn't do
it - none of it. The "miracles?" I
didn't see Mary, I've never heard
God, no matter how much I've
prayed... and I've been shouting up
there for over a year now. This
whole story about me seeing the
Virgin Mother - It's all made up. I
made it up because I was sitting
outside that church that day
smoking pot, avoiding my mother.
I'm not a miracle.

The look on the Pope's face is indiscernable. He assesses her silently. At this point, Stella is crying, her shame and fear bubbling up inside her.

STELLA (IN SPANISH) (CONT'D)

I'm so - I'm so sorry.

The Pope slowly stands up. Stella, eyes puffy, takes a few short breaths.

Without another word, the Pope shuffles out of the room, leaving Stella to sit there alone.

STELLA (CONT'D)

Fuck.

CUT TO:

INT. SISTER ALICE'S VATICAN OFFICE - THE NEXT MORNING

Sister Alice paces back and forth in her office. Sunlight streams through an open window. Her office is being set up - but a large, beautiful wooden desk and cushy chair are already perched in the center, along with two adjacent chairs.

A sharp knock is heard at the door.

SISTER ALICE

Come in.

The door swings open, and Melanie strides in.

MELANIE

Sister Alice - where is Stella? I haven't seen her all yesterday, and I stopped by her room this morning and she was nowhere to be found -

Sister Alice closes the door sharply behind Melanie.

SISTER ALICE

Stella is being called to trial.

MELANIE

Trial?! What is this, the dark ages? She told a little white lie.

SISTER ALICE

Father Ed and Father Mike... It's not just Stella, they manipulated this whole thing. I manipulated this whole thing...

Sister Alice steps back to her desk, playing absently at a few papers.

SISTER ALICE (CONT'D)

I'm not Vatican-adjacent any more, Melanie. I'm Vatican-complacent.

MELANIE

Can she have some sort of witness?

SISTER ALICE

Only if they have evidence proving her true intentions. The bit of honesty Stella displayed... Her video in Japan...

MELANIE

Robert said y'all took that video.

SISTER ALICE

Indeed. We did.

Sister Alice picks up a few of the papers on her desk and nods.

SISTER ALICE (CONT'D)

Evidence like that would probably be close and kept guarded... Like down the hallway from my office. You wouldn't miss the guards if you make a right.

Melanie squints at Sister Alice. She sinks into one of the chairs in front of her desk.

SISTER ALICE (CONT'D)

Have you ever seen *Casasblanca*?

MELANIE

Sure, Bogart?

SISTER ALICE

So you know about the "letters of transit."

Melanie nods slowly.

SISTER ALICE (CONT'D)

So funny, those papers. Could get anybody anywhere, no questions asked. And with my new status here at the Vatican... I have the "letters of transit."

Sister Alice glances meaningfully at the papers in her hand and folds them. Melanie sits up a bit more.

MELANIE

Okay...

SISTER ALICE
But, I could never give them to
you.

Sister Alice sets the papers down on her desk. Suddenly, from outside, mass bells ring.

SISTER ALICE (CONT'D)
Ah. Time for mass. I did so mean to
attend today, to give thanks for my
new position.

Sister Alice brushes past Melane toward the office door.
Pauses, turns back around.

SISTER ALICE (CONT'D)
You can let yourself out.

Without another word, Sister Alice whips out of the office, leaving the door slightly ajar. Melanie doesn't even need to stop and think. She snatches the Papal Letters of Transit and dashes out of the office, shutting the door behind her...

INT. VATICAN HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

...and running straight into Robert, sneaking through the hallway. The pair smack into each other and fall to the ground.

MELANIE
What the fuck?

ROBERT
Oh, shit.

MELANIE
How did you even get in here?

The two help each other stand up and dust off.

ROBERT
They let me buy a ticket and I
ditched the tour. Even a *persona
non grata's* money is good for the
church.

MELANIE
Whatever -

Melanie turns to run down the hallway, like Sister Alice said, before pausing. She assesses Robert. Grabs his arm.

MELANIE (CONT'D)
Come with me.

ROBERT
What?

MELANIE
I'll explain on the way!

The pair run down the hallway together.

INT. VATICAN CITY HALLWAY - LATER

Stella mills about alone, absently tugging at the guest pass lanyard around her neck. In the other hand she carries a large bottle of communion wine, dark red in a green glass. She is still crying from her confession, shaky with guilt, drunk.

