

A BIRTHDAY GIFT

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FADE IN:

EXT. TROPICAL SHORE - DAY

Lush jungle stretched along the beach. Colorful birds chirp paradise songs. Turquoise waves lick the sand.

SUPER: NEAR FUTURE

LEO, 59, sits fishing. His eyes, watery from breeze, gaze at the endless open water in front of him.

ARTHUR, 30, steps out of the jungle. He watches Leo. A fish nibbles the bait and yanks the fishing line. Leo doesn't seem to notice. Arthur moves closer.

ARTHUR
Are you nervous?

Leo, startled, turns back to see Arthur. The fish steals the bait, splashing. Leo shakes his head "no".

ARTHUR
Three days left --

LEO
I know how many days left.

They silently stare at the water glide. A raft blackens on the horizon.

ARTHUR
Must be Angelo, from two weeks ago.
I recognize it, I built the darn
thing myself.

The raft drifts closer. A BODY lies in the center. Sea birds circle in the air above the raft.

Arthur marks himself with the sign of the cross. Leo suddenly turns to him.

LEO
You know, it's even better this
way. One makes peace with himself
and ready. I am ready.

Arthur hugs Leo.

ARTHUR
I love you Dad.

They watch the raft in silence.

INT. LEO'S ROOM - DAY

An iron presses a white shirt, steams. Leo folds the shirt with care. Hangs it on a chair, on top of already ironed dress pants. Sits and stares at them. Suddenly starts shaking in silent cry.

A handwritten calendar on the wall. It looks incomplete - the day count stops at the number twenty five. All the days are crossed out, except for the last one.

ANTHONY, 10, runs in.

ANTHONY

Grandpa!

LEO

Come sit on my lap, Anthony.

The boy climbs on his lap.

ANTHONY

Why are you leaving us?

LEO

It's very hard to explain. See, Anthony, there is not enough room here. Like, you know, you have crayons and only twelve will fit in the box. You can't put more than twelve even if you'd really wanted to. Does it make sense?

ANTHONY

No.

Leo laughs uneasily.

ANTHONY

You are not a crayon.

Leo hugs the boy.

ANTHONY

What will happen if you stay?

LEO

(not right away)
You are too young to understand.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

Fire pits illuminate the beach. CROWDS of people feast on abundance of grilled fish, meat and fruit. They drink, chat, and laugh. Red sweaty faces, grins.

Arthur is at one of the tables. He talks and laughs, but his eyes are sad.

A MAN makes a gesture and the chatter dies down.

Leo steps out of the darkness. Dressed in the white shirt he ironed in the previous scene. He smiles. Everyone one by one comes up to him and hugs.

LEO

No need. I know I'm respected and loved here.

WOMAN

Don't be shy, Leo. It's your night.

A Man offers Leo to sit down at the center of the table. A YOUNG LADY brings plates full of food to Leo. He sips from his mug.

MAN

We've gathered here to celebrate the cycle of eternal life and God, who gave us a unique opportunity to survive here on this prosperous land that once was known as an icy wasteland Antarctica.

EVERYONE

Amen.

MAN

We're also here to say thank you and happy birthday to this great man Leo. He's a good friend to many of us and will be missed. We love you Leo.

He raises his glass, everyone follows. Leo stands up.

LEO

I could say a thousand words or nothing at all, it doesn't matter anymore. I'll just say one thing: I tried my best. Go on, enjoy the food, enjoy yourselves.

He sits down and sinks his teeth in a chunk of steak.
Everyone gets back to festivity.

Arthur excuses himself from the table.

EXT. BEACH - SUNRISE

Some people are asleep right where they ate, resting their heads on empty plates.

Leo and a few other folks walk up to a raft. It looks just like the one Leo saw three days ago at the beach. Young men give it a push out on the water.

The Man gestures to the Young Lady. She offers Leo a tray with a drink. Leo takes it.

MAN

As soon as you get out in the open water, lay down right away. Soon your feet will start to feel heavy. Relax. It should be fast, shouldn't be painful. Just numbness. It will spread to your legs first, then upper body, and so on.

Leo nods and drinks it to the bottom.

Arthur steps out from the crowd. They hug.

ARTHUR

I want you to read this later.

He folds a piece of paper into Leo's hand. Leo nods and climbs onto the raft.

MAN

Happy birthday, Leo.

Leo waves, sad smile.

LEO

I'll see you all sometime... in the next life.

He turns away as tears fill his eyes.

EXT. OPEN WATER, RAFT - MORNING

Leo is lying in the center of the raft. He stares at his toes. Wiggles them. He keeps looking at his feet, drifts into sleep.

EXT. OPEN WATER, RAFT - DAY

Leo awakens, his face is sunburned. He looks around, confused. He wiggles his toes. Stands up.

LEO
I'm alive!

A wave of happiness sweeps his face. He examines his limbs. He realizes something and the happiness turns into fear.

LEO
I'm alive...

He glances. No shore in sight. Sweat runs down his face. He scoops salt water and forces himself to gulp.

He searches his pockets. They are empty, except for one piece of paper. Unfolds.

ARTHUR (V.O.)
What happened to us? What happened
to the freedom of choice? Who are
we to dictate how long a man should
live? At sixty, there's so much
more you can do with your life.

Splashes. Leo turns. A canoe bumps into his raft. Arthur, wide smile. Anthony sits behind him.

ARTHUR
This is my gift to you.

The boy holds a folded map with red marks on it, bags with food and water are at his feet.

FADE OUT.