

Waking World

by  
Josh Campbell

EXT. THE STREETS OF NEW YORK CITY - DAY

It is a blizzard and a lone man, ESTEBAN, wrapped thick in a parka and scarf, makes his way through the deserted streets.

ESTEBAN:

(v.o.)

Down Avenue B toward Houston  
Street. I take this path every day  
since I saw the birds come to life  
and then kill themselves.

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. HOUSTON STREET - DAY

Springtime now, the streets are crowded with people. ESTEBAN is sitting against a wall, smoking a cigarette. As he looks around him, he sees diagrams describing the patterns that people walk.

ESTEBAN : (V.O.)

That is me, Esteban, on the day  
that the birds killed themselves.  
I had been on the south side of the  
island to talk to a literary agent  
that was interested in my novel,  
Angels of Stolen Kisses. It is a  
very good book about the reluctance  
to fall in love after you have been  
hurt. It has not been released  
yet.

Suddenly, the color drains from the scene except for the pigeons. They fly up as one and then burst into flames and rocket down at the people walking below them, all apparently unaware of what is coming. The scene freezes. ESTEBAN is the only one that can move. He walks carefully through the crowd, laying a comforting hand on shoulders as he passes. He spots a child in a stroller about to be hit by one of the flaming pigeons. He hurries over to the child and grabs the pigeon. He plucks it from the air and tosses it aside. He leans down and touches the child's crying face. Suddenly, the scene unfreezes and the child's mother SCREAMS. ESTEBAN rears back from the sudden noise and darts left, right into the path of an oncoming bus. The bus SCREECHES to an abrupt halt and HONKS ITS HORN. ESTEBAN stumbles backwards and sideways and finally trips over the curb. People step around him.

ESTEBAN:

(v.o.)

People fear contact in this city.  
Maybe it is germs or the discomfort  
of a stranger's embrace. They do  
not want to touch anyone. We all  
somehow live alone here and the  
touch of another person is maybe  
toxic.

A young woman, TESSA, steps up to ESTEBAN. She is wearing a skirt and cardigan sweater. She remains motionless but a phantom image of her overlaying the still form says:

TESSA:

Are you all right?

ESTEBAN stares at her. Continuing to remain motionless with the image overlaid:

TESSA:

I said, "Are you all right?"

ESTEBAN: (V.O.)

I find it hard to talk to others.  
I was raised in America but I have  
never fit in. I miscommunicate. I  
think people have to want to  
misunderstand me but people always  
want more and more.

TESSA LAUGHS, but the underlying form does not move.

TESSA:

Would you like to stand up again?

ESTEBAN:

Why don't you move? Are you dead  
inside?

TESSA decides that ESTEBAN is crazy and merely walks away. As she walks, the overlaid TESSA turns around and stares back at him. The sun suddenly moves quite quickly behind the buildings and the street is shrouded in darkness in a matter of seconds.

ESTEBAN: (V.O.)

I have not talked to a girl since  
Mercury. Our conversations were  
tunnels. Thin tunnels, varicose.  
(MORE)

ESTEBAN: (V.O.) (cont'd)  
 For that short time, she had  
 defined life for me. Now I live in  
 an afterlife.

BACK TO:

EXT. THE STREETS OF NEW YORK CITY - DAY

The blizzard continues as ESTEBAN trudges through the snow drifts. He MUMBLES to himself as he walks. A man, SILAS, steps out of a doorway a few meters away. ESTEBAN reacts with joy.

ESTEBAN:  
 Silas!

SILAS:  
 I'm losing my balls out here.  
 Global warming is bullshit.

ESTEBAN: (V.O.)  
 I've almost confirmed that Silas exists. Someone else mentioned him to me once and said that he had slept with his wife and his cousin. From the way he said it, it was not clear whether Silas had slept with the man's wife and cousin or his own. Silas is the only interesting person I know.

SILAS:  
 Let's go to the Astoria for drinks.

ESTEBAN:  
 I can not. I am on the hunt.

SILAS:  
 Whatever you're looking for, you won't find it like this. This is bear weather.

OVERHEAD

We pull above them and show that for several blocks, ESTEBAN'S footprints are the only pair in the snow.

ESTEBAN: (V.O.)  
 I am an artist because what is inside me is not what is outside me. Do you understand?  
 (MORE)

ESTEBAN: (V.O.) (cont'd)  
 People think all artists are trying  
 to express themselves but I have so  
 little to express. I use my  
 writing to interpret. I live in  
 some kind of coma dream, and the  
 sleep is infected. I write to  
 reach the waking world I am  
 missing.

INT. ESTEBAN'S LOFT - NIGHT

ESTEBAN stands on a ladder, writing on the wall with marker.  
 It is a complicated equation filled with esoteric words.  
 ENTITLEMENT leads to GREED leads to FEAR leads to WEAKNESS  
 leads to SPOKEN IMAGES, etc.

ESTEBAN: (V.O.)  
 You can lose a lot of things and  
 you still do not die. That is  
 maybe the worst part of life. It  
 does not stop just because you have  
 nothing. No home, no possessions,  
 no future, no hope. No love. When  
 a piece is missing, you feel that.  
 And you will fashion anything to  
 fill the hole, the empty-

There is a BUZZING SOUND. ESTEBAN goes to the buzzer.

