

BEFORE NOON

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Based on characters created by
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BLACKNESS

The screech of train wheels as they brake and slow into a station.

Or maybe it is the chatter of school children running pell-mell along the banks of the Seine in Paris.

Until it turns out to be....

EXT. COLLEGE DORM, CITY

The happy hubbub of college freshmen of all sexes and types hurrying to check in for the new academic year. The dormitory is identified over the entrance as Weinstein Hall, New York University. It is a beautiful late August day in the Big Apple.

Cars line the sidewalk. Every spot down the block is taken. Other vehicles cruise slowly along looking for an available parking spot. Some have run out of patience and are double parking to unload. New York cops try to keep order and send the errant drivers on their way. Arguments ensue.

Parents unload boxes and suitcases into carriers with the NYU logo on the side. Then students grab the carriers and roll them inside while their parents try to keep up. Controlled chaos.

Waiting on the curb is CELINE and her eighteen year old daughter NINA standing guard over a collection of boxes and suitcases. Celine looks in her early 50's but maintaining her physique and figure. Her crossed bare arms indicate someone who works out. A shoulder bag covered with images of the most famous French impressionist paintings hangs from her shoulder. Celine looks unhappy.

Emerging out of the dorm like a salmon swimming against the current is JESSE with Nina's twin sister ELLA right behind him. They both push carriers brandishing the NYU symbol. Jesse is in his early 50's with flecks of gray in his still impressive mane of hair yet he dresses like a man thirty years younger. Like a man trying to hide his age.

The twins appear to be a youthful blend of mother and father. They have Celine's hair and looks but the open and world embracing demeanor of Jesse.

He and Ella stroll over to where Celine and Nina wait.

CELINE

So what did you learn?

Still unloading stuff from a fancy SUV is TED, a distinguished looking man in his mid 40's. He looks as if he would be more at home in a suit and an office than where he is right now. But he is game and trying to do the right thing.

He sets the last piece of luggage next to the others. Then sighs and straightens up with the smile of someone who knows his part of the day's activity is done.

TED

That's the last of it.

Celine nods. Ted nods at Jesse who nods back.

Ted stares at Celine who looks a tad stressed.

TED (CONT'D)

Is there anything else you need?

Celine shakes her head.

Ted brightens.

TED (CONT'D)

Okay then. I'll be off.

The twins rush forward and give him an awkward hug.

ELLA AND NINA

Thanks, Uncle Ted.

He feels just as awkward. They break away and turn their backs on him. Their rote show of affection done. They start loading items into the carriers.

JESSE

Thanks, Ted.

Ted nods and climbs behind the wheel of the SUV.

TED

(to Celine)

I'll call you later.

Celine nods his way.

He fires up the SUV and pulls out and down the street. One of the waiting vehicles immediately pulls into the open space, blocking another car going for the same spot. Horns blare.

Celine turns to Jesse.

CELINE

Well?

Jesse grimaces.

JESSE

They are only allowing one parent
per child in.

ELLA

(links her arm around his)
And I picked Dad.

NINA

You would.

They stick their tongues out at each other but then descend
into laughter. Giddy about the day.

Celine doesn't like this news.

CELINE

So what am I supposed to do? Just
stand here on the sidewalk all
alone guarding our stuff?

JESSE

Sounds like something you are
uniquely qualified for while the
big strong patriarch helps the
children move in.

CELINE

Very funny.

Celine does not find that funny.

JESSE

I don't know what to tell you.
COVID regulations. Or so they say.

CELINE

Maybe we should just give up and go
back home and do distance learning.

ELLA

(together)
NO!!!!!!!!!!

NINA

(together)
NO!!!!!!!!!!

Celine sighs and shakes her head.

Ella and Nina exhibit all the frustrated eagerness of children wanting to get in line for an amusement park ride but their parents are holding them back.

ELLA

Come on!

She grabs the handle of her carrier in one hand and her rolling suitcase in the other. And starts for the entrance.

Jesse grabs another suitcase and, to his surprise, an old acoustic guitar case. It pops open. He and we recognize the guitar within.

INT. CELINE'S APARTMENT, PARIS - FLASHBACK

Before Sunset: Celine sits on her bed and picks up the guitar. Then she serenades Jesse.

EXT. COLLEGE DORM - RETURN TO SCENE

Jesse holds it up and glances Celine's way.

She avoids his gaze and starts putting items into Nina's carrier.

ELLA

(looking back)

Come on, Dad!

Jesse can only close the case and follow his daughter in.

Celine puts her hands on her hips and glares at them disappearing through the doors.

Nina continues loading items into her carrier.

NINA

Come on, Mom! They're getting away.

She resumes helping her daughter.

INT. DORM LOBBY

Controlled chaos with laden parents and students everywhere. Ella is in first. Jesse catches up to her.

JESSE

Hey, hey, you got your key?

Ella shoots him a look and holds up her key card.

He nods as they make their way to the elevators where a large crowd waits to get on. There are three elevators.

JESSE (CONT'D)

Too bad we can't take the stairs.

ELLA

You're too old to take the stairs.

Jesse acts with mock indignation.

JESSE

You're saying your old man is not up to the task? That I am over the hill?

She just rolls her eyes and smiles.

An elevator door opens. A full car of parents get off. The next set of riders jam their way in. The doors close.

Jesse and Ella wait in silence. She stares at the rising floor numbers above the door; she's almost pulsating with anticipation. Jesse stares at her as if he is seeing his daughter as a young adult for the first time.

JESSE (CONT'D)

Excited?

She rolls her eyes and ignores the question.

JESSE (CONT'D)

I remember when I went away to college. I absolutely could not wait for my parents to get out of my hair. It was awkward as hell because they had just divorced and were barely speaking to each other. Both wanting a last bit of my time and me just wanting both of them to get lost and leave me alone.

Ella continues to stare at the numbers while giving no indication that Jesse has said anything at all.

The numbers are coming back down.

Jesse frowns. He starts to say something else but....

...the doors open. The few parents hurry off.

The gaggle of new passengers including Jesse and Ella struggle aboard with their carriers and luggage and other things.

INT. ELEVATOR

Jesse and Ella settle in. The car is full. The door starts to close. But right before it does....

....a muscular arm bursts through the shrinking crack and stops the doors from closing.

The door opens back up to reveal Celine and Nina. They push their way into the already overcrowded car. Some of the others sigh and groan but they make room.

The door closes and the car starts to climb.

CELINE

As soon as you were inside, I realized that it may be only one parent per child but we are checking in two children. So your efforts to ditch me were futile.

JESSE

I wasn't trying to ditch you.

Celine humphs and stares at the rising number above the door.

INT. 6TH FLOOR LOBBY

The elevator door opens. Celine and Nina get off followed by Jesse and Ella and a few other parents and students. They begin looking around.

CELINE

What number are we looking for?

She takes the key card from Nina's hand before she can reply. Nina rolls her eyes.

NINA

616.

Jesse laughs. Everyone stares at him.

JESSE

That's the day we met. June 16.

The girls don't care. Nina takes the key card back from her mother and starts down the hall. The rest follow. Jesse snickers. Celine shoots him a look.

CELINE

You're not helping.

He holds up the items he carries.

JESSE

That's funny. I thought I was.

INT. ROOM 616

We hear the swiping of a card in the lock. The door opens. The girls hurry in followed by their slower parents.

They find themselves in a dorm suite: a centrally located open air kitchen and living room with doors to two bedrooms and a bathroom on each side. Out the windows is a lovely view of the Flatiron Building and Manhattan.

The girls' other two roommates KAITLYN (redhead) and MADISON (brunette) are already there. Their parents continue to move them in. The girls turn to assess the new arrivals.

KAITLYN

Ella and Nina?

The twins nod. The four of them scream and rush into a group hug. Hang onto each other and jump up and down with excitement. Eventually they break up.

NINA

This is our mom and dad.

ELLA

They met in the most romantic way.

NINA

They met on a train in Europe.

ELLA

Then got off the train and walked around Vienna and fell in love.

NINA

Dad wrote a book about it.

This info means nothing to the girls but their parents look interested. One mother opens her mouth to speak.

MADISON

We took the bedrooms on this side so one of you could still have a bedroom with windows.

NINA

That's cool.

She turns to her sister.

NINA (CONT'D)
You want the front?

ELLA
Does it matter? We will be in and
out of each other's rooms anyway.

She grabs the handle on her carrier and pulls it into the back bedroom on the left.

Jesse shrugs. He cannot fault her logic. He starts for the back bedroom. Nina and Celine carry stuff to the front bedroom.

As they pass by each other, Jesse holds up the guitar case to catch her attention. She looks back at him and shrugs her shoulders as if to say "What?".

The other parents whisper amongst themselves then shrug and hug their daughters goodbye.

INT. FRONT BEDROOM

Celine follows Nina in. It is a furnished room with an unmade bed and mattress and storage drawers built in below. A desk in one corner. An empty bookcase and a closet unit in another.

CELINE
Well, let's figure out where we can
put this stuff.

NINA
Mom, you don't have to worry about
that. Ella and I will figure it out
later.

Celine isn't listening. She sets her shoulder bag on the floor and plops the large suitcase on the bed. She unzips it and starts putting the clothes away.

An impatient Nina shakes her head and checks out the view.

INT. BACK BEDROOM

Ella has started to put things away. Jesse sits on the bed still holding the guitar case. He looks it over like he hasn't really looked at it in years.

JESSE

I can't believe your mom let you
bring her guitar.

Ella looks nonplussed at the question.

ELLA

I asked her. She said yes.

Jesse looks troubled. He opens the case and pulls out the
guitar. A few pages of sheet music tumble out onto the floor.

INT. FRONT BEDROOM

Celine still unpacks clothes and puts them into the closet
and drawers.

Nina starts unpacking boxes featuring supplies for the desk.

Celine pulls out a well worn beige top. She unfolds it and
holds it up.

EXT. VIENNA MONTAGE - FLASHBACK

Shots from *Before Sunrise*:

--Celine (wearing the top under her dress) and Jesse walk
away from the train station.

--Celine and Jesse make out in the park at night.

--Next morning, they walk hand in hand down a street. Celine
no longer wears the top, bare shoulders under the dress.

INT. FRONT BEDROOM - RETURN TO SCENE

A moment of nostalgia on Celine's face.

CELINE

I didn't know you were bringing
this.

NINA

Mom, I've been wearing it for
years.

She takes it out of her mother's hands and tosses it in an
open dresser drawer.

CELINE

Well, you should have asked.

NINA

I didn't think you'd mind.

Celine stomps out. Nina picks up the top, holding it lovingly in her hands. Her eyes glance at Celine's bag.

INT. BACK BEDROOM

Ella is busy putting things away. Jesse still sits on the unmade bed holding the guitar.

ELLA

You know, you and Mom don't have to stick around. Nina and I will be perfectly fine on our own.

JESSE

I know. Oh, I know. I just remember how it was when I moved Hank to college and how awkward it was having your stepmother there.

As soon as he says it, Celine walks in.

ELLA

She's not my stepmother.

JESSE

I guess that's true.

Celine frowns but walks right past him and starts helping Ella unpack.

ELLA

Mom, I've got this. You have to find something else to do with your life than be our mother.

She moves to block Celine from unpacking. Celine steps back, unhappy. Jesse stands.

JESSE

I am starting to think that we may not be wanted here.

Ella tosses her stuff in a drawer and slams it shut.

ELLA

God, stop being so dramatic, Dad. Why do you two have to be so dramatic all the time?

Jesse stares at Celine.

JESSE

I'm a writer and she's a musician.
Oh course, we're dramatic.

CELINE

I am not a musician. I never was a
musician. I am a wife and mother.

He holds up the guitar.

CELINE (CONT'D)

What? I haven't played that in
years. I don't even remember how to
play it now.

JESSE

It's like riding a bicycle.