Out of nowhere, Fathers Ed and Mike beeline toward her. Tired and exasperated, she throws her arms up in defeat.

STELLA
Oh great, you two.

FATHER MIKE
Did you take that from the
sacristy?

STELLA
(giggling)
No, I turned water into wine. I'm
the miracle, just like you said.

FATHER ED (IN ITALIAN)
What did you tell His Holiness?

STELLA
(mimicking him in Italian)
What did you tell His Holiness?
(in English)
Seriously, does anyone understand
what this guy is saying?

FATHER MIKE
You are not to speak a word of the
truth.

The priests push up against Stella, pressing her back against the hall wall.

STELLA
Hey, stop.

FATHER ED (IN ITALIAN)
You will stay silent.

FATHER MIKE
You cannot explain it, but
these things have happened.
And it's because of God's
mercy.

STELLA
Okay.

Stella pushes through them, dashing off in the opposite
direction, down the hall....

INT. OTHER VATICAN HALLWAY - SAME TIME

Melanie and Robert, still walking quickly, approach two Swiss
guards, manning a rather inconspicuous door.

MELANIE
(whispering to Robert)
That has to be the door Sister
Alice was talking about.

ROBERT
(whispering back)
Are you crazy? "Letters of
transit?" That was dumb even in the
movie, there's no way they won't
look for a name or check with their
superiors or whatever.

MELANIE
(whispering)
Too late.

The pair approach the two Swiss Guards, silent blank slates
wearing loud colors. Melanie clears her throat awkwardly
before handing one of the guards the papers.

MELANIE (CONT'D)
We need to get inside, please.

The guards look at the papers together. Their faces do not
change. They look back up at Melanie and Robert, their faces
still blank.

Without another word, they step to the side. One of the
guards opens the door for them, and gives the papers back to
Melanie.

MELANIE (CONT'D)
(to Robert)
Told you!
(MORE)

MELANIE (CONT'D)
 (back to the guards)
 Thank you!

Melanie and Robert step into the dark recesses of the room.

CUT TO:

INT. VATICAN HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

As Stella runs toward her destiny, more and more people join her, trying to capture her attention before one of the biggest moments of her life. Fathers Ed and Mike follow, not far behind her.

Sister Alice enters the hallway from a side door, and spots Stella. She bustles ahead, trying to get around the Fathers, who close in even closer to Stella.

SISTER ALICE
 Stella - Can we talk?

FATHER MIKE FATHER ED (IN ITALIAN)
 You've done enough talking. Shut up!

The priests grab Stella at that and pull her faster down the hallway. From another side door, Gregory stumbles in. He seems a bit tipsy as well.

GREGORY
 Stella!

STELLA
 Gregory!

GREGORY
 Big day, huh?

Gregory lets out a hiccup. Sister Alice rolls her eyes. Gregory moves to take Stella's hand, and is promptly pushed aside by Father Ed.

FATHER ED (IN ITALIAN)
 Haven't you done enough?

GREGORY
 No! I'm her representation!

Fathers Ed and Mike pick up the pace with Stella, nearly carrying her at this point. Gregory and Sister Alice follow close behind.

STELLA
 I don't know what to do!

SISTER ALICE
It's going to be okay, Stella!

Stella whips her head around and looks at Sister Alice behind her, still being careened forward by the priests.

SISTER ALICE (CONT'D)
Miracles happen, Stella.

STELLA
Not really!

SISTER ALICE
(with a knowing look)
They are real.

Finally, the group has reached the doors, flanked again by two more Swiss Guards.

STELLA
Aren't these the same guards as before?

GREGORY
They aren't called the world's *smallest* army for nothing.

The guards remain blank slates. They open the doors. Fathers Ed and Mike enter. Gregory enters, squeezing Stella's hand in the process. Sister Alice is close behind. Stella takes a deep breath, makes the sign of the cross, and enters...

INT. PAPAL COURT ROOM IN VATICAN CITY - CONTINUOUS

...a large, well-lit chamber. A small roar of conversation grows as Stella gets deeper in the room. Lined on both sides, in stadium seating, sit dozens of cardinals, robed in red.

As Stella is seen, a hush falls over them. She steps forward. The Pope sits in the center back of the room, flanked on each side by two ornately robed cardinals.

Stella is the only woman in the room. She is directed to a podium in the center of the room. Fathers Ed and Mike sit to one side of her, while Father Gregory sits to her right.