ESTEBAN:  
 Who is it, please?

MERCURY:  
 It is Mercury, Esteban.

ESTEBAN:  
 I do not want to see you.

MERCURY:  
 I got your letter.

ESTEBAN:  
 I did not write the letter. The  
 typewriter wrote it.

MERCURY:  
 Esteban, I have the police with me  
 here.

ESTEBAN:  
 Good. Tell them to take you away.  
 You are not welcome here.

MERCURY:

We're not leaving until we talk to you.

ESTEBAN walks away from the intercom system and looks out the window. He can not see the entrance from his window.

ESTEBAN: (V.O.)

She had taunted me with her beauty. When I was young and handsome and bright and powerful, I was all she wanted and I gave her all I had. I gave her my everything and she slept with another man. She said she loved me and I guess she did.

There is the sound of A DOOR BEING KICKED IN THE DISTANCE. ESTEBAN climbs out the window and instantly finds himself at street level, in an alley. He sees police officers at either end. He stares up at the window and sees MERCURY, a beautiful redhead, standing with an ANONYMOUS MAN.

ESTEBAN: (V.O.)

He was everything I was not. He was rich and accomplished and he satisfied her. He did not argue or ask for space. He was not depressed or phobic. He did not make her worry. He did not make her angry or unhappy. He did not need her to love him. I hate this man I have never met and I should have killed him.

The police begin approaching ESTEBAN.

ESTEBAN:

Stay back! I have a bomb!

ESTEBAN reaches down his pants and pulls out a tangle of wires.

MERCURY:

(from the window)

Esteban, we just want to help you!

ESTEBAN: (V.O.)

I felt unattractive. It was the first time I had ever thought of my appearance at all. Suddenly, I was the most hideous person in the city. How could I talk to her again? Why would she love me? Why wouldn't she just destroy me?

(MORE)

ESTEBAN: (V.O.) (cont'd)  
 I would destroy someone I have  
 never met and he has good  
 qualities. I never realized that I  
 was so unlovable until she stopped  
 loving me. What else was there to  
 say once that happened?

ESTEBAN:  
 Stay back, all of you! I will  
 destroy this whole neighborhood!

The police take a few more steps towards him and ESTEBAN  
 pushes a button. Suddenly, he is in a movie theater. It is  
 full of children and many parents.

ESTEBAN: (V.O.)  
 No, no, no. It was not a bomb, it  
 was my time travel machine.

A child kicks the back of ESTEBAN'S seat. He turns on him  
 violently. The boy's mother, HOLLY, puts a hand on ESTEBAN'S  
 arm to calm him.

ESTEBAN:  
 What is his name?

HOLLY:  
 Matthew.

ESTEBAN:  
 What is your name?

HOLLY:  
 Holly.

ESTEBAN:  
 I am Esteban and I am a writer.

HOLLY:  
 How long have you been here?

ESTEBAN:  
 I can't tell you. I time traveled.

HOLLY:  
 Is that a joke?

ESTEBAN turns back to face the screen.

HOLLY:  
 (leaning into his ear)  
 Did you come alone?

ESTEBAN:  
I want to see how the movie ends.

HOLLY:  
Do you know what movie this is?

On the screen, it is showing ESTEBAN arguing with MERCURY.

ESTEBAN:  
We said forever! Forever, Mercury!

MERCURY:  
It's not that I don't love you-

ESTEBAN:  
You don't! You never did! You had  
your mind made up!

MERCURY:  
You are unbearable. You go into  
your own head- I'm not sure you're  
ever present.

ESTEBAN:  
Why didn't you just stab me? Why  
didn't you kill me instead of  
sleeping with him?

MERCURY:  
Why would I kill you?

ESTEBAN:  
Why would you sleep with him? My  
work? Because I have to keep the  
world at a distance to study it?

MERCURY:  
Your work brings in no money! You  
are bankrupting me! I try to go to  
school, I try to work full time,  
and we are barely getting by! Do  
not call it work if you are not  
paid for it, Esteban!

HOLLY leans in again, pulling his attention away.

HOLLY:  
Do you like this movie?

ESTEBAN:  
I think I have seen it before.

HOLLY:

It's probably a remake. It feels familiar.

ESTEBAN:

There are no new stories.

ESTEBAN leans back in his seat and the back gives way, spilling him onto a mat at a yoga parlor. He sits up, unsure of what has happened. The instructor is talking but the words are coming out backwards. A beautiful blonde, WHITNEY, turns to ESTEBAN.

WHITNEY:

He said that what we don't know about ourselves is more important than what we do.

ESTEBAN:

We know what he does. He is a yoga instructor. I am a writer. And you are a femme fatale.

WHITNEY laughs.

WHITNEY:

You misunderstood. What we don't know about ourselves is more important than what we do know about ourselves. You're new here. Do you want to get coffee? After class?

ESTEBAN:

How do I know this is real?

WHITNEY stares at him.

ESTEBAN:

I am sorry. Did I do something wrong?