He strums it with his thumb.

Celine grabs it from him and puts it back in the case. Jesse
isn't happy and opens his mouth to say something. Celine
storms out.

Ella makes a face at her father.

ELLA

What's up with Mom?

Jesse takes a moment to answer. Does he say what he thinks?
Or does he opt to maintain the peace? He scoops up the sheet
music and puts them back in the case before closing it.

JESSE

Oh, you know, facing the prospect
of an empty nest and not wanting to
let you go.

ELLA

You don't feel that way?

JESSE

(he does)

No.

She smiles and shakes her head.

ELLA

Didn't you and Mom raise us to be
self-sufficient and independent?

JESSE

Yes.

ELLA

Do you not think we are ready to
face the world alone?

JESSE

Yes, but we never thought this day
would actually come.

They laugh and smile at each other.

ELLA

Me either.

A last moment of childhood nostalgia between father and
daughter.

A knock at the main door catches their attention.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Two good-looking males saunter in with an assured walk. They
are the epitome of contemporary male cool. Meet RYAN and
ETHAN.

RYAN

Knock, knock.

All four girls pour out of their rooms. They like what they
see. So do the boys.

ETHAN

Hello, hello. We are your new next
door neighbors.

RYAN

And we just thought we would stop
by and say hello.

Kaitlyn and Madison giggle and smile. Ella and Nina like them
too but they play it cool.

Jesse emerges from one bedroom and Celine (bag on her
shoulder) from the other. Their presence is an immediate
buzzkill. Jesse takes an instant like to the guys. Celine
less so.

Jesse steps forward and offers his hand.

JESSE

I'm Jesse, soon to be departing
father.

RYAN
(takes it)
Ryan.

Jesse moves on to shake Ethan's.

ETHAN
Ethan.

JESSE
Cool name.

ETHAN
Thanks.

Difficult to tell if he is genuinely impressed or not.

NINA
And this is our mother Celine.

She doesn't wave or do anything but fold her arms and frown.

ELLA
They fell in love in Vienna but
then got back together in Paris
nine years later.

NINA
And had us.

ELLA
They're not married.

NINA
And they're not divorced.

JESSE
We just are.

Pause. The moment feels awkward.

RYAN
We could come back later.

The girls shake their heads. Kaitlyn and Madison protest.

JESSE
(to Celine)
I suppose we could get going.

The twins nod.

Celine gives a curt shake of her head.

JESSE (CONT'D)
 Come on. It's not like it's the
 last time we'll be visiting them.
 You'll be here more than me.

Conflicting emotions play across her face. She knows she wants to stay but also knows it is time to go. Even if she doesn't want to.

The twins rush in and hug her goodbye. Even as they start moving her toward the door. Celine knows what is going on.

CELINE
 Alright, alright!

Jesse follows behind. They all pause at the door. Celine gives each daughter a genuine hug. And they respond in kind.

CELINE (CONT'D)
 Study. Be good. Stick together.

NINA & ELLA
 Mom!

CELINE
 (letting them go)
 Okay, okay!

Still, she hesitates on the threshold.

Jesse hugs each daughter in kind.

JESSE
 You know how to reach me. Don't
 forget to have fun.

Ella glances toward Celine than stares at Jesse.

JESSE (CONT'D)
 I know, I know. I will, I will.

He joins Celine on the threshold. The two of them sigh knowing that a major stage of their life is about to end. The twins almost will them out the door - eager for their childhood to end.

They wave goodbye.

INT. 6TH FLOOR HALLWAY

Jesse and Celine step into the corridor. The door closes behind them. They are startled.

Jesse smiles and shakes his head. He catches the number 616 on the door. A tear starts to fall but he brushes it away.

Celine is in tears. She rushes to the elevators.

JESSE
(rushing to catch up)
Hey, Celine!

INT. DORM LOBBY

The elevator door opens. Celine rushes out. Jesse follows but she isn't waiting for him.

JESSE
Celine! Hey, Celine! Slow down!

EXT. COLLEGE DORM

There are fewer parents and students carrying things in. Celine hurries out and strides for the sidewalk. Jesse emerges a few seconds later.

JESSE
Celine!

She doesn't stop. If anything, she steps up her pace.

He starts to follow but the parents step in from the side. One mother shoves copies of his novels *This Time* and *Our Time* by Jesse Wallace into his hand. Drawings of a college age couple like Jesse and Celine on the one and a thirtysomething version on the other. They babble but he isn't listening. He scrawls his autograph on each and hurries on.

JESSE (CONT'D)
Celine, wait up! I got to ask you something.

She stops on the sidewalk then turns her eyes, full of fury and scorn, onto him.

JESSE (CONT'D)
What are you in a hurry for?

CELINE
I have to catch the noon train.

Jesse looks at his watch. It's just before ten.

JESSE
What for?

She hesitates for a moment.

CELINE

I just do.

She steps to the edge of the sidewalk. Looks both ways for a break in traffic. They inevitably catch each other's eye by doing so then nervously look away.

Celine starts crossing the street. Jesse falls in right beside her. Still giving each other a look. Not too dissimilar to the wary looks they gave each other when they got off the train together in *Before Sunrise* or when walking away from the bookstore in *Before Sunset*. Each of them both excited and nervous and a little bit scared.

EXT. WASHINGTON SQUARE

They reach the other side and stroll into the park. It is full of tourists out in force and filling the square.

Jesse and Celine continue down the broad main walkway. Jesse takes it all in, energized by the sight.

JESSE

I used to love all this. So vibrant and exciting.

Celine looks around, starting to loosen up.

CELINE

Yeah, it is. I always loved that about New York.

They walk along, enjoying the mood and atmosphere.

But Celine's smile is momentary, replaced by a worried glance back toward the dorm retreating into the background.

JESSE

Don't worry about our girls. They will be fine.

Celine faces front.

CELINE

I know they'll be fine.

JESSE

No, you don't.

CELINE

Yes, I do.

JESSE
No, you don't.

CELINE
Yes, I do. Don't tell me how I am
feeling.

JESSE
You're in denial.

CELINE
No, I'm not. Shut up!

JESSE
You are.

CELINE
I said shut up!

As they argue, they stroll past a young couple in their early
20's who just frown and shake their heads.

BOY
Do you have any idea what they are
arguing about?

GIRL
No, I don't. Have you heard that as
couples get older they lose their
ability to hear each other?

BOY
(kidding)
What?

The girl bats him on the shoulder. They giggle and kiss.

GIRL
I wonder if anyone is ever happy in
a long term relationship.

BOY
(pulls her close)
We will be.

Jesse and Celine move on. She puts on her sunglasses.

CELINE
Why do we raise our children to be
powerful and independent only to
discover that when they grow up
that they don't need us anymore?
What's the point of that?

JESSE

Said every good parent who ever
lived.

Around them are dozens and dozens of New Yorkers doing their favorite park activity.

--College age boys with their shirts off toss frisbees or footballs back and forth.

--College age girls stretch out on towels on the grass and sunbathe in some combo of swimsuits and shorts. Older men sit and read books, and sneak looks at the girls.

--Women walk their dogs.

--Musicians of all stripes and genders strum away on their guitars or instruments of choice with an upside down cap or open instrument case in front of them for money.

--A collection of a dozen or so youth protest the latest American outrage: overturning Roe v. Wade. Their chants ring throughout the square.

Celine smiles and sends a somewhat envious look the protestors' way. Jesse follows her gaze and smiles himself.

JESSE (CONT'D)

This place hasn't changed much.

CELINE

I like that. This was always my favorite part of New York when I lived here.

Celine looks back at the protestors one more time.

CELINE (CONT'D)

I never thought I would live in a country where my daughters had less rights than I did.

JESSE

They're going to be fine.

She faces front again.

CELINE

I know that. I just wished they had picked a different school.

JESSE

You didn't want them to go to your alma mater?

CELINE
No, I wanted them to go to my other
alma mater. In France.

JESSE
(with a phony French
accent)
The Sorbonne?

CELINE
Yes. In a civilized country.

Jesse laughs.

JESSE
What can they learn at The Sorbonne
that they can't learn here?

Celine purses her lips, appears reluctant to answer.

Jesse can't resist pressing.

JESSE (CONT'D)
What?

CELINE
I wanted their education to be as
non-American as possible.

JESSE
What's wrong with being American?
You're an American now.

CELINE
I am not an American. I am a French
girl who happens to live in
America.

JESSE
With dual citizenship.

CELINE
Only because of your fucked up tax
laws.

JESSE
So what's wrong with being
American?

Celine shakes her head.

CELINE
We don't have enough time to go
into all of that.

Jesse's turn to shake his head.

CELINE (CONT'D)

You do realize you all are the laughingstock of the world now. With your Trump and your fake news and your cancel culture and your repressed Victorian prudishness masquerading as feminism.

JESSE

Hey, don't lump me in with all that.

CELINE

You're from Texas, aren't you?

JESSE

That doesn't mean I believe all that. I live in LA now.

CELINE

Which is just as bad as Texas in its own ways. I am glad I live here in New York which is the only civilized part of this country.

JESSE

And yet you are still living here in this country you despise instead of back in your native France.

CELINE

You know why I am living here. And I don't despise your country at all.

JESSE

It sure sounds like you do.

CELINE

I don't. I only dislike what it has become. Nothing but willful ignorance and cell phones.

Jesse can only shrug at that.

JESSE

True enough.

They glance at what all is happening around them.

CELINE

But this part hasn't changed. I mean, everyone could be home on social media but here they are out enjoying themselves.

JESSE

I think COVID made people appreciate the real world more. And at least it set the clock back on global warming.

Celine groans.

CELINE

See? Another myth Americans want to tell themselves. Another instance of fake news.

JESSE

What do you mean? It's true. Whatever activism gets done, whatever amount of marching and protesting we do, the world corrects itself. Society corrects itself between left and right. Politics corrects itself between fanaticism and compromise. It has nothing to do with how much protesting people do.

CELINE

That is just another excuse people tell themselves so they don't have to do anything at all. Usually white males who think the world is already arranged just fine. For them.

JESSE

Yeah, well, most people just want to live their lives and not have to worry about the state of the world 24/7. I have enough troubles of my own.

Off to the corner of the broad walk, a woman is playing Bach's "Un Clave" piece on the cello. It is the same harpsichord piece they listened to in *Before Sunrise* after their night in the park.

They both recognize it and glance at the other. Their eyes meet and hold for a moment.

They have reached the fountain at the center of the park.

The two of them stand there enjoying the sound of the water and the nearby scream of children playing: boys and girls splashing water and chasing each other around.

It makes them smile.

Celine spies the Washington Square Arch on the edge of the square to the right.

CELINE

Oh, I love that arch.

She heads toward it.

JESSE

Yeah, me too.

Jesse hurries to catch up.

As they walk along they pass a woman standing atop an apple box on the edge of the walk. She's dressed in Puritan garb and holding a baby doll wrapped in swaddling clothes. A large red "A" hangs over her chest. It is Hester Prynne from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* come to life.

A few men laugh and jeer at her but she says nothing.

Jesse and Celine glance at each other, taking in the contemporary relevance of the tableaux.

JESSE (CONT'D)

Nathaniel Hawthorne still has something to say to the world.

WASHINGTON ARCH

They reach the Arch and stroll under it. Neither can help looking up.

CELINE

It reminds me of the Arc de Triomphe back home.

JESSE

I suppose those protestors will want to knock this down eventually because it celebrates George Washington and he was a slave owner.

They come out from under the arch and turn to pause in front of the statue of Washington as commander in chief.

CELINE

Don't you think we should take that fact into account?

JESSE

Of course. But I also think you have to consider the full measure of a person's life. I mean, yes, he owned slaves. But he also won the Revolutionary War, he refused to be a king after it was over, and almost single-handedly set up the institutions of the U.S. government that we still use today. I think any time you take the measure of a person, you have to look at their entire life, not just one aspect of it. Everything. The good, the bad, and the ugly.