The whole scene looks like a more colorful version of *A Man for All Seasons*. Stella stands alone in the center of the room. She clasps her hands together.

One of the cardinals stands tall, and raises his arms up.

CARDINAL GIOVANNI (IN SPANISH)
 In the name of the Father, the Son
 and the Holy Spirit. Amen. The
 trial of Stella Gonzalez will be
 conducted by the Holy See, His
 Holiness...

As the cardinal drones on in Spanish, Stella whispers to
 Gregory.

STELLA
 (half-joking)
 What is this, the Spanish
 Inquisition?

Gregory gives her a sullen look. Stella's joke falls flat as
 what little hope she has left shatters.

CARDINAL GIOVANNI (IN SPANISH)
 Stella is charged with heresy, and
 sexual deviance.

STELLA
 Sexual deviance? If I was getting
 laid I'd be in a much better mood.

Cardinal Giovanni sits down. The Pope rises to his feet.

POPE (IN SPANISH)
 No doubt you are all familiar with
 Stella González. We have touted her
 as a miracle. And truly, when it
 comes to her influence, its impact
 on the church has been miraculous.
 Stella, thank you for bringing a
 newfound hope to the world.

Stella doesn't move, unsure of what to do. Maybe if she
 doesn't move, they won't see her. One of the cardinals at the
 Pope's side chimes in.

CARDINAL LEONARDO (IN SPANISH)
 I understand you've had a few
 issues with telling the truth.

STELLA (IN SPANISH)
 I need to confess. I keep saying
 that but not actually doing it.

POPE (IN SPANISH)
 Go on.

STELLA (IN SPANISH)
 I didn't see the Virgin Mary. I
 didn't see anyone. Stopping the
 shooting... That was no miracle. I
 was smoking pot in my car and
 things got out of control way too
 fast. I lied. It's my fault.

The cardinals start talking all at once in different
 languages, letting their opinions be known loudly. Stella
 looks guiltily at the Pope, then at Gregory. Gregory, drunk,
 sits there dumbly, confused as ever.

STELLA (IN SPANISH) (CONT'D)
 But this sexual deviance thing - I
 don't know *where* that's coming
 from...

POPE (IN SPANISH)
 And the other miracles?

STELLA (IN SPANISH)
 What?

POPE (IN SPANISH)
 Did you falsify the other miracles?

STELLA (IN SPANISH)
 I didn't... That wasn't...

POPE (IN SPANISH)
 Who manipulated that?

Fathers Ed and Mike stand up in a huff, infuriated. They cry
 out over the crowd and Pope.

FATHER ED (IN ITALIAN)
 It's disgraceful, your
 Holiness!

FATHER MIKE
 We had no idea!

The cardinals become even more infuriated, pointing angrily
 at Stella. It was their word against hers.

STELLA (IN SPANISH)
 They knew the whole time!

FATHER MIKE
 We saw Stella and her
 representation there becoming quite
 intimate!

STELLA
 That's a lie!
 (in Spanish)
 (MORE)

STELLA (CONT'D)

Your Holiness - I lied about the first miracle, and I admit I was... tempted by sex and the Devil's lettuce -

POPE (IN SPANISH)

You knowingly tampered with and influenced the global faith. That is wrong, and sinful. It indicates ego, not altruism. Stella, you manipulated the people. Catholicism is a delicate thing, and the people who follow it truly follow it with their whole hearts. When they see evidence of a miracle, it renews their faith in the Holy Trinity. They believed you. But by falsifying your actions, you made yourself a false idol.

STELLA (IN SPANISH)

I didn't mean for it to go that far - honestly, I know I lied and that's horrible, I take full responsibility for that. But the more I think about it... What if I wasn't there that day? What if I hadn't been skipping mass? Would that man have accomplished his mission? And what about our mission? I think there's a lot more that the church can do to make things better for more people. I know we do a lot with charity but... there are places in which we lack. And I'm tired of feeling so guilty about it. I only used the *first* lie for myself, sir. Fathers Ed and Mike used me for all the rest. I was only trying to help.

FATHER MIKE

She lies!

MELANIE (O.C.)

No, she doesn't!

As if prompted, Melanie enters the court, dragging Robert in behind her. The two Swiss Papal Guards fall in behind them, disheveled, clutching their faces. Melanie drops her own CAN OF MACE on the ground as she runs into the court.

Melanie and Robert both jump at the sight of the cardinals, and shudder before moving forward.