WHITNEY:

I'm throwing myself at you and you're questioning reality.

ESTEBAN:

I am sorry. I have trouble saying what I intend.

WHITNEY:

I think you're doing okay. But I can't place your accent.

ESTEBAN:  
I do not have one, I just speak  
weirdly.

WHITNEY LAUGHS.

ESTEBAN:  
It is a terrible secret that  
everyone knows. Sometimes I do not  
talk so that it will not be  
revealed.

INT. A COFFEE SHOP - SOON AFTER

ESTEBAN is filling his coffee cup with sugar. WHITNEY stirs  
her drink.

WHITNEY:  
Would you like a little coffee with  
your sugar?

ESTEBAN:  
I have never been able to drink  
straight coffee. I like sugary  
drinks, sodas, things like that. A  
milkshake. I would prefer a  
milkshake, but you did not invite  
me to that.

WHITNEY:  
You're very weird, you know that?

ESTEBAN:  
It is hard to not take that  
personally. Although you did buy  
me coffee.

WHITNEY:  
I thought you paid for it.

ESTEBAN:  
(beat)  
I guess we just do not pay for food  
today.

WHITNEY:  
What do you do?

ESTEBAN:  
I am an explorer of the  
theoretical.

WHITNEY:

What does that mean?

ESTEBAN:

As a concept, have you considered that reality is formed by your perception of it?

WHITNEY:

I still want an answer to the first question?

ESTEBAN:

If we are here, having this coffee together and talking, it is really happening. Do you see what I mean? But if we were over there-  
 (he points to another table where they are also sitting)  
 -and we are watching us here, then it is a different reality. They find our conversation boring. They do not understand why we are together. Do you see?

WHITNEY:

That's not something you can get paid for, is it? Thinking about that kind of stuff, I mean.

ESTEBAN QUICKLY STANDS.

ESTEBAN:

I must go. Thank you for the coffee that we did not pay for.

WHITNEY:

Wait a second. I'm not trying to insult you. I just...I don't know what to think of any of this.

ESTEBAN:

I appreciate your interest but I am a bad person to know.

WHITNEY:

Nah, you're interesting.

ESTEBAN:

You are nice. And I will not subject you to me.

WHITNEY:

You make yourself sound so terrible. It's a relief, to be honest.

ESTEBAN:

I should go.

ESTEBAN stands and walks out of the shop and into the street, which is filled with snow again.

INT. ESTEBAN'S LOFT - DAY

ESTEBAN, in pajama pants and no shirt, is painting a picture onto a canvas. He steps back from it and looks. It is a bizarre, child-like image, with vivid colors. He notices something. He reaches out and plucks a hair from the canvas.

ESTEBAN: (V.O.)

It is hers. It is now covered with red paint but I know it is hers. Eight months later and her hair is still everywhere. It finds its way into my work. I find it in my clothes. I find it in the sheets. I just want her to be gone.

ESTEBAN places the hair on a framed picture of MERCURY. There are many other hairs on the picture frame.

ESTEBAN:

(v.o.)

It looks like a spiderweb. She has trapped me here.

The intercom BUZZES. ESTEBAN answers it.

ESTEBAN:

Who is there, please?

WHITNEY:

Esteban, it's Whitney.

ESTEBAN:

How do you know where I live?

WHITNEY:

You told me.

ESTEBAN:

I did not. I did not even tell you my last name.

WHITNEY:  
Can you just let me up? I'm  
freezing down here.

ESTEBAN buzzes her in. He then rushes to get his loft somewhat less cluttered. There is a KNOCK at the door. ESTEBAN pulls on a t-shirt and answers the door. WHITNEY stands there. She does not enter.

ESTEBAN:  
What are you waiting for?

WHITNEY:  
Do you have someone else up here?

ESTEBAN:  
No.

WHITNEY:  
Are you lying to me?

ESTEBAN:  
No.

She finally steps into the loft. She looks around. She notices the equations on the wall.

WHITNEY:  
Who did that?

ESTEBAN:  
I did.

WHITNEY:  
What is it?

ESTEBAN:  
Let me show you something.

He reaches under the bed and pulls out a tray of half-filled wine glasses. He lays this on a stool.

WHITNEY:  
What are you-

ESTEBAN:  
Just watch.

ESTEBAN begins to rub a finger over the edge of the glasses, produces a BEAUTIFUL NOTE. As he plays each glass, a different part of the equation lights up.

WHITNEY:  
It's very pretty.

ESTEBAN:

The words, see, have an intrinsic musical weight. If you hit the right note, magic happens. I discovered it while whistling and then tried a guitar and a violin and finally the wine glasses. The wine glasses work best.

WHITNEY drops her coat, revealing a white slip and nothing else.

ESTEBAN:

No wonder you were cold! You're walking around nearly naked!

WHITNEY:

I came to seduce you.

ESTEBAN pushes too hard on a wine glass and it breaks, cutting himself.

WHITNEY:

Oh, let me see! Is it bad?

ESTEBAN holds his hand out to her. She inspects the cut on his middle finger.

WHITNEY:

Well, you won't be playing wine glasses for a while. Do you have bandages?