CELINE

Including Sally Fairfax? I wonder how Martha felt about her.

JESSE

Could George help it if he was a babe magnet?

They both laugh.

JESSE (CONT'D)

They stayed together, didn't they?

Celine sighs and nods. They stroll over to the other column and gaze at the sculpture of Washington as president.

CELINE

Yes, they did. "My love for those I love - not very many, but don't I love them so?"

JESSE

Thank you, Emily Dickinson.

CELINE

The greatest writer who ever lived.

JESSE

No, that would be Nathaniel Hawthorne.

(MORE)

JESSE (CONT'D)
(points back at tableaux)
And still relevant today.

CELINE
So is Emily.

JESSE
I didn't say she wasn't. Or maybe
Faulkner. I don't think there is a
better short story in the world
than "A Rose For Emily". But in
George's case the full measure of
his life appears to be
overwhelmingly good.

CELINE
You should ask his slaves.

JESSE
Touche'. Although I understand that
he freed them in his will.

CELINE
Another myth. He granted them their
freedom but only after Martha died
and she didn't die until three
years later.

Jesse throws up his hands.

JESSE
Do you always have to have the last
word?

CELINE
And you don't?

They both laugh. Jesse smiles.

JESSE
This is nice. Walking around and
talking about non-parental stuff
again. We used to do that all the
time. In Vienna. And Paris.

CELINE
And Greece.

JESSE
(sighs)
And Greece.

CELINE
I don't miss the old days.

A pensive look passes between them.

CELINE (CONT'D)
(turning away)
I have got to go.

She starts to walk away.

JESSE
Celine?

She stops and looks back. Jesse steps up to her.

JESSE (CONT'D)
I just thought, I mean, I was wondering. We just dropped our daughters off for their first year of college. I thought maybe we could get a cup of coffee together and pat ourselves on the back about what a great job we did despite everything. We raised them. We just set them free. Mission accomplished.

CELINE
I don't know that an empty nest is something worth celebrating.

JESSE
Just a cup of coffee. And then you can catch your train.

Celine mulls this over.

CELINE
Where?

JESSE
Just northwest of here. One of my favorite shops. I used to go there all the time when I lived here.

Celine appears to be actually considering this.

CELINE
Is it still along the way?

JESSE
Yes, yes, still along the way.

CELINE
And I will still make my train on time?

JESSE

You will still make your train
before noon at the Christopher
Street station.

She stares at Jesse. She looks in the direction he pointed.
Then back at him. The edge of her lip curls up into a bit of
a smile.

CELINE

Alright.

JESSE

(surprised)
Alright?

CELINE

Yes.

JESSE

Alright!

They set off, strolling past the chess tables set up in the
corner of the park where men of all ages (and a few women)
play. A man and a woman play a game. She moves her piece
into...

CHESS WOMAN

Checkmate!

The man groans while the woman cackles with glee.

EXT. MACDOUGAL STREET

Celine and Jesse stroll along, not saying anything. Just
taking in the storefronts and the passersby who run the gamut
of typical New Yorkers. Some walk, some ride, and some just
stand against the fronts or at the edge of the sidewalk.

Their nervous eyes keep seeking the other out. Then looking
away.

JESSE

I never asked exactly where you
lived when you were in New York.

She points back over her shoulder.

CELINE

It's over there. About two blocks
over. By the *Friends* apartment
building.

JESSE

Really?

CELINE

Really. Do you want to see the
Friends building?

They both look at each other for a moment.

JESSE & CELINE

(together)

No.

Celine's cell phone rings. She fishes it out of her bag and checks out the caller ID.

CELINE

It's Nina.
(answers)
Hi, Pomme.

She steps over to the side of the walk. Jesse does too. He and we listen.

CELINE (CONT'D)

(into phone)

No.

(listen)

No.

(listen)

No.

(listen)

Maybe.

(listen)

It's in the bottom drawer.

(listen)

There you go. You're welcome.

She hangs up. Jesse stares at her.

CELINE (CONT'D)

She was looking for her makeup case.

Jesse nods. They take a few steps.

JESSE

Ella never cared so much about makeup.

CELINE

True. She always wanted to be free and easy. Like her mother.

JESSE

I think both of our girls are a fine combination of mother and father.

CELINE

Except sometimes Ella is too much like her father.

JESSE

And sometimes Nina is too much like her mother.

They both laugh.

Jesse's phone rings. He fishes it out of his pocket.

JESSE (CONT'D)

(checking ID)

It's Ella.

(answers)

Hello?

They step out of the sidewalk flow again.

It's Celine's turn to listen.

JESSE (CONT'D)

(into phone)

Yeah.

(listen)

No.

(listen)

No, she's still here. We're getting coffee together.

(listen)

Yes, I will.

(listen)

I will. I will.

(listen)

Talk to you later.

He hangs up. Celine's turn to stare at him. He slips his phone back in his pocket.

JESSE (CONT'D)

Nothing. Just checking up on us.

They blend into the pedestrian lane and resume walking.

JESSE (CONT'D)

Our daughters are pretty special.

CELINE

Yes, they are.

JESSE

I never knew any twins until we had ours. Twins are amazing.

CELINE

Yes, they are. I could tell they were going to be special when they were still in my womb.

JESSE

How?

Celine places a hand over her belly.

CELINE

I don't know. I just knew. I am glad they have each other as they step off into the world.

JESSE

(nods)

Maybe we all were meant to go two by two through the world.

At the next intersection, they cross.

EXT. PROVINCETOWN PLAYHOUSE

Jesse and Celine arrive in front. He pauses and stares up at the facade. The sign on the door reads closed. He looks in shock.

JESSE

This isn't the Provincetown Playhouse.

CELINE

No, it's not.

JESSE

I saw a lot of plays here. It was my favorite playhouse in the world. This is not how it was.

CELINE

Yeah, they tore it down a couple years ago. NYU wanted to expand their law school.

He continues to stare at it.

CELINE (CONT'D)

They were going to put the new building around it but then they found they couldn't do that without compromising the existing walls so they knocked it all down, built a new theater, and stuck the same name on it.

JESSE

That is so wrong.

CELINE

I know.

JESSE

Eugene O'Neill had his first plays produced here. Bette Davis made her New York stage debut here. Edna St. Vincent Millay, Max Eastman, Theodore Dreiser, Wallace Stevens, John Reed and Louise Bryant.

CELINE

Who?

JESSE

They were a couple. He wrote *Ten Days That Shook The World*, the definitive book about the Russian Revolution and she was a pioneering woman journalist. Remember the movie *Reds*? That was about them.

Celine shrugs. Jesse stares back at the building.

JESSE (CONT'D)

Stephen Sondheim's early works were performed here. American musical theater started here.

CELINE

And now it is gone. All that remains is the name.

JESSE

That is so wrong.

CELINE

That is life. We accept it and move on.

JESSE

I hate that concept.

Reluctantly, Jesse joins her as they continue down the sidewalk.

JESSE (CONT'D)

Do you remember Tex and Karl back in Vienna handing out those fliers for their play?

CELINE

I still have the flier.

JESSE

You do? I'm impressed.

EXT. CORNER OF MACDOUGAL & WEST 3RD STREET

They reach the next intersection. Jesse starts to cross but it is Celine's turn to pause and look. Jesse circles back to her side. She takes off her sunglasses. He follows her gaze down the street.

CELINE

(smiling & pointing)

The Blue Note.

Jesse focuses in on the famous jazz club's sign about a half block down the street.

JESSE

Oh right. I wasn't there very often. I'm not much of a jazz guy.

CELINE

Me either, but I saw Nina Simone there. She was great.

JESSE

I remember.

(doing Nina Simone)

"Baby, you're gonna miss that plane."

The reference makes Celine uncomfortable. She slides the sunglasses back on.

Together, they cross the street and move on.

EXT. CAFFE REGGIO

They arrive in front of the historic cafe with its green facade and sidewalk tables.

JESSE

This is it.

CELINE

Oh, I love this place. I used to come here all the time back in the day.

JESSE

Me too. I loved the history.

CELINE

I loved the atmosphere.

Jesse looks as if he is working up the inner courage to say something. His mouth starts to open just as...

...Celine's cellphone rings again.

CELINE (CONT'D)

One second.

She steps away, turns her back to him, and fishes her phone out of her handbag. She answers it.

CELINE (CONT'D)

Hello?

(listening)

Oh. Yes.

She wanders away to one of the tables.

Jesse stands there for a moment, starts to feel a bit self-conscious so he turns and goes inside.

INT. CAFFE REGGIO

Sparsely populated on this Sunday morning. A couple regulars occupy the tables where they sip their coffees and read the *Sunday Times*.

Jesse steps up to the counter where a barista in her young twenties waits.

JESSE

Two coffees, please.

She smiles at him then hurries off to fulfill his order.

Jesse glances out the window to see Celine still chatting on the phone.

The barista sets the filled cups on the counter.

BARISTA

Two coffees.

Jesse pulls out his wallet to pay.

BARISTA (CONT'D)

You're Jesse Wallace, the author,
aren't you?

JESSE

Um, yes. Yes, I am.

EXT. CAFFE REGGIO

As she half-listens, Celine turns back to the cafe and sees through the window...

...Jesse chatting and laughing with the barista who fiddles with her hair.

Celine bites her lower lip and turns away.

Jesse comes back out with a coffee in each hand. Celine hangs up and stuffs the phone back in her bag.

CELINE

That was Ted. He's back home.

Jesse sets the coffees on the nearest table and takes a seat. After a moment's hesitation, Celine sits in the opposite chair. She takes off her sunglasses and tosses them on the table. She rubs her temples.

Jesse takes in the crow's feet and wrinkles around her eyes. She is older but still lovely.

CELINE (CONT'D)

(noticing his stares)
What?

Once again, Jesse opens his mouth to broach a subject.

This time, the phone in his pocket goes off. He rolls his eyes and fishes his ringing phone out. Celine helps herself to one of the coffees.

JESSE

(looks at the caller ID)
It's Hank.

He answers it. HANK's face pops up on the screen. Ten years since we last saw him in *Before Midnight*. Now in his early twenties but still looking like the teenaged boy from before.

HANK
Hi, Dad!

JESSE
Hey.

Hank appears to be sitting in a kitchen chair while holding a baby.

HANK
Got my sisters all moved in?

JESSE
As much as possible before some
cute boys showed up and they kicked
us out.

Hank snickers at that.

HANK
Those are my sisters. Well, half-
sisters. Progressive and yet still
boy crazy.

Jesse repositions the phone so Celine can see him too.

Hank's eyes widen at the sight of her.

HANK (CONT'D)
Celine! Oh my god, good to see you.

CELINE
Hi, Hank.

JESSE
How's my grandson doing?

Hank raises the baby up so they can see his face.

HANK
Mason is fine. I just finished
giving him his lunch.

The baby appears to be nodding off.

CELINE
Where's Natalie?

Hank resumes rocking the boy.

HANK
Working. Where are you?

JESSE

At a cafe in Greenwich Village.
Having a cup of coffee.
(raises his cup)
What's up?

Hank's expression darkens, resembles the look Jesse had when they arrived at the cafe.

HANK

Well, I wanted to talk to you about something but -

His eyes glance toward Celine.

She senses it.

CELINE

It's okay. You can discuss anything with me. You always have.

Hank looks at the baby in his arms.

HANK

Looks like your grandson is asleep.
I'll put him down and be right back.

Hank disappears off screen.

Jesse and Celine sit there, sipping coffee, looking nervous. Exchanging worried looks.

Hank returns and sits down.

HANK (CONT'D)

I'm back.

And yet he continues to hesitate.

JESSE

So what's on your mind?