Melanie clears her throat. She carries a tablet in her hands, one of the tablets Fathers Ed and Mike were using throughout their international travels.

MELANIE (CONT'D)

Stella has tried to make penance
for this whole thing ever since she
lied. And we have proof!

Melanie jogs up to the Pope. Fathers Ed and Mike try to stop her, but Robert gets in their way, a flurry of athiest energy.

ROBERT

Back off!

FATHER MIKE

How were you able to get that
video?

MELANIE

A miracle!

Melanie passes the tablet to the Pope, who takes it and clicks it on.

The two adjacent cardinals watch on behind him. The video features the family in Japan, telling their story. Stella is nowhere to be seen or heard. Father Kenji gives his testimony. Information is included about how to help out their family, and other migrants in their situation.

The Pope looks up at Stella, softened.

MELANIE (CONT'D)

It was never about her. It was
about them.

ROBERT

It's true, Sir Holiness. I saw real
faith here. And I don't even
believe in this shit, so, take my
word for it.

The Pope considers this. Sits back. Allows the tablet to be passed around to other cardinals.

The Pope looks intently at Stella. His face is meditative, contemplative, stoic. Then, a small smile.

POPE (IN SPANISH)

Thank you for your confession,
Stella.

Another hush falls over the room. Stella holds her breath.

POPE (IN SPANISH) (CONT'D)
 For the charge of heresy... I
 think, for penance... You should do
 ten Hail Marys, fifteen Our
 Fathers... and six acts of service
 for others.

CARDINAL LEONARDO (IN SPANISH)
 But, what about the sexual
 deviance?

POPE (IN SPANISH)
 We haven't been shown any evidence
 of that, except the word of Father
 Ed and Father Mike. And, after all
 this... We may need to hold a
 separate trial in the near future.

The Pope looks sternly at Fathers Ed and Mike, and whispers
 to one of the cardinals next to him. They stride to the
 priests without another word.

He stands, as if God just delivered the order. The cardinals
 nod approvingly, satisfied with the decision. Stella nods
 dumbly. Fathers Ed and Mike look like they are going to be
 sick.

Gregory stands, and looks at Stella with a new light. She
 stares at him. Without a word, Gregory turns and runs out of
 the room. Stella's eyes fall to the ground, sad, guilty,
 ashamed.

The Pope approaches her, and leans over to speak in her ear.

POPE (IN SPANISH) (CONT'D)
 (whispering)
 Privately, I understand your
 motivations behind all this, I do.
 But please know Stella, I must
 protect this institution at all
 cost. Publicly, it's a different
 story, by design. I will not tamper
 with that.

STELLA (IN SPANISH)
 I just don't know what to do
 anymore. I do feel a bit better now
 that I've gotten it off my chest,
 but something still feels off.

POPE (IN SPANISH)
 I don't think we're the people you
 need to be confessing to.

STELLA (IN SPANISH)
What do you mean -

Church bells ring in the distance. Stella stops herself, and it dawns on her. Tears creep at the corners of her eyes as she speaks.

STELLA (IN SPANISH) (CONT'D)
It'll break her heart.

POPE (IN SPANISH)
Mary's heart was broken. More than once, in her lifetime. Her Son broke her heart too, do not mistake. That's the beauty and tragedy of the life of a mother. Her love has no bounds.

Stella reaches forward and holds the Pope's hand. He smiles at her. Stella stands quickly, turning to leave. She suddenly remembers herself, and whirls back around. She bows to the Pope. He laughs.

CUT TO:

INT. SAINT PETER'S BASILICA - MOMENTS LATER

Stella is running through the halls, ornate structures and rooms. She finally stumbles into the basilica. Various people stroll about, looking at the statues and stained glass, speaking softly to one another.

Stella spins around, looking for the one person she needs to talk to. Finally, in the distance, she spots Yvette, standing in front of the infamous Pieta statue of the Virgin Mother cradling a crucified Jesus Christ.

Stella takes a breath and takes a few determined steps forward. A few people move aside, and reveal that the Bag Lady is standing next to Yvette. The women speak softly to one another, as if they have known each other forever.

Stella cannot help herself, and she begins running through the crowd, weaving through people. By the time she reaches her mother, the Bag Lady is gone. Stella pauses to catch her breath. She notices Yvette has been crying.

STELLA
What were you two talking about?

YVETTE
(softly smiling)
Love. Loss. Our children.