They sit on his bed and bandage the finger. ESTEBAN looks her over as she does this.

ESTEBAN:

I think I should tell you that I am a liar.

WHITNEY:

We're all liars.

ESTEBAN:

No, I tell people I am a writer.

WHITNEY:

You're not?

ESTEBAN:

It is the worst type of cowardice to lie about yourself for your own ego.

WHITNEY:

Then maybe it's okay. I mean, yeah, it's stupid. But it's a lie that makes you feel better about yourself. And maybe that illusion of reality is important enough to bend the truth for.

ESTEBAN:

That is a very comforting way to look at it.

WHITNEY:

Is that all you've lied about?

ESTEBAN leans forward and kisses her beside her mouth. She draws away.

ESTEBAN:

I am sorry.

WHITNEY:

No, it was just unexpected.

ESTEBAN:

I just wanted to know what it would be like to kiss you.

WHITNEY:

How was it?

ESTEBAN:

You're not her.

There is a long pause.

WHITNEY:

Will you sleep with me?

ESTEBAN:

I do not want to have sex.

WHITNEY:

I understand. I just want sleep in the same bed.

ESTEBAN:

Why?

WHITNEY:

Because it's cold and I get lonely. It feels nice to sleep next to someone.

ESTEBAN:

It upsets me. I can't get comfortable. I can't do my routine that I always do.

WHITNEY:

You have a bedtime routine? What do you do?

ESTEBAN:

No, I will not tell you that.

She leans her head down and kisses his bandaged finger.

WHITNEY:

For good luck.

ESTEBAN:

I could hold you. Sometimes it is easier to sleep when someone is holding you.

CUT TO:

INT. ESTEBAN'S LOFT - LATER

ESTEBAN and WHITNEY lay in bed, holding each other. ESTEBAN is uncomfortable and talks to fill in the space.

ESTEBAN:

I do not know that I could give second chances anymore. All my compassion is used up. And I know that you are asleep now, and probably dreaming of the man you will marry, but I hope that I will not mess this up so that we have to do it again. I am not ready. For anything. I don't know what you're doing here. I don't know why-

The phone RINGS. ESTEBAN looks at it. It RINGS again. He softly pushes WHITNEY away and off his arm. He answers the phone.

ESTEBAN:

Yes, who is this, please?

(pause)

How can that be? You are sleeping here beside me.

(pause)

You must run. Get out of the plane.

(MORE)

ESTEBAN: (cont'd)

(pause)

I will try to help.

ESTEBAN hangs up the phone and closes his eyes tightly. Nothing happens. He rolls over and places his arm around WHITNEY and kisses her on the cheek. He closes his eyes.

CUT TO:

EXT. A LAVA FIELD IN ICELAND - MORNING

A plane has crashed on the lava field, partly covered with snow. The front of the plane is on fire, the rear section missing, and the wings missing. There is MUFFLED SCREAMING from within the plane. ESTEBAN appears on the field.

ESTEBAN:

Whitney! Can you hear me?

The MUFFLED SHOUTING continues within the plane.

ESTEBAN:

Whitney! I am coming to save you!

He rushes to the rear section with its gaping hole. Black smoke is pouring out of it. He claps his hands once and the smoke begins to suck back into the plane.

ESTEBAN:

Whitney, do not breath!

ESTEBAN jumps into the plane.

INT.

The wrecked plane Same time

The plane is empty of seats. There are small groups of people huddled together throughout the cabin. ESTEBAN makes his way through the plane, looking for WHITNEY. He finds her, pinned under some luggage. A man is laughing at her. ESTEBAN collars the man and punches him. The man fights back and knocks ESTEBAN to the ground.

ESTEBAN:

I do not want to fight you, sir.  
Look, we are on television!

The man looks to where ESTEBAN is pointing, a large television screen covering the cockpit, that shows the scene inside the burning airplane.

There is the SOUND OF A MUSIC BOX. ESTEBAN grabs WHITNEY and pulls her free from the luggage.

WHITNEY:  
I knew you'd come!

ESTEBAN:  
Follow me!

ESTEBAN wraps her arm around his neck and carries her outside the plane's wreckage. They collapse onto the ground, sitting on the lava field. They look at the barren emptiness around them. The ground begins to shift beneath them. It is reeling backwards.

ESTEBAN:  
Hold on!

They grip the strange ridges that the lava has formed. The plane slides away from them with a METALLIC TEARING SOUND, the ground becoming vertical, a cliff face. Water begins to wash over them.

WHITNEY:  
Esteban! I can not hold on!

ESTEBAN:  
We must wake up, Whitney!

WHITNEY:  
We are not asleep!

ESTEBAN:  
We are! I followed you into your dream!

They are now hanging from a wall, the world has tilted 90 degrees. ESTEBAN looks down below him and sees that strange man climbing up on legs that are ten feet long and have two sets of knee joints per leg.

WHITNEY:  
What do we do?

ESTEBAN:  
Call me again! Wake me up!

ESTEBAN lets go and begins falling. He lands in a large white room that overlooks Central Park. There is a giant phone in the room and it begins to RING, deafening. He climbs the phone and pulls the receiver with all his might to dislodge it.