Hank finishes his internal debate and opens his mouth.

HANK

I was just wondering --
(sigh)
-- did things change much for you two once you became parents?

JESSE

You mean once we had Ella and Nina.

HANK

Yeah.

JESSE

Of course, it changed.

HANK

I don't have many memories of how it was between you and Mom. Before you divorced and moved in with Celine.

Again, the mention makes the two of them awkward.

HANK (CONT'D)

I just remember it being me and Mom with occasional visits from you.

CELINE

And summers in Paris.

Hank brightens at this.

HANK

I loved those. Especially that last summer in Greece.

More awkwardness.

HANK (CONT'D)

So things change once you become parents?

They both nod.

CELINE

Yes, definitely. So what is different between you and Natalie?

HANK

Well, I don't know, it's just different is all. We have less time for ourselves, less time for a night's out. Less time for everything.

JESSE

That's true.

HANK

We can't go out with friends. We can't find much time for ourselves. And when we do, we're just tired.

JESSE
(laughs)
Welcome to parenthood.

Celine smacks his arm. He looks at her like "What?".

She moves closer to the screen.

CELINE
I hate to tell you this but this is
completely normal.

JESSE
The "new" normal.

Celine glares at him.

CELINE
Be serious for once.

JESSE
I am serious.

Celine turns her attention back to the phone.

CELINE
When you first become a couple, it
is all about you. The two of you.

JESSE
True love.

CELINE
Once you become a parent, it is no
longer about you. It is about them.

JESSE
Real love. Every day challenges.
What the baby needs.

CELINE
Then what the child needs.

JESSE
And then what the teenager wants.

CELINE
Everything is about raising them.

JESSE
Or making sure you have the money
to raise them. It's a balance. It's
a dance.

CELINE

It's a commitment. A commitment you are going to have for the next eighteen years or so.

JESSE

Until they are out the door.

CELINE

And even then you will have challenges to meet.

JESSE

Like becoming a grandpa.

Celine rolls her eyes.

HANK

It's just...it's not the same.

CELINE

And it isn't going to be the same. It will never go back to how it was before. Just know that what you are doing now is more a partnership than a love affair. A partnership focused on raising your son.

JESSE

And how many other children come along.

HANK

I don't know. One seems enough. How did you do it with twins?

They smile.

CELINE

It definitely helps to have two of you, especially in the baby years.

We hear Mason start crying in the next room.

HANK

Right now, I am envying you two. It's all behind you now.

JESSE

Hey, don't write off Mason's childhood. Those are some of the best times. You will always remember them.

The crying persists.

HANK

I guess I've got to go. Celine,
good to see you.

CELINE

You too!

He ends the call. The screen goes blank.

They sit there for a moment. Celine finishes her coffee. She checks out...

...the grey in Jesse's hair. He is looking old.

Jesse appears to be working up the courage to broach a subject again. He opens his mouth just as...

...Celine looks at her phone and sees the time.

CELINE (CONT'D)

Oh my god, I better get going.
(gets to her feet)
Thank you for the coffee. This was
fun. Mostly. Take care.

She moves away.

JESSE

(getting to his feet)
Celine?

Celine puts her sunglasses back on.

JESSE (CONT'D)

Would it be okay if I walked you to
the station?

CELINE

Jesse, I am a 21st century woman. I
am fully capable of walking there
by myself.

JESSE

I know. Boy, do I know. I just want
to hang with you a little longer.
If that's OK?

Celine fidgets for a moment while contemplating this.

CELINE

Okay.

JESSE
Okay?

CELINE
Yes.

JESSE
Okay.

She starts off.

Jesse empties his coffee cup then tosses it in the nearest trash can. On its side reads: "Save the world! Recycle!" He hurries to catch up with Celine who is already moving down the sidewalk.

EXT. FURTHER DOWN MACDOUGAL STREET

He falls in beside her.

JESSE
I wonder how the girls are doing
with those boys.

CELINE
I'd rather not think about it.
It was good to see Hank again.

JESSE
It was. It was. I don't really talk
to him very often now that he is
married and grown.

CELINE
I suppose that is how it goes. Did
you talk to your parents much once
you were an adult?

Jesse shakes his head.

JESSE
Once they divorced, my parents
seemed more interested in doing
their own thing than staying in
touch with me. Dad remarried and
moved on with his life and Mom
centered everything around her
bitterness. Just like my ex-wife.

CELINE

I talked to my parents every day. But we lived closer together as well. Do you think our daughters will ditch us at some point?

Jesse shrugs.

JESSE

I doubt it. I mean, even when they move far away, they can stay in touch in ways we never could back when we were growing up. You and I could only write letters or make a very expensive long distance phone call. Look at us now. We just had a video chat with Hank while sitting at a cafe table in New York and he's in Chicago. It's like we are the Jetsons or something. Still no flying cars though.

They walk along for a bit.

CELINE

I sometimes wonder if the world is changing too fast. All this technology dominates our lives now. It didn't even exist twenty years ago and now everything is filtered through it. Kids spend too much time online and not enough time having real world experiences.

JESSE

Like meeting strangers on a train and getting off with them in old Vienna?

CELINE

You know what I mean.

They continue to stroll.

JESSE

I'm okay with the changes. The internet, social media. Like JFK said, the torch has passed to a new generation. We're now the older generation that we used to blame the world's problems on when we were young.

CELINE

I didn't contribute to the world's problems. If anything, I tried to solve them.

JESSE

But we didn't solve them. We tried but we didn't. Maybe that is what they can't forgive us for.

A gaggle of young people hurry by (a collection of all races and all genders) and continue down the street.

JESSE (CONT'D)

God, look at how young they are. It amazes me how young we were when we met.

CELINE

The problem is that I have never felt young. I have always felt old.

JESSE

Even in Vienna?

CELINE

Even then.

JESSE

We were so stupid to not trade phone numbers or addresses. If we had met just a couple years later we would at least of had email to find the other. What were we thinking? Just a vague promise to reunite on that Vienna train platform six months later.

CELINE

Which didn't happen. But we did find each other again.

JESSE

Only because you sought me out at that Paris bookstore.

CELINE

Only because you wrote that book. Up until that point I didn't think you remembered me at all.

JESSE

I have never forgotten you from the first moment I saw you.

That thought makes Celine a bit uncomfortable.

JESSE (CONT'D)

I just remember what a breath of fresh air you were back then. Especially after my girlfriend dumped me in Madrid.

CELINE

Maybe she finally saw through you.

JESSE

Do you remember what that fortune teller said about you? The flower peddler?

CELINE

Vaguely.

JESSE

She said you needed to resign yourself to the awkwardness of life. Only when you found peace within yourself would you find true happiness. So have you?

CELINE

You remember all that?

JESSE

I do.

CELINE

I remember you didn't like what she had to say about you at all.

JESSE

True. But over the years I came to realize that she was right. I have been learning my entire life.

CELINE

I am not sure you have learned anything. Most men are too scared to learn.

JESSE

Not true.

CELINE

So what have you learned?

JESSE

That when we are together like this
we exist outside of place and time.
Like it was back then. Just like it
is now.

She laughs at this.

JESSE (CONT'D)

It's true. So walking around Vienna
when did you know I was the one?

CELINE

I'm still not sure you are the one.

JESSE

I remember when I realized it. The
first time we kissed on the Ferris
Wheel. Floating above the Prater
and Vienna. It felt like I had
finally found my other half. My
soulmate. How about you?

CELINE

Oh, Jesse, why are you even asking
me? I'm old enough to know now that
there is no such thing.

JESSE

You told me then that you decided
to have sex with me as soon as you
met me. Long before I asked you to
get off the train. So I am asking
when did you know I was the one?

CELINE

I don't want to talk about this.

EXT. PANCHITO'S

A Mexican restaurant with a number of CLOSED signs hung in
the windows.

JESSE

Oh my god. They're closed.

Celine circles back.

JESSE (CONT'D)

I mean closed closed.

He cups his eyes and tries to look in the dark windows.

CELINE

So?

JESSE

You don't understand. This used to be a bar called The Common. It's where Bob Dylan wrote "Blowin' In the Wind". This should be a national monument. And now it's gone like The Bitter End and Cafe Au GoGo and CBGBs.

They walk on but Jesse looks deflated.

EXT. MACDOUGAL & BLEEKER STREET

They arrive at this intersection. Celine starts to turn right but Jesse finds himself drawn to the left. He stares down the street at something unseen.

JESSE

(points down the street)
They were all down there.

CELINE

And they're all gone now.

JESSE

Damn, that sucks.

Celine points back in the opposite direction.

CELINE

The future is that-a-way.

She starts back up the way she started. Jesse follows along but he keeps glancing back.

EXT. BLEEKER STREET

He falls in alongside her.

JESSE

I remember there was one night back in the day when I was stumbling home after an all night party. Drunk off my ass, barely able to stand. And as I walked by Marie's Crisis Bar over on Grove Street there was a guy there playing the piano. So I stopped to listen and it was so beautiful.

(MORE)

JESSE (CONT'D)

And then he stopped playing, I don't know, maybe he sensed I was there. But he turned around and I swear to God it was Stephen Sondheim. The actual man. And he smiled at me so I smiled back.

CELINE

That's neat. It's too bad he is gone.

JESSE

Yeah.

JESSE (CONT'D)

Do you ever miss those days?

CELINE

The clubs?

JESSE

Yeah. Back when you were alone and fancy free here in the Big Apple.

CELINE

No. It was a fun time in my past. But now it is gone.

JESSE

You really don't miss it?

CELINE

No.

JESSE

You don't ever think about it?

CELINE

(getting irritated)

No.

JESSE

You never think back on all the good times you had?

CELINE

No! Why? Do you?

JESSE

All the time. When I see objects or things I think about when I saw them before. What we were doing or saying. Like your guitar.

CELINE

You would.

JESSE

It's one of my greatest strengths
as a writer.

CELINE

Looking back on things is just
another opportunity to tell
another myth about yourself.
Because we don't remember how it
was. We remember how we wish it was
and that eventually replaces the
truth.

JESSE

"When the legend becomes fact,
print the legend."

CELINE

Huh?

JESSE

The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance.

She shrugs it off.

CELINE

Why would someone waste their time
thinking about something they could
never have or experience again? It
just makes you feel sad and
depressed.

JESSE

I thought you said you never
thought about them.

She glares his way.

JESSE (CONT'D)

You are a bastard. You have always
been a bastard. I am sorry I got
off that train with you. And I am
sorry we ever got back together.

JESSE (CONT'D)

But I'll bet you are not sorry
about our two daughters.

CELINE

No, of course, I am not sorry about
that.

(MORE)

CELINE (CONT'D)

You always take my words out of context and manipulate them to your own advantage.

She speeds up. He falls behind.

Jesse hurries to catch up again.

EXT. BLEEKER STREET, FURTHER NORTHWEST

Celine marches along. For the first time, she appears to be in a hurry to reach her destination. Jesse catches up and falls in alongside of her. He opens his mouth to speak but decides against it and clamps his mouth back shut.

Celine can tell he is there but she chooses to look straight ahead.

The number of pedestrians on the sidewalk increases. It gets harder for Jesse to remain behind her, but he does even if it means bumping shoulders with other passersby.

They glower at him. Some raise their arms and growl at him. After a couple pedestrians do this, Jesse spins around.

JESSE

(doing Dustin Hoffman in
Midnight Cowboy)

"Hey, I'm walking here. I'm walking here."

It makes Celine grin a little though she keeps her head turned away so Jesse cannot see her expression.

JESSE (CONT'D)

(grins at her)

I always wanted to do that.

They continue their way to the end of the block.

EXT. FURTHER UP BLEECKER STREET

They walk along not saying much. Celine pulls out her phone and glances at the time before shoving it back in.

Jesse's phone rings. He pulls it out, checks the ID, and answers it.