Yvette turns to her daughter, and sees that Stella has also been crying.

YVETTE (CONT'D)
Mi'ja, what's wrong?

STELLA
(crying)
Mom. I've been so horrible.

Yvette cradles her daughter's face.

YVETTE
No you haven't.

STELLA
Yes, I have. I'm so sorry, Mom. I lied. About everything. I didn't see the Virgin Mary in mass. I wasn't called by God to stop the shooter. The world believed in me and I'm a fraud.

The pair are silent for a few moments. Yvette doesn't let go of Stella's face.

YVETTE
You've restored a lot of people's faith, Stella. Don't feel bad about that part.

STELLA
I feel worse about lying to you, Ma. I've been holding so much of myself back since Dad... And now this... I just want to make you happy.

YVETTE
You make me happy, Stella. Every day. Just living your life the way you want to - that's what gives me joy. Your father would not have wanted you to hold any of yourself back. I don't want you to. To just have been a part of your creation...

Yvette looks at the Pieta statue again.

YVETTE (CONT'D)
Nothing else matters. You could do anything, and I would forgive you.
(MORE)

YVETTE (CONT'D)

And, I don't have to forgive much,
this time.

STELLA

Really?

YVETTE

Look where we are, mi'ja. You
brought us all here. Me, you and
Melanie. You brought me out into
the light. Allowed me to experience
life again. The beauty... and the
pain... And even when we're all
fighting, we're here. A family.
Your father is smiling down from
Heaven. I can feel him. We're all
together again.

Stella embraces her mother, the women holding each other
close. As they pull apart, Yvette wipe the tears from
Stella's face.

FADE TO:

EXT. VALLEY CEMETERY - DAY

Stella, now in the cemetery for the first time, lays a single
flower at her father's grave. She brushes the headstone
gently, lingering back.

Yvette and Melanie, standing off to the side, pull away,
linked arm in arm. Stella, left alone with her father, goes
through an array of emotions. Finally -

STELLA

I'm sorry Dad. I love you so much.

Stella starts crying. Wraps herself in another hug.

STELLA (CONT'D)

I told you, "I'll be back."

She giggles to herself for a moment, as if her father is
there to give her a long hug. Stella collects herself, wiping
the tears away from her face. She straightens, then blows a
kiss to her dad.

She turns around to see Gregory standing there, looking at
her. He smiles and steps forward - guess he doesn't hate her
after all. It's at this point Stella realizes he is not
wearing a priest's collar.

The pair walk side by side down the line of graves toward Yvette and Melanie, who wait by Melanie's PT Cruiser. We cannot hear what they are saying to one another.

Yvette and Melanie smile at the sight of Stella and Gregory. Stella looks at her family, back at her father, up at Gregory. She is happy... Self-assured for the first time in a long time.

CUT TO:

EXT. CALIFORNIA MOSQUE - SOME TIME LATER

A young man, around Stella's age, sits on a bench outside of a beautiful mosque. He wears clean, modest clothing.

He hears the prayer coming from the inside of the mosque, and looks conflicted. The young man begins to shake and cry, then buries his face in his hands.

As he grapples with his own demons, the bag lady walks by the mosque, looking around. The bag lady notices the young man and smiles softly. As she approaches him, the music swells around them - the promise of more revelations to be had.

END

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jamie D. Trevino attended the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley in pursuit of her graduate and undergraduate degrees. In December 2017, she earned a bachelor's degree in Mass Communication with a focus in Broadcast Journalism and minored in Film Studies. She began working on her master's degree in the Fall semester of 2019 at UTRGV, where she pursued a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing. Her focus in graduate school was screenwriting, but her education included the creative writing spheres of fiction, creative non-fiction and graphic literature. She earned her MFA in December 2021. Her permanent mailing address is 4613 Mile 7 Rd. in McAllen, Texas. Trevino's personal email is jamiedanielletrevino@gmail.com.

Professionally, Trevino worked full-time as a reporter for the Progress Times newspaper publication in February 2018, in Mission, Texas. In February 2021, she began working as a news producer for KRIS 6 News in Corpus Christi, Texas. Currently, she still works there full-time. Trevino has worked as a writer for two short documentary films produced by the CHAPS department at UTRGV: "And Then the Army Was Gone: Fort Ringgold" and "Just a Ferry Ride to Freedom." She also has performed as an actress on stage and in several full-length feature films and short films produced at the local level.