CUT TO:

INT. ESTEBAN'S LOFT - SAME TIME

ESTEBAN jolts up in his now empty bed. The phone continues to RING. He answers it.

WHITNEY:

Thank you for letting me stay,  
Esteban. I'm sorry I had to sneak  
out on you.

ESTEBAN:

I saved you.

WHITNEY laughs.

ESTEBAN:

I did. I saved you. Do not forget  
that.

WHITNEY:

Well, if you did, then you owe me a  
good life.

She hangs up and ESTEBAN throws a pillow at the window. It freezes in the air after bouncing off the glass. It slowly rotates. ESTEBAN crawls to it and touches it with his outstretched hand. There is a blue glow that runs down his bandaged finger. The blood spots on the bandage dissolve and disappear. He removes the bandage to find his finger is now free of cuts. The pillow floats around like one of Warhol's mylar balloons.

INT. A BOOK STORE - DAY

ESTEBAN talks excitedly to SILAS as SILAS browses the shelves.

ESTEBAN:

She called me from her dream and I  
was able to enter it and become a  
part of her story.

SILAS:

But how did you get her into bed?

ESTEBAN:

She came there to seduce me.

SILAS:

You are lying to me. Girls are not  
that stupid.

SILAS is re-arranging books on the shelves.

ESTEBAN:

Stop that. The store will kick us out.

SILAS:

Their method is for shit, Esteban. Look at how they have these arranged. Alphabetically. It's pedestrian, no imagination.

ESTEBAN:

How are you arranging them?

SILAS:

By color. I'm on periwinkle.

ESTEBAN:

How did I enter her dream, do you think?

SILAS:

Did you nail her?

ESTEBAN:

Sex is not a competition and I will not have my lovers as numbers on a scorecard.

SILAS:

Let me see your finger.

ESTEBAN:

Why?

SILAS:

You said you cut it on the wine glass.

ESTEBAN:

It was healed by the pillow ballon.

SILAS stops re-arranging the books.

ESTEBAN:

What? What is it?

SILAS:

Esteban, you know how you are sometimes not in reality?

ESTEBAN:

Yes, it can be very difficult. I was not in reality when I met her.

SILAS:  
And you weren't in reality when she  
spent the night.

ESTEBAN:  
No, I think I was. I still have  
paint on my t-shirt.

SILAS pulls out a book and opens the cover. He takes out a  
pen and begins to sign it.

ESTEBAN:  
Stop that.

SILAS:  
It is my book, I will do what I  
want with it.

A female salesperson sees what is happening and shouts at  
SILAS to stop it.

SILAS:  
Do you know who I am?

ESTEBAN:  
Silas, they will ask us to leave.

SILAS flips to the back cover, which shows a picture of  
himself smiling, and begins to draw devil horns over the  
picture.

EXT.

The streets of New York Day

The snow is gone and SILAS is leading ESTEBAN.

SILAS:  
So you have no evidence that she  
was ever there?

ESTEBAN:  
I could not even find a hair. Only  
Mercury's.

SILAS:  
I think what you must do is devise  
a series of questions to test how  
concrete these girls are.

ESTEBAN:  
To determine if they are real or in  
my head?

SILAS:  
Yes, exactly.

ESTEBAN:  
That is a great idea.

SILAS:  
I stole it from Blade Runner. A series of questions to test if a person is a robot. But the principle is the same.

ESTEBAN:  
What questions would I ask?

SILAS:  
Make them choose between a retarded child and a pregnant kitten. Ask them when their birthday is and what they got five years ago. Ask them if their parents are still alive.

ESTEBAN:  
What if my mind invents the answers for them?

SILAS:  
Then you'll have a hell of a book on your hands.

ESTEBAN:  
I don't want to do that. I don't want my art to be an extension of psychosis.  
(beat)  
Would you choose a retarded child or a pregnant kitten?

SILAS:  
I am lazy so I decline both.

INT.

A barber shop Day

SILAS is getting a shave, with a straight razor. His hair is slicked back on his head.

ESTEBAN:  
What other questions will I ask?

SILAS:

Ask about their prom and their date to the prom. Ask what he was like. Ask if they went with another girl to shake up the establishment. Give them leading questions to see if they pick it up from there.

BARBER:

Would you like a haircut, son?

ESTEBAN:

No, my hair is good.

The BARBER and SILAS look at each other for a beat and then begin to laugh.

INT.

A department store Day

SILAS and ESTEBAN are in the men's section, looking at suits.

ESTEBAN:

I have no money for suits.

SILAS:

But what if you meet one of these girls again and ask them to dinner? What will you do, take them out for pizza?

ESTEBAN:

I would ask them to come to my loft and watch movies.

SILAS studies him for a second.

ESTEBAN:

It is not a bad plan.

SILAS:

Have you ever tried to raise someone from the dead, Esteban?

ESTEBAN:

That is what my novel is about.

SILAS:

I thought it was about Mercury.

ESTEBAN:

It's about suicide and myself.  
Mercury is just the method of  
death.

SILAS:

What is your next novel?