JESSE

Hey, guy!
(to Celine)
It's Hank again.

Jesse listens, slows down but keeps walking. Celine slows down as well, matches his pace and listens in.

JESSE (CONT'D)
No, no, that's okay. I understand.

What he hears brings him up short.

JESSE (CONT'D)
Oh wow! Really? You're kidding?

Celine stops next to him.

JESSE (CONT'D)
Oh, I remember her. I remember her very well.

Celine leans in to listen.

JESSE (CONT'D)
After all these years? Wow. Well, what did she say?

He listens. So does Celine though she can't really tell what's going on.

JESSE (CONT'D)
Oh wow.

He steps over to the side. Celine follows him.

JESSE (CONT'D)
Oh wow. Well, how do you feel about that?

More listening.

JESSE (CONT'D)
What do I think you should do?

He glances at Celine then pulls away. Moves a few steps down the sidewalk and turns his back on her. Which ticks her off. Neither she, nor we, can hear what he is saying but he is saying it very emphatically with hand gestures and all.

Then he hangs up and comes back. Slips the phone back in his pocket.

JESSE (CONT'D)
Oh wow.

Celine raises her arms like "What?".

JESSE (CONT'D)

That was Hank.

CELINE

You said that.

He takes Celine by the arm and ushers her into the nearest coffee shop.

INT. COFFEE SHOP

Jesse leads Celine inside. It's newer than Cafe Reggio with a totally different vibe: louder and trendier and populated by hipsters who regard the older Jesse and Celine with sardonic stares.

Jesse grabs the first vacant table. They sit down.

JESSE

Do you remember that last summer in Greece? Do you remember Melina?

CELINE

Of course.

A waitress with many prominent piercings arrives with iPad in hand.

WAITRESS

Get you something?

JESSE

Ah yeah. Coffee. Just coffee. Your most basic and simple kind.

(holds up two fingers)

Two.

She frowns but heads off to fill their order.

JESSE (CONT'D)

So, yeah, Melina. The little summer romance she and Hank had when we were in Greece nine years ago.

CELINE

They were so cute together.

JESSE

True. Except, speaking of email, he just got an email from Melina.

First time he has heard from her in those nine years.

(MORE)

JESSE (CONT'D)

Apparently, she is in town studying at the University of Chicago and she wants to meet him for coffee.

CELINE

You're kidding.

At this, the waitress returns with two coffees in what appear to be European mugs. She sets them down and moves on.

JESSE

That's right. She says she has never forgotten him since that summer in Greece. She would like to meet him for coffee or, if he would like to meet some place more private, she has a friend who would let them use her house for the afternoon.

CELINE

What?

Jesse takes a drink of the coffee. Celine seems to still be taking it all in.

CELINE (CONT'D)

What did you tell him?

JESSE

I asked him if he was interested in seeing her again and he said he was but he didn't want to do anything wrong.

CELINE

And what else did he say?

JESSE

He also said he was tempted.

Celine shakes her head.

JESSE (CONT'D)

So I told him he needed to decide what he felt for Melina and what he felt for Natalie. Whether it was true love or real love.

CELINE

What the hell kind of advice is that? He's married!

JESSE

So was I when we got back together.

Disgusted, she slams her fist on the table (catching the attention of nearby patrons) and hustles out - slamming the glass door behind her. Jesse rolls his eyes. He slams down his coffee, tosses a few bills on the table, and follows her out.

EXT. FURTHER UP BLEECKER STREET

Jesse emerges, sights Celine, and hurries after her.

He catches up very quickly even though she has a good head of steam.

JESSE

What's your problem?

CELINE

He's married.

JESSE

I repeat: I was married when we got back together in Paris. How is this different? He's an adult. He has to decide what is best for him.

She wheels around to face him.

CELINE

And what the hell is this true love vs. real love crap? I have never heard of such a thing.

JESSE

Maybe it's just something I came up with.

She shakes her head and starts walking along. He falls right in beside her like it is the most natural thing in the world.

JESSE (CONT'D)

True love is a meeting of minds between two people. A feeling of connection that is almost spiritual. It is emotional. It is carnal. A connection that transcends time and distance.

Celine looks like she thinks this is a bunch of hoey.

JESSE (CONT'D)

Real love, or I guess I should say real world love, is a bond forged between two people through shared values and the ability to solve real world problems together. It is more situational and practical but probably in the long run more durable.

CELINE

That makes no sense.

JESSE

Oh, I don't know. I bet you George back there, old Father Of Our Country George would understand it. I bet he had a true love connection with married Sally Fairfax that they may or may not have acted on but he had a real love bond with Martha. Which is why they probably stayed together while Sally went back to England.

Celine starts to slow down which pleases Jesse because he is almost out of breath.

JESSE (CONT'D)

If you can combine the two kinds together then that is when you've found your soulmate.

They reach the next intersection and wait with the crowd for the light to change.

CELINE

There's no such thing as a soulmate. And there's no such thing as love, real or true.

JESSE

Really? What about the connection you and I have? What about the love between Hester Prynne back there and the Reverend Dimmesdale?

The light changes and the crowd crosses but they remain in place.

CELINE

I always hated *The Scarlet Letter*.

JESSE

I prefer *The House of the Seven Gables* myself. But why?

CELINE

Why what?

JESSE

Why do you hate *The Scarlet Letter*?

CELINE

Because he demonizes women. He condemns women for having a sex drive and acting on their desires.

JESSE

He doesn't condemn women. That's how Puritan society was back then. And the hypocrisy of the reverend for fathering an out of wedlock baby but not owning up to it.

CELINE

But he chose that story so that he could condemn women and their behavior. That is still how men chose the stories to tell today. Either women are whores or goddesses or saints. Still.

JESSE

But can't women be all of those things? Don't the problems of the world happen when people deny essential sides of themselves? We are all saints. We are all sinners. We are all sexual beings. We are both male and female.

CELINE

Yes, but men can't help trying to find the ideal woman. And if they can't find them then they keep trying to create them. Like in Hawthorne's "Heidegger's Daughter" where the guy keeps trying to remove the blemish from his daughter's face and when he finally succeeds, he kills her.

JESSE

You are thinking of "The Birth-Mark".

CELINE

What?

JESSE

That wasn't "Heidegger's Experiment". It was another Hawthorne short story called "The Birth-Mark". And it wasn't his daughter but his wife.

CELINE

Well, that doesn't matter.

JESSE

Well, it kind of does.

CELINE

Stop trying to correct me.

JESSE

I am only pointing out when you are wrong.

The light changes back and people stop around them waiting for it to change.

CELINE

No, you are trying to invalidate my point.

JESSE

Not in the least.

CELINE

Well, you are.

JESSE

No, I am not. I was just trying to point out a mistake. Finish your point.

CELINE

Oh, thank you. Thank you so much for granting me permission to finish my point.

JESSE

That is NOT what I was trying to do. I was trying to be polite. Please finish your point.

Celine looks surprised to find herself out of breath.

CELINE

I just think that Emily Dickinson gives a truer sense of what love really means.

JESSE

Emily Dickinson who spent most of her life alone only dreaming about love but never putting it into practice in the real world. That isn't true or even real love. That is hothouse love. The kind of love that can only survive when kept behind glass. It's a fantasy that cannot survive in the real world.

She just glares at him.

JESSE (CONT'D)

Am I right?

CELINE

Why do you always have to have the last word?

The light changes and she starts off across the street with the crowd.

JESSE

And you don't?

He smiles and follows her across.

EXT. FATHER DEMO SQUARE

They reach the end of the next block where the intersection contains a pair of small parks. Father Demo Square on their right and Winston Churchill Square across the street on the left.

Celine stops in her tracks even though the light is green and they can cross. Instead, she steps out of the pedestrian rush so she can get a better look. Jesse does too. He looks around, trying to discern what she is seeing. He can't.

JESSE

What?

Celine just stands there. For a second, she almost seems to be tearing up.

She steps over the low hanging chain barricade. Reaching down, she steps out of her sandals then wriggles her toes in the well-manicured lawn.

It makes her giggle.

Jesse looks perplexed. Celine walks around, shuffling her bare feet through the blades of grass.

CELINE

When I lived here back in the `90s,
this was my favorite place to
visit.

Jesse stands listening.

CELINE (CONT'D)

Living in the city was great but
every once in awhile I would start
to really miss grass. The feel of
it between your toes. The color
green itself. Probably the hardest
color to find in New York.

Jesse nods.

JESSE

I used to like to come here too.

CELINE

Why?

JESSE

Because it reminded me of the park
back in Vienna. Where we spent the
night.

Celine's bit of bliss becomes tempered by bittersweet.

CELINE

Me too.

JESSE

So you do think back on the good
times in your life.

She drops her sandals onto the ground and slips them back on. She steps over the low hanging chains and onto the sidewalk.

They rejoin the crowd waiting for the light to change. Celine looks uncomfortable like she let a bit of her mask down.

JESSE (CONT'D)

Can I ask you a question? Why did we end? Why did we go our separate ways after Greece? I've never understood why.

The light turns green. Celine hurries into the intersection. Once again, she leaves Jesse a couple steps behind but he hurries to catch back up.

Celine waits on the other side wearing a bemused expression.

CELINE

It always amazes me how much bullshit you men can come up with over something that is a simple biological connection. Something our bodies conjure up for the simple act of procreation. People meet. They mate. They move on.

She resumes walking up the street. He follows and they leave the square.

JESSE

That is true. That is very true. We met. We had a physical connection. And we produced our two lovely daughters.

CELINE

I did that. You were just the drone.

JESSE

That also true. Although I'd like to think I helped more than that little bit. Not only at the conception stage, and by the way I still remember that night and it was like wow, unbelievable, but also helped to raise them and shape their personalities along the way.

Celine just rolls her eyes.

JESSE (CONT'D)

But if all romance is this temporary physical connection that biology forces on us to make babies so our species doesn't die out then why did I go back six months later to Vienna to find you?

(MORE)

JESSE (CONT'D)

Why did you deliberately choose to seek me out in Paris nine years after that? It could not have just been random biology.

Celine has had enough of this.

CELINE

This was a mistake.

JESSE

What? Why? I'm just asking questions.

She whips around.

CELINE

Why are you doing this? Why are you bringing up things that were resolved years ago? We are over, Jesse. We are done. It has been over for years. We have moved on. At least I have. I'm with Ted now. I can't help it if you are still alone.

She starts back up the street. Jesse remains where he stands like a guy who has taken some emotional bullets to the chest. Soon enough, he collects himself and looks around.

His eyes widen as he realizes where they are. They have reached the next intersection.

EXT. HOUSTON STREET

They reach the cross street and turn right. Film Forum is a half block ahead on the left.

JESSE

Oh man, there it is. Wow.

Celine looks at the marquee then to Jesse. He has an almost worshipful, reverent look on his face. It makes her smile.

JESSE (CONT'D)

All the great movies I saw there. *Metropolis* and *Persona* and *The Seventh Seal* and the *Russian War and Peace*. That was over six hours long.

CELINE

Leave Her to Heaven.

JESSE

And *Reds*.

CELINE

Anything with Isabelle Huppert. *Entre Nous*, *The Lady of the Camellias*, *Violette*, *Loulou*, *The Story of Women*, *Every Man For Himself*. That's why I call Ella "Pomme". It was Isabelle's character's nickname in *The Lacemaker*. Such a great film.

JESSE

Jean Renoir's *Grand Illusion* and *Boudu Saved From Drowning* and *The Rules of the Game*.

CELINE

I don't think anybody knows the rules yet.

JESSE

Or My Dinner With Andre. Just two guys sitting around a restaurant talking for the whole movie. Imagine anybody going to see a film just to watch two people having a conversation.

CELINE

It seems rather silly when you think about it.

They begin walking down the sidewalk across the street from it. But Jesse's eyes remain riveted on the marquee.

JESSE

All great movies and nobody talks about them anymore. Does anybody under 30 even know Ingmar Bergman?

CELINE

Probably not. They would have to know of him in order to go look him up. That's what I don't like about the internet. You have to already know about something in order to look it up. It's like when libraries switched over from card catalogs to computer databases.

(MORE)

CELINE (CONT'D)

Some days I used to go to the library and pull a drawer out of the card catalog and just let my fingers do the walking. I found a lot of great books that way. You can't do that so easily with a database.

JESSE

Too true.

They pass by a bench facing the street and the theater.

CELINE

I loved *Persona*. One of the few movies to get right what it's like to be a woman.

JESSE

And made by a man.

CELINE

By a man who had the intelligence to listen and collaborate with the women in his movie. Liv Ullmann is great. Bibi Anderson is great.

He takes a seat on the bench.

JESSE

I love the scene of them talking about meeting the boys on the beach.

CELINE

You would.

JESSE

Oh, and that shot where he combines the two halves of their faces into one. Unbelievable.

CELINE

Amazing.

JESSE

Did you see *Fanny and Alexander*?

She joins him on the bench.

CELINE

Of course. My mother took me to see it when I was fourteen. I loved the house the family lived in.

(MORE)

CELINE (CONT'D)

The way it went on and on. It seemed like a world of its own. I always wanted to live in a place like that.

JESSE

I loved the speech the father gave to the theater company on Christmas Eve.

He looks to be trying to think of it.

JESSE (CONT'D)

"My dear friends, I love this little world inside the thick walls of this playhouse...outside is the big world and sometimes our little world succeeds in reflecting the big one so that we understand it better."

CELINE

"Or perhaps we give the people who come here a chance to forget for awhile the harsh world outside."

They give each other intimate glances.

JESSE

That courtyard you lived at in Paris when we met again reminded me of that kind of place.

CELINE

Really?

JESSE

Yeah.

CELINE

Interesting.

JESSE

Now I just feel like that old guy in *Wild Strawberries*. Or playing chess with Death in *The Seventh Seal*.

CELINE

My film teacher at NYU loved the last scene where Death leads them off to the hereafter and the characters dance along behind him.

(MORE)

CELINE (CONT'D)

She used to say "The dance of life is the dance of death."

JESSE

I can't remember the last time I had a movie experience like that. A movie or a book that enables us to step outside our existence and see ourselves anew. Maybe that is something we can only have when we are young.

(looks her way)

Do you think we were ever at a screening together?

CELINE

Here? I don't know. Maybe. We used to go to showings at Cinematheque. I remember watching a lot of Bertolucci and Truffaut and Alain Resnais.

JESSE

Hiroshima Mon Amour and *Last Year at Marienbad* are two of my favorite romantic films.

CELINE

Really? You could never tell what was going on.

JESSE

That's why they're my favorite romantic movies. What are yours?

CELINE

I don't have a favorite romance movie.

JESSE

Liar. Everyone has a favorite romance movie.

CELINE

I just remember you wanting to chain me up to the gates like Eva Green in that Bertolucci movie.

JESSE

Ah, *The Dreamers*. Love that movie.

Celine just shakes her head. They sit for a moment.

CELINE

I hated the one where they actually killed a cat on screen.

JESSE

Yeah. *Novecento*. I wouldn't call that a romantic movie.

CELINE

Nor would I. That's five and a half hours of my life I would like back.

JESSE

But you can't really count those screenings at Cinematheque. They were different. We had already met. But what would it have been like for us to meet here?

He walks his fingers in her direction across the back of the bench. But as soon as the tips of his fingers touch her shoulder, Celine jumps to her feet.

CELINE

I have no idea. I hate the idea of dating again anyway.

JESSE

What are you talking about? You and I dated.

CELINE

No, we didn't. We met and walked around Vienna for a night. Then nine years later we met and walked around Paris for an afternoon. Then we became a couple and then I got pregnant.

JESSE

And nine years later we walked around Greece and you decided to break up. And now it's nine years later and here we are walking around Greenwich Village trying to figure out what comes next.

CELINE

You're the only one trying to figure out what comes next. I know where my future lies.

She stands there with arms folded. Jesse gets to his feet.

JESSE

So what did you hate about dating?

CELINE

The fact that it is all play acting. Nobody is being themselves. They are just trying to be the thing the other finds appealing. And then they get married and discover the real person isn't anything like the person they fell in love with. So they get divorced and start the ridiculous process all over again. Leaving us women alone with the emotional baggage.

She frumps back in the direction they came. Jesse casts one last look at the Film Forum then joins Celine in moving on.

EXT. BACK UP HOUSTON STREET

The two walk along, both looking more circumspect.

JESSE

You've changed.

CELINE

Have I? Are you sure? Because I don't think I have changed at all.

JESSE

No, you've changed. You're turning into a bitter old lady.

CELINE

Well, so what if I am? I think that is a good thing.

JESSE

No, it's not. No, it's not. I mean what happened to the rest of you? There used to be two Celines.

CELINE

What do you mean?

JESSE

What happened to your idealism? That used to color your whole perspective: human rights and saving the world and all.

CELINE

I came to the conclusion that the world didn't want to be saved. That the people all around us were quite happy with everything turning to shit as long as they could still live on their phone and they didn't have to leave their home to do anything.

Her phone goes off. She hurries to get it out of her purse and answer.

CELINE (CONT'D)

Hello? Yes, Ted.

Celine steps away and turns her back on him.

CELINE (CONT'D)

It's in the cabinet under the island. No. In the cabinet.

Jesse looks around, trying not to listen to the conversation.

CELINE (CONT'D)

No, I am not dawdling. We are almost at the station now. I'll be home in an hour.

(listens)

Yes. Yes.

Jesse forces a sad smile on his face. The smile of someone who knows he has lost the girl of his dreams.

CELINE (CONT'D)

Yes. I swear. Talk with you soon.

She hangs up and stuffs the phone back in her purse.

CELINE (CONT'D)

Ted.

JESSE

I heard.

CELINE

He'd be lost without me.

JESSE

Is that the kind of man you prefer? Someone whose dependent on you?

CELINE

And what about you? You haven't changed a bit. You still dress like a teenager.

JESSE

I take that as a compliment.

CELINE

Well, you shouldn't. Living with you was like living with an arrested adolescent boy. Everything is golly gee. Isn't that amazing? Isn't that wonderful? Aren't you still beautiful?

He glances at her.

JESSE

But you are still beautiful.

She shakes her head, looking away.

CELINE

No, I am not. I am fat and I am old and I am ugly. I don't know why you can't see that. Look at all the people passing us by. Am I turning anybody's head? Does anyone even notice me?

JESSE

I'm noticing you.

CELINE

You don't count.

JESSE

Apparently, I never did. I mean, c'mon, don't most of us long for one person to come along, one person, who loves them and honors them and sees them for who they are? And the only way for a person to see who they are is through the eyes of another. Because each of us is horrible at seeing ourselves. We judge ourselves. We deride ourselves. We play down our talents and we elevate our faults. I do it. You do it. Every human being does it.

A woman strolls by in a skimpy bikini top and short shorts and sunglasses.

JESSE (CONT'D)

Except maybe her.

Celine watches her go.

CELINE

Actually, she is the saddest person on this street.

JESSE

What makes you say that?

CELINE

Because she needs the approval of men to feel good about herself.

JESSE

Maybe she just accepts the fact that she is drop dead gorgeous and has no problem showing it off to the world. You know, when you got it, flaunt it.

CELINE

Women don't think that way.

JESSE

Yes, they do. Maybe women like you don't.

CELINE

Oh, like me? Like me? You mean the ugly and the fat and the unhappy ones?

JESSE

Have you ever wondered why you are unhappy?

CELINE

I am not unhappy.

JESSE

Yes, you are.

CELINE

I am not.

JESSE

You're in denial.

CELINE

No, I am better off than almost anyone else on this street.

JESSE

Why is that?

CELINE

Because I am able to see myself for who I am. Not some idealized notion of who I am. Who I am exactly, realistically. I know I am not the smartest person in the world. I know I am not the most beautiful. And I am okay with that. It is just fine being an average woman who is loved by an average man.

JESSE

Meaning Ted.

CELINE

Yes. Ted.

JESSE

So you are just going to spend the rest of your life up there in Tarrytown? You're just going to hole up in your house like Emily Dickinson? Watch the world pass by outside your window? And wait for death to gladly stop for you?

She once again storms forward down the sidewalk.

EXT. BEDFORD STREET

Celine comes around the corner and continues up the street. Her lips are pursed. Her stride is fast.

After a moment, Jesse comes around the corner and hurries after her.

JESSE

Celine! Slow up.

She doesn't.

CELINE

Why do you want to know that? Why is it even important to you?

JESSE

Slow down!

She does slow. In fact, she comes to a halt. Jesse almost slams into her but manages to miss and stop right beside her.

Celine stares at the courtyard to her left. Jesse pauses to take it all in as well. It is so beautiful.

CELINE

(takes off her shades)

Wow.

EXT. BEDFORD COURTYARD

It appears to be classic Greenwich Village come alive with the Federalist style buildings and the grass and the trees. Like a little oasis away from the world.

The two of them start walking down its cobblestone walk.

JESSE

Why didn't you show up in Vienna?

CELINE

I told you. My grandmother's funeral. She died and I had to be there.

JESSE

But what was the real reason?

CELINE

I told you.

JESSE

Come on. The truth.

She stands there for a second.

CELINE

After we went our separate ways that first time, all I could do was think of you. Whether I was with my parents or out with friends or sitting in class or studying at all, all I could do was think of you. Your smile and your touch and how unbelievably safe it felt to be in your arms. I had been with boys before and it was never like that. And that's when I knew.

JESSE
Knew what?

CELINE
That I was going to meet you on
that platform in Vienna.

JESSE
But you didn't.

CELINE
No.

JESSE
Why?

She puts her glasses back on. They resume walking around the courtyard. Both checking out the tall majestic trees at its center.

JESSE (CONT'D)
Can I tell you something? Something
I never told you before? Something
that happened to me after we went
our own ways after Vienna?

Celine doesn't indicate "no".

JESSE (CONT'D)
I was back in the states thinking
about you. Wondering about going
back to meet you as we promised.
Wondering if that night we had was
real or whether it was just a one
time thing. Lightning in a bottle
that can't be captured again. Was I
being realistic or was I being Jay
Gatsby reaching my hands out to
touch the green light.

CELINE
You mean whether I was real or just
a shallow rich girl like Daisy
Buchanan?

JESSE
No. I knew you weren't shallow.

CELINE
And that I definitely wasn't rich.

He steps off the walk and lays a hand on one of the trees.

JESSE

Then one night I had a dream. I was standing on the lawn of my parents' house. I tried to move but realized that I couldn't. I couldn't because I was a tree. I think I was a sycamore.

Celine shoots him a skeptical look.

JESSE (CONT'D)

I know. But I was. My legs were roots extending down into the ground and my arms were branches, only they didn't reach up. They extended into the ground as well. It felt like they were attached to something. So I shook my branches as hard as I could. I pulled and I pulled and I pulled until suddenly the earth gave way and they sprang up out of the ground.

He runs his hand along its branch.

JESSE (CONT'D)

And that's when I realized that I was attached to the tree next to me. And your face was on that tree. You opened your eyes and smiled at me. And I felt a contentment and a connection to you that I had never felt before or since.

He sits down on the root of the tree.

JESSE (CONT'D)

That's when I knew that you and I were joined together. Forever. And that's when I knew I was going to go back to Vienna to see you again. That's when I knew that you were my soulmate.

Celine just stands there staring at him. It is difficult to read her expression.

CELINE

And so you journeyed back to that train platform in Vienna and put up those signs for a girl who was so stupid she decided to not even show up.