ESTEBAN:

I haven't figured out if the first  
one is actually finished. Life  
after death is exhausting.

EXT. STREETS OF NEW YORK - DAY

The streets are covered with dead leaves and there is an earthquake transpiring. ESTEBAN is sprinting, looking for a safe spot to ride out the quake. As he dashes down the street he spots TESSA ahead of him and he catches up with her, grabs her shoulder. She spins away and crouches into a defensive stance. ESTEBAN puts his hands up in a gesture of placation.

ESTEBAN:

I will not hurt you.  
(small pause)  
Do you remember me? From the  
gutter when the bus almost hit me?

TESSA:

Yes, I think so.

ESTEBAN:

We were about to have an  
interesting conversation, I think.  
But I frightened you away.

TESSA:

Is that supposed to be an  
introduction?

ESTEBAN:

You are right. I am Esteban and I  
owe you a cup of coffee.

TESSA:

For...?

ESTEBAN:

I interrupted our previous  
introduction and robbed you of me.  
I am a remarkable person. I'll  
show you over coffee.

INT.

A diner Day

This diner looks as though it belongs in a Norman Rockwell painting. Everyone is dressed in 1950's style. The waitresses are on roller-skates. ESTEBAN and TESSA share a booth.

ESTEBAN:  
Would you like a slice of pie?

TESSA:  
Yes, of course.

ESTEBAN:  
Who are you?

TESSA:  
My name is Tessa.

ESTEBAN:  
What do you do, Tessa?

TESSA:  
I am a special needs teacher.

ESTEBAN:  
When is your birthday?

TESSA:  
April 11th.

ESTEBAN:  
What year?

TESSA:  
Every year.

ESTEBAN laughs.

TESSA:  
Why the third degree?

ESTEBAN reaches up and grabs the light fixture, turning it to focus on her face.

ESTEBAN:  
We want names, see? That's how  
it's gonna be, see?

TESSA laughs.

TESSA:  
What do you write?

ESTEBAN:  
I wrote a story about a boy with no heart.

TESSA:  
Were you the boy?

ESTEBAN:  
(silent, considering)  
No, I have a heart. People have hearts, story characters don't.

TESSA:  
What happened to the boy?

ESTEBAN:  
He got old and died. They buried him upside down. I like the idea that it would rain. It would rain and wash away the top soil over the years and eventually his feet would be sticking out of the dirt. Like he was growing, like a crop.  
(beat)  
Would you like to be my friend, Tessa?

TESSA:  
Sure, you seem interesting.

ESTEBAN:  
Do you find me attractive?

TESSA:  
I'm not going to answer that.

ESTEBAN:  
Because I don't think you are.

TESSA:  
Excuse me?

ESTEBAN:  
You're not very pretty. You're mousy. Your nose is too long and your hair is-

TESSA:  
I'm going to leave now.

ESTEBAN:

But I did not get to the good part.  
What I mean to say is that you are  
a good person. You are someone who  
would help a stranger.

TESSA:

What does one have to do with the  
other?

ESTEBAN:

Because I am the opposite. I am  
beautiful on the outside and many  
girls admire me, but inside I am  
terrible. I treat people rudely  
and I do not do nice things for  
strangers.

TESSA:

That's a strange confession.

ESTEBAN:

I am a strange and interesting  
person.

TESSA:

How did you end up here?

ESTEBAN:

There was an earthquake. I had to  
run until I found you.

TESSA:

That doesn't make sense.

ESTEBAN looks up, thinking of how to explain, when he notices  
something.

TESSA:

Is this all a joke? It's hard to  
tell if you're for real.

ESTEBAN:

Shhhhhh.

He holds up a finger to tell her to hold on. He climbs up  
onto the booth's seat and inspects the light fixture.

TESSA:

What are you-

ESTEBAN:

Just a second.

He takes a small, round metal magnet that is attached to the lighting fixture. He inspects it carefully. And then sets it down on the table.

TESSA:

What is-

ESTEBAN:

Shhhhh.

He writes on his paper place mat: WE ARE BEING SPIED ON. He pushes it to her side of the table so she can read it. She gives him a worried look. He holds up his finger again and then rummages inside the pocket of his coat. He pulls out a tape recorder and pushes play. ESTEBAN and TESSA'S voices begin to play.

TESSA:

I think Halloween is my favorite season because it fits with the season it represents.

ESTEBAN:

It is actually the festival of Samhain, a celebration of the gathering of crops. Don't you think Christmas fits the season as well?

TESSA:

Valentine's is the worst.

ESTEBAN grabs her hand and leads her out of the booth, leaving the tape recorder behind to spin out its conversation for the bug.

EXT.

The streets of New York Moments later

TESSA and ESTEBAN walk out of the diner.

TESSA:

Who would be spying on us?

ESTEBAN:

It is impossible to say, really.

TESSA:

How did you have a conversation with me recorded?

ESTEBAN:

I have a time travel machine. I must use it at some point.

TESSA:

I do not understand.

ESTEBAN:

Time is not constant. I have the power to alter it.

TESSA:

But how did you-

ESTEBAN:

Have you seen fish in a shallow lake?