JESSE

What can I say? I'm a stupid
romantic at heart. And so are you.

She takes off her sunglasses and wipes tears out of her eyes.

CELINE

I was terrified that you wouldn't
be there. And that would be when I
knew that I meant nothing to you.
That I was just a one night stand.
And I would be standing there alone
on that train platform bawling my
eyes out while everyone stared at
me.

JESSE

But I was there.

CELINE

I know. That's the worst part.

Neither looks to know what to say to the other.

EXT. BEDFORD STREET

Celine comes out of the courtyard and continues up the
street. Her lips pursed. Her stride fast. After a moment,
Jesse steams around the same corner and hurries after her.

JESSE

Celine!

She halts and whirls around to face him.

CELINE

The problem with you is that there
has always been two Jesses.

JESSE

What do you mean? Two Jesses?

CELINE

Oh, there can be two Celines but
not two Jesses?

JESSE

I didn't say that.

CELINE

It's just like your true love vs.
real love nonsense. Or soulmate
bullshit.

JESSE
It's not bullshit.

CELINE
Yes, it is. Just like the bullshit
that there are two Celines. There
is only one Celine but I will tell
you that there are two Jesses.

That brings him up short.

JESSE
Well, of course there is. Just like
there are two sides to every person
who ever lived. Including Celine.

CELINE
Not true. Not true.

JESSE
OK, well, since I clearly cannot
see both sides of me, please try
and enlighten me.

CELINE
Oh, I will. The first Jesse is a
wonderful man. He is sweet and
thoughtful. He's a good father and
a relatively good husband when he
isn't all wrapped up in his work.

Jesse shrugs. He believes that is pretty accurate.

They reach the next intersection and cross.

EXT. NORTH OF DOWNING STREET

They cross and resume walking.

CELINE
But then there is the insecure
Jesse. The Jesse who needs his
fragile ego stroked. The Jesse who
still dresses like he is sixteen
years old.

He sighs and nods. His clothes make it silly to contradict
her.

CELINE (CONT'D)

The Jesse who only has eyes for Celine unless he falls under the spell of an enthusiastic groupie who can't wait to get her hands all over him and suck his dick. But I suppose that is just customer relations. And you will justify it by giving me some bullshit about how humans are not meant to be monogamous.

JESSE

Well, they aren't. But that doesn't mean they can't be. It's a balance. It's a dance.

She wheels around and faces him.

CELINE

So I am going to ask you again that same question I asked you nine years ago that you refused to answer. Did you sleep with that girl in Washington DC? That bookstore girl? Emily.

JESSE

What girl? I don't even remember such a girl.

She starts walking again.

CELINE

See? I knew you wouldn't answer. Tell you what? Let's make it easier for your primitive male brain. What about today's girl?

JESSE

What today's girl?

She faces him again.

CELINE

The girl back at Caffè Reggio. The barista. I saw the way she was looking at you.

JESSE

You mean the girl who I was having a polite conversation with while you were on the phone with your current boyfriend?

That pisses her off. And they're walking again.

JESSE (CONT'D)

Why do I get accused every time a girl decides to take it on herself to flirt with me?

She just shakes her head. If anything, she ups her speed.

They reach the next intersection and cross.

EXT. NORTH OF CAMINO STREET

Jesse and Celine reach the sidewalk and keep walking.

JESSE

Did I ever tell you why my parents got divorced? The real reason? Because my father got tired of being accused by my mother of fooling around every time he went away on a business trip. He decided one day that if he was going to get the grief for doing nothing then he might as well enjoy the apples falling from the trees as well.

CELINE

That's a horrible justification for infidelity.

JESSE

More horrible than being accused of it when you have been nothing but true?

She spins back around.

CELINE

Have you been true? Have you always been true to me?

JESSE

I'm here, aren't I?

That ticks her off.

CELINE

That's still not an answer.
(on her way again)
And now you've got your son believing the same stupid bullshit.

JESSE

How so?

CELINE

You've got him ready to blow up his marriage to that perfectly nice girl all for the sake of some girl from his past that he barely even knew.

JESSE

Oh, you mean like you? That girl who I spent the most magical night of my life with back in Vienna and who I reconnected with in Paris nine years later? That girl?

Celine just sighs.

CELINE

You know, I think I just want to walk to the train station alone, okay?

JESSE

Ah, I see. Just like you just want to walk through the rest of your life alone?

Celine glances in the window of a bar they are passing. Jesse does too.

The TV over the bar is playing a news report about the reconstruction of Notre Dame cathedral in Paris.

JESSE (CONT'D)

Do you remember when we met in Paris and we took that boat ride down the Seine? We went right by Notre Dame. When the news broke that it caught fire, that boat ride was the first thing I thought of.

CELINE

When I saw the pictures of it burning, I just cried and cried. I literally cried.

JESSE

Me too. But now they are rebuilding it and in a couple of years it will be back to its former glory. That's something we can do too.

Celine frowns and continues on. They reach the next intersection where Bedford Street meets 7th Avenue South with a triangle in the center.

EXT. TRIANGLE - CENTER OF 7TH AVENUE SOUTH

They reach another oasis of green in the center of a Big Apple intersection. Celine stumbles to the nearest bench and sits.

CELINE

Jesse, why are you doing this to me?

He comes over and leans on the bench.

JESSE

Because I want some answers.
Because I want to know why we ended
and why we can't get back together.

They just sit there in silence for a moment.

He sits down on the bench next to her.

CELINE

It's too late, Jesse. Even if they rebuilt it exactly, Notre Dame will never be the same, really. And even if we got back together, it will never be the same either.

JESSE

I don't want it to be the same. I am not some romantically naive Jay Gatsby. I know you can't repeat the past. I just want us to be together here. In the present. And in the future.

They just sit there in silence for a moment.

JESSE (CONT'D)

Tell you what, let's each promise to answer a question. The question that each of us most wants to have the other answer. The question that has been bothering both of us for most of our relationship and which has been slowly eroding the ground beneath us for a long time.

She looks at him.

JESSE (CONT'D)

And because I already know your question, I will even give you a bonus question you can ask. Agreed?

She looks him up and down.

CELINE

Agreed.

JESSE

Yes. Thank you. Finally.
(looks into her eyes)
The answer to your question is yes. I did sleep with that Emily woman.

CELINE

I knew it.

JESSE

She was fun but I have to add two more things.

CELINE

Okay.

JESSE

One, she was not as a good a lover as you are.

CELINE

Was. I'm a good lover?

JESSE

Oh my god, yes. You are amazing.

CELINE

Why is that?

JESSE

Because you are beautiful and I love you.

They just sit there for a moment.

CELINE

What is the second thing you were going to say?

JESSE

And two, that was the only time in the whole history of our relationship since we got back together in Paris that I ever fooled around on you. I regretted it immediately and I regret it even to this day. I swore I would never do it again. And I hope Emily is happy because I have no idea where she is.

Another moment when they just sit there.

CELINE

Thank you.

JESSE

You're welcome. Now can I ask you my question?

She slides her sunglasses back on then crosses her arms.

CELINE

Shoot.

JESSE

Why didn't you meet me back in Vienna six months later? And save us all this trouble?

CELINE

I was right. You haven't changed at all.

Celine springs up and hurries on. Jesse rolls his eyes but hurries on.

EXT. NORTH OF COMMERCE STREET

He catches up with her. Celine turns to face him with her arms crossed.

CELINE

Why are you asking all this?

JESSE

Because I want to get back together.

Celine laughs at this.

CELINE

That is not even possible.

JESSE

Why not? You're not married. I'm not married.

CELINE

I'm with Ted now.

JESSE

And is Ted all that great? I mean, he seems like a nice enough guy in a forgettable safe way.

CELINE

He is just fine. We love each other. We are good friends. Nothing flashy. Nothing fancy.

JESSE

Not like us.

CELINE

Thank God he's not like us.

JESSE

And so that is what you are going to do? Retreat back into your home and live out your days with a man who doesn't challenge you. Who doesn't penetrate your walls?

Celine wheels around on him.

CELINE

Oh my god, would you just shut up? That's all you do.

(moving hands like mouths)

Gobble, gobble, gobble, gobble.

She strides off down the street.

CELINE (CONT'D)

I don't want to talk anymore. I am so tired of talking. I never talked to anyone as much as I speak to you.

JESSE

You and Ted don't talk?

CELINE

No!!! There are whole days when we barely speak to each other. And it is such blessed silence.

They walk on.

EXT. CORNER OF BEDFORD & GROVE STREETS

Celine stops on the corner and turns to face him.

CELINE

Look, I think I am just going to walk the rest of the way to the station by myself.

He opens his mouth to speak but she covers his mouth.

CELINE (CONT'D)

Stop!

(steps back)

Jesse, it's too late and you and I are too old. I don't miss the old days. I don't miss you. Whatever we had, whatever there was between us, whatever you want to call it, it's dead. It's gone.

JESSE

And so you're just going to walk through life alone?

A slight smile breaks across her face.

CELINE

Do you always have to have the last word?

He smiles back.

JESSE

And you don't?

She turns to go. He takes a step toward her.

JESSE (CONT'D)

Celine, you're the only woman I have ever loved. And I suspect that I am the only man you have ever loved.

Celine looks him up and down. She seems to be considering this. But then --

CELINE
It's not possible.

JESSE
Why not?

CELINE
Because we're too old. Too much time has passed. We are not the same people we once were. And once a person has changed, they cannot go back. Their younger self is gone.

JESSE
Bullshit. Younger selves don't disappear. They just go dormant. Like what happened between you and I. But it doesn't really die. I know that now.

CELINE
How?

JESSE
Because I learned a long time ago that there are parts of my personality - some of the best parts - that only come alive when you and I are together. Like we are right now. I was too young to realize that when we separated after Vienna. I only realized it when we went our separate ways after Greece. We have something special that only happens when we are together.

CELINE
And now it's gone.

JESSE
No, it's not. It never dies. It just needs both of us to come alive.

CELINE
Oh god, you are not arguing that we are soulmates, are you?

He says nothing.

CELINE (CONT'D)

Jesse, you are unbelievable. The time I spent with you was the most stressful --

JESSE

-- most wonderful --

CELINE

-- most infuriating --

JESSE

-- most special time. The only time when I was at my best self. And the only time you were too.

She shakes her head and starts circling him.

CELINE

And if we got back together, how would it be any different than before?

JESSE

It would be different.

CELINE

Why would it be different?

JESSE

Because we are older. We have more understanding. We are more forgiving.

Celine laughs.

CELINE

Some of us, maybe.

She turns to face him.

CELINE (CONT'D)

If we did get together then there would have to be some conditions for doing so.

JESSE

(shaking head)

No no no no no. I am not into setting parameters.

CELINE

You never were.

JESSE

I am not into setting parameters
because I don't believe people can
change.

CELINE

Because you are incapable of
change.

JESSE

I don't believe people can change
but what I do believe is that
people can recognize both the good
and bad sides within and make a
conscious decision to focus on the
good. To look at the full measure
of the person. It doesn't mean we
won't sometimes still be bad but we
can keep trying to be good. Both of
us. You and I.

CELINE

Why would we do that?

JESSE

Because together we are one. You
and I. One. No matter how far apart
we are. No matter how much you deny
it. You complete me. And I complete
you.

CELINE

And now it is gone. All that
remains is the name.

JESSE

That is so wrong.

CELINE

That's life. We accept it and move
on. I have. Why can't you?

They just stand there looking at each other. For once, they
are out of words.

She looks at her watch.

CELINE (CONT'D)

I have to catch that train.

JESSE

Wait. I lied. About my favorite
romantic movie. You and I. This is
my favorite romantic movie.

CELINE

You and I are not a movie.

Their eyes meet. Maybe a bit of affection passes between them.

CELINE (CONT'D)

Goodbye, Jesse.