A diagram appears explaining this all.

TESSA:

Yes.

ESTEBAN:

They think the world is flat like that. It's two dimensions, there is nothing outside it. They could not believe there is something other than the lake. But if you pull one out, it is in the third dimension. It is like a magical land to them, now.

TESSA:

What?

ESTEBAN:

Time is our fourth dimension. And outside of that, there are more dimensions. If you were two dimensional, you could be imprisoned by a circle. But if you're three dimensional, you can just step over the circle and be free. That is what I do with time.

(beat)

May I ask, what was the theme of your prom?

TESSA:

I don't think we had one. The prom them was "prom."

ESTEBAN:  
Who was your date?

ESTEBAN:  
(v.o.)  
Don't say Silas. Don't say Silas.

TESSA:  
Ricky Gaultierre.

ESTEBAN:  
Did you kiss him?

TESSA:  
I think so.

ESTEBAN:  
Did you screw him?

TESSA begins to walk away.

ESTEBAN:  
But how will I find you again?

TESSA:  
(while walking)  
You probably won't.

ESTEBAN:  
I was not finished with my  
questions.  
(v.o.)  
I see her leave. I see her return  
to that form that is just love.

As she walks away, the projection of her turns back to face  
ESTEBAN and smiles.

ESTEBAN:  
(v.o.)  
Whatever had happened, I think  
maybe it was a miracle.

INT.

ESTEBAN'S apartment Day

ESTEBAN sits at a desk, typing.

ESTEBAN:

(v.o.)

I had set out to be the greatest minimalist writer in the history of the world. I would write and then give my work to Silas and he would draw red lines through passages that did not need to be there. We reduced it to bones. I began to refine my sentences to the smallest possible length. Eventually, I was left with sentences like "I have." "I am." "I will." And then, the shortest sentence in the English language, "Go." I thought maybe-

The typewriter DINGS.

ESTEBAN:

(v.o.)

Was I done? Was I finished with that sentence?

The typewriter DINGS again. ESTEBAN looks at it carefully. He reaches out and touches the space bar. Nothing happens.

ESTEBAN:

(v.o.)

What is happening here?

The typewriter DINGS. ESTEBAN studies the page and finds that it bears the words he has just spoken. He picks up a screwdriver and pries open the case of the typewriter. He can not see inside because of the darkness. He opens a drawer and pulls out a flashlight. He looks inside again. He finds cartoonish words in balloons sitting in a line. They read "This is unusual."

ESTEBAN:

(v.o.)

This-

(the first balloon goes up onto the page)

Is-

(the second)

Unusual.

(the third)

ESTEBAN lifts the typewriter and tosses it across the room. It lands upside down and dozens of little word balloons spill from it. The intercom buzzes. ESTEBAN answers it.

SILAS:

This is the prize committee! You have won ten thousand rubles!

ESTEBAN:  
Now is not a good time, Silas.

SILAS:  
I have Mercury with me. She wants  
to see you.

ESTEBAN:  
I do not want to see her.

SILAS:  
Then I'm alone. Let us up.

ESTEBAN:  
I will let you up, but not her.

SILAS:  
(talking to MERCURY)  
He says I may come up but not you.  
(inaudible words)  
Esteban, I am coming up alone.

ESTEBAN pushes the buzzer and begins to sweep up the typewriter and its words. There is a knock at the door. ESTEBAN opens the door. SILAS stands with his trench coat open, as though he is flashing ESTEBAN. A large gold cross hangs from his neck.

ESTEBAN:  
Is she behind you?

SILAS:  
It was the only way.

He drops his coat and MERCURY steps out from behind him.

ESTEBAN:  
I did not want to see her.

MERCURY:  
I am just worried, Esteban.

ESTEBAN:  
It is no good anymore, Mercury.  
It's dirty now. You made a mess.

SILAS:  
Salvation lies within, Esteban.

ESTEBAN:  
And you are a traitor! Why did you  
bring her here?

SILAS:  
What have you done to your  
typewriter?

ESTEBAN:  
The machine was reading my mind. I  
have disabled it.

MERCURY:  
(to SILAS)  
You see?

ESTEBAN turns his back and walks away.

MERCURY:  
Esteban, I just want to help you.  
I've called your parents, I've  
called psychiatrists, I don't know  
what else to do. I can't help you  
if you won't let me.

ESTEBAN:  
When we met, I was a drug addict.

MERCURY:  
I remember.

ESTEBAN:  
You made me quit.

MERCURY:  
Yes.

ESTEBAN:  
You made me go straight and then  
you turned my insides all crooked.

MERCURY:  
What?

ESTEBAN:  
My heart, Mercury! You broke it  
into pieces and now they cut me up  
from the inside.

(to SILAS)  
Are you fucking her? Did you come  
up here to stick it in my face?

MERCURY:  
He just wants to help you. We all  
want to help you.

ESTEBAN:  
I had another woman here. She  
slept in my bed with me.

MERCURY does not respond.

ESTEBAN:  
And I saved her.

MERCURY:  
Let me save you.

ESTEBAN:  
Save me? You broke me. Did it mean  
nothing? Am I nothing to you?