She turns her back and walks away.

Jesse just stands there, watches her go until she disappears into the crowd and he stands alone.

EXT. GROVE STREET

Celine walks along. She looks pensive and withdrawn, hurrying to cover the few blocks to the station.

The sound of someone playing a piano reaches her ears. She perks up and looks for the source. It comes from Marie's Crisis Bar.

She peeks in the windows and sees an older man dabbling on the keyboard of an old piano. He plays a show tune like "Send In the Clowns" or "Maria" - something by Sondheim.

Celine stands there watching him play.

She smiles and listens a little while longer. Then she heads down the sidewalk. We hang on the man playing the piano. He finishes the song then vanishes into thin air.

EXT. CORNER OF BEDFORD & GROVE STREETS

Jesse remains rooted to the spot. Is she coming back? His eyes wander across the street to...

...the *Friends* apartment building.

He laughs, shakes his head, and walks off.

EXT. PATCHIN PLACE

Celine walks though her gait appears listless. She keeps looking back to see if anyone is following but no one is.

She pauses in front of a closed gate. A sign hangs from it. Celine closes in to read it. "Here John Reed and Louise Bryant lived while he wrote *Ten Days That Shook The World.*"

She runs her fingers along the letters of his name. Then walks on.

EXT. FATHER DEMO SQUARE

Jesse wanders back. He seems in no particular hurry to go anywhere or do anything. Instead, he just sits down on a bench.

EXT. CHRISTOPHER STREET STATION

Celine arrives at the entrance to the station. A sign over the staircase identifies it. She pauses and looks around. Sees nobody she knows. Reluctantly, she starts down the stairs, disappearing into the depths of the city.

EXT. FATHER DEMO SQUARE

Jesse looks around. Kicks off his shoes and runs his bare feet through the grass.

INT. CHRISTOPHER STREET STATION PLATFORM

Celine hurries to board the train.

STATION ANNOUNCER
(over speakers)
Last call for the E train to Harlem
Station. Departing in one minute.

She makes it just as the doors close. It pulls out.

EXT. FATHER DEMO SQUARE

Jesse's phone rings. He answers.

JESSE

Hey.
(listens)
Yeah? No.
(listens)
Yeah. Just here on the sidewalk.
All alone.
(listens)
No, I don't think so. It appears to
be a lost cause. I am definitely no
longer wanted.
(listens)
Yeah. Yeah.
(MORE)

JESSE (CONT'D)
(reacts to what is said)
Really? OK.

He stands and hurries out of the square.

INT. TRAIN

Celine strolls down the aisle. Not particularly full for a Sunday. She finds an empty seat and sits. She takes off her sunglasses and stuffs them in her bag.

Looks out the window but there is nothing but tunnel. Nothing to see.

She looks at the people in the car. Most of them stare at their phones. A middle-aged couple bickers toward the back.

One woman reads a copy of *This Time* by Jesse Wallace.

Celine opens her bag and feels around. Touches something strange. She pulls it out. It's her beige top from *Before Sunrise*.

A smile of remembrance crosses her face. She holds it up on herself. Then notices...

...the passengers around her staring her way.

She stuffs it back in the bag. Fishes around and pulls out a copy of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. She opens it and resumes reading. Almost hiding within its pages.

Her cellphone rings. She fishes it out of her bag.

CELINE
Hello?

EXT. GROVE STREET

Jesse walks along at a brisk pace. He seems to be going somewhere.

INT. TRAIN

Celine is still on her phone.

CELINE
Hank, what a nice surprise.

INT. HANK'S KITCHEN

He sits at the table with phone in his hand.

HANK

I thought I would let you know that
I spoke with Melina.

INT. TRAIN

Conversation goes back and forth.

CELINE

Really. And?

HANK

I told her we should just be
friends. I'd be crazy to throw away
what I had here.

CELINE

Yes! Finally. Somebody listening to
me.

HANK

Yeah. Dad told me that.

CELINE

He did?

HANK

Yes. He said I needed to decide if
what I felt for Melina was real
love or true love. I am not even
sure if I am in love at all.

CELINE

Good man.

HANK

So's my dad.

Celine wrinkles her brow but says nothing.

HANK (CONT'D)

Like Dad says life's a balance,
it's a dance. And the older we get,
the easier it gets to be your true
self. I have no idea what the
future holds. I don't even know if
I am in love with Melina.

(MORE)

HANK (CONT'D)

I have a lot of good memories but what I feel is nothing like what you and Dad have.

That observation touches her.

CELINE

Had.

HANK

Have.

CELINE

I don't know about that.

HANK

That's just a myth you like to tell yourself. I know it isn't always perfect. What relationship is? But I have never seen two people with a stronger bond. Talk to you later.

He hangs up. Celine just sits there thinking.

At that moment, out the window, the train emerges from the tunnel. We see the NYC skyline in all its glory.

INT. HARLEM STATION

The train pulls in and screeches to a halt. Doors open. Riders troop off. Celine among them. She follows the signs for the MTA train up the Hudson to Tarrytown.

Her eyes catch sight of a women's restroom.

INT. HARLEM STATION BATHROOM

Celine walks in. A YOUNG (mixed race) WOMAN stands at the sinks staring into the wall-sized mirror and putting makeup on. She watches Celine go in a stall and close the door.

After a moment, she sees Celine's top tossed over the top of the stall followed a moment later by her bra.

The Young Woman's eyes widens.

The stall door opens and Celine steps out. She walks over next to the woman and surveys herself in the mirror. Trying to assess that she still looks good. The top still fits her beautifully as she stands there in all her braless wonder.

Celine notices the woman standing next to her. She gives Celine an appreciative nod before her feminine gaze becomes a leer, almost a come on.

Celine smiles before curtly shaking her head. Then hurries out.

Her old top and bra remain atop the stall door.

The woman shrugs and resumes applying her makeup.

INT. HARLEM STATION CORRIDORS

The camera follows Celine as she walks along down stairs and through the corridors. Kind of like in *Before Sunset* when she and Jesse are walking up the stairs of her apartment building.

She checks the time as she passes a station clock. It is just before noon.

Her phone rings again. She appears almost annoyed by the intrusion. She pulls her phone out. Caller ID says it is Ted. She silences the ringer and tosses it back into her bag.

It rings again. She sighs and checks. Brightens when she sees the ID says Ella.

CELINE
(answers)
How's it going, Pomme?

INT. FRONT BEDROOM

Ella and Nina sit on the bed. Ella holds Celine's guitar, ready to play. Nina holds the phone. They have it on speaker.

ELLA & NINA
(together)
Hi, Momma!

ELLA
We were looking through your guitar case --

NINA
-- and we found some sheet music.

INT. HARLEM STATION CORRIDOR

Celine smiles and nods.

NINA
(over the phone)
It appears to be in your
handwriting.

CELINE
Yes, I wrote a few songs in my day.
Not anymore.

INT. FRONT BEDROOM

Nina holds up a piece of sheet music. Ella begins to play "An Ocean Apart"*.

ELLA & NINA
(singing)
"Now we are together, sitting
outside in the sunshine."*

INT. HARLEM STATION CORRIDOR

Celine listens to her daughters sing over the phone.

ELLA & NINA
(over the phone)
"But soon we'll be apart. And soon
it'll be night at noon."*

INT. FRONT BEDROOM

The girls sing away. Kaitlyn and Madison stroll in and listen.

ELLA & NINA
(singing)
"Now things are fine. The clouds
are far away up in the sky. But
soon you'll feel the cold rain."*

INT. HARLEM STATION CORRIDOR

Celine continues to walk and listen as they sing the chorus.

ELLA & NINA

(singing)

"You promised to stay in touch when we're apart. You promised before I left that you'll always love me. Time goes by and people cry and everything goes too fast."*

INT. HANK'S KITCHEN

He sits at the table holding his baby and listening on the phone.

ELLA & NINA

(over the phone)

"Now we have each other, enjoying each moment with one another. But soon I'll be miles away, and soon the phone will be our only way."*

EXT. NEW YORK STREET

Jesse walks along listening on his phone as well.

ELLA & NINA

(over the phone)

"Now I'm in your arms, feeling pure love and warm. But soon I'll be alone, and soon your voice will change of tone."*

INT. FRONT BEDROOM

The girls sing. The roommates listen.

ELLA & NINA

(singing)

"You promised we'll never break up over the telephone. You said our love was stronger than an ocean apart. Time goes by and people lie and everything goes too fast."*

EXT. NEW YORK STREET

Jesse still walks along.

ELLA & NINA

(over the phone)

"Distance will make us cold.
(MORE)

ELLA & NINA (CONT'D)

Even put our love on hold. But soon
we'll meet again, and soon it'll be
bright at noon again."*

INT. FRONT BEDROOM

Same as before. Only Ryan and Ethan now enter the room. They
and the girls exchange knowing smiles.

ELLA & NINA

(singing)

"You promised not to lose faith in
our love when I'm away. You
promised so much to me but now
you've left me. We go by and then
we lie and all this time we wasted.
Time goes by and people lie and
everything goes too fast."*

INT. HARLEM STATION CORRIDOR

Celine slows as she listens.

ELLA & NINA

(over the phone)

"Time went by and then we died and
everything went too fast.
Everything went too fast.
Everything went too fast."*

INT. FRONT BEDROOM

The song ends. A feeling of love and warmth in the room.

ELLA & NINA

(into the phone)

We love you, Momma.

INT. HARLEM STATION CORRIDOR

Celine looks moved. She wipes a tear away.

CELINE

I love you too. All of you. Even
your father.

EXT. STATION PLATFORM

The words move Jesse who has just arrived.

INT. FRONT BEDROOM

Same as before. The sisters hug while their roommates and the guys applaud.

INT. HANK'S KITCHEN

Same as before. He hugs his child.

INT. HARLEM STATION CORRIDOR

Celine hangs up and hurries on to make her connection.

EXT. HARLEM STATION MTA PLATFORM

Celine reaches the top of the stairs and steps out onto the platform. She immediately notices...

...a blue flier hanging from the nearest post. It is a blue 8x10 piece of paper. At the top it reads HAVE YOU SEEN THIS PERSON? Below it is a photo of Celine.

She notices that the next post has one as well...

...and the next one...

...and the next one...

...all the way down the platform.

Some of the passengers arriving and departing pause to look at the flier. A few start to make the connection that she is the woman in the picture.

Celine takes a closer look at her photo.

She and we realize that her photo is really two pictures of Celine photoshopped into one. Her younger self on the left side and her present self on the right. Young and old Celine combined into one. A composite of her life. Just like that moment in *Persona*.

EXT. COLLEGE DORM - FLASHBACK

Celine turns to Jesse.

CELINE
So what did you learn?

END FLASHBACK

EXT. HARLEM STATION MTA PLATFORM

Back to scene. Celine's eyes widen and she steps back.

She reaches out with her hand and caresses her younger half. It brings a sad smile to her face. Her features soften.

Celine fishes out her sunglasses and puts them on.

ANNOUNCER

(over loudspeakers)

Final call for the Hudson Valley
Metro Liner. Now boarding for
Yonkers, Tarrytown, Sleepy Hollow,
West Point, and Poughkeepsie.

She hurries down the platform to the open doors of the train. As she starts to get on board, she spies...

...Jesse standing at the far end of the platform.

Their eyes meet.

She pauses.

She takes off her sunglasses and stares at him.

He stands there staring back. A smile on his face.

A conflict of emotions play across each of their faces.

Neither sure what to do.

Celine takes a step towards the train. Looks back at her man.

He continues to smile back - expectations rising.

Celine takes another step towards the train. She is about to board then she stops and stares back his way.

Hold for a moment.

FADE OUT

The screech of train wheels as it begins to pull out of the station.

THE END

*"An Ocean Apart" (2003) Lyrics by Julie Delpy
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