MERCURY:  
If that were true, I wouldn't be  
here.

ESTEBAN:  
I don't WANT you here!

He turns and SMASHES the window with his fist.

MERCURY:  
My god! Are you okay? Are you  
bleeding?

There is a LOUD BUT INAUDIBLE VOICE SPEAKING on the other  
side of the loft's wall. ESTEBAN POUNDS ON THE WALL and  
CALLS FOR QUIET.

MERCURY:  
Esteban, let me look at it.

ESTEBAN:  
I do not want you to! I do not  
want to be your friend! I do not  
want you to be a part of my life!  
You are gone! You've been banished  
from my life!

ESTEBAN looks at her and she begins to waver and flicker,  
fade out.

MERCURY:  
But why? What have I done?

ESTEBAN:  
You cheated! You are a cheater!

MERCURY:  
You have no right to call me names.

ESTEBAN:  
She does not even deny it!

SILAS:  
(trying to stay neutral)  
You both had problems. You're both  
young. You maybe did the wrong  
thing, but-

ESTEBAN:  
And you can go to hell too, then.  
You're a co-conspirator now.

SILAS:  
That's so arbitrary.  
(looking at the wall and  
noticing the word  
diagram)  
What is this? A literary equation?

ESTEBAN:  
I want to be alone. I am cold and  
I am bleeding. You have both let  
me down and I would like to be  
alone now.

REWIND.

ESTEBAN:  
I would like to be alone now.

REWIND.

ESTEBAN:  
I would like to be alone now.

SILAS:  
(to MERCURY)  
We should go. This hasn't gone  
well.

SILAS walks out the door. MERCURY walks up to ESTEBAN and  
embraces him from behind.

MERCURY:  
I still love you more than I love  
myself.

ESTEBAN:  
I meet many girls now. I sleep  
with many girls. Now please let  
go.

MERCURY withdraws and walks away. ESTEBAN turns back and watches her feet. They are not touching the ground. The LOUD AND INAUDIBLE VOICE continues to MUMBLE. ESTEBAN picks up the telephone.

ESTEBAN:

Mr. Burnstein, it is Esteban, the writer. The man in the next apartment is making a lot of noise.

ESTEBAN hangs up the phone. From the next apartment we hear the phone RINGING. After a few seconds, we hear it SLAMMED INTO THE RECEIVER. There is the POUNDING OF FEET into the hall and then over to ESTEBAN'S door. The KNOCKING IS VERY LOUD. ESTEBAN wipes sweat from his face. He slowly walks over and opens the door. A slim, dapper man faces him.

GEORGES:

(in a European accent)  
I'm sorry, but did you call the superintendant about the noise?

ESTEBAN:

I maybe called someone. It's hard to keep track.

GEORGES:

I am so sorry. I was rehearsing a scene.

ESTEBAN:

You're an actor?

GEORGES:

Actor?  
(laughing)  
No. Oh, Lord, no.

ESTEBAN:

I am Esteban, the writer. Who are you?

GEORGES:

My name is Georges Simenon.

ESTEBAN seems to recognize the name.

ESTEBAN:

Really?

GEORGES:

Yes.

ESTEBAN:

But you died.

GEORGES:

You heard that too? I thought I was dead for a while. Turned out I was just in the Bronx. Tell me, Esteban the writer, what have you written?

ESTEBAN:

Oh, I could not share my work with you. You are Georges Simenon! You write a novel every eleven days!

GEORGES:

Don't make fun of me.

ESTEBAN:

No, I have read! You wrote over 500 novels in thirty years!

GEORGES:

I try not to think of myself as a writer. I don't let it define me.  
(looking at the words on  
the wall)  
I like these. They have an emotional weight. Have you tried playing a piano with them?

ESTEBAN:

(excitedly)  
Yes! You understand! Words do have emotional weight! Try the wine glasses!

GEORGES:

I'm sorry, but I really must get back.  
(beat)  
I work at a shoe store. You should come visit me.

ESTEBAN:

Why would you work at a shoe store?

GEORGES:

(smiling)  
Everybody needs shoes.

ESTEBAN:

Not everybody.

GEORGES:  
Yes, everybody.

ESTEBAN ponders for a second. Then he blurts out:

ESTEBAN:  
I sleep with many women now!

GEORGES:  
Is that right?

ESTEBAN:  
Yes. She thinks she has won but I  
will be the victor.

GEORGES:  
The victor often spoils.

GEORGES shuts the door.

EXT.

The streets of New York Day

ESTEBAN is carefully watching a child eat a caramel apple on the sidewalk. With each bite, words spill out from the apple and litter the ground. ESTEBAN is entranced by this. WHITNEY taps him on the shoulder and he jumps.

WHITNEY:  
Don't be a Nervous Purvis.

ESTEBAN:  
You frightened me. I have been on  
edge.

WHITNEY:  
Well, here I am.

ESTEBAN:  
And I am here as well.

WHITNEY:  
You said you wanted to meet.

ESTEBAN:  
When did I say that? Are you sure  
it was not in a dream?

WHITNEY reaches out and puts a comforting hand on his shoulder.

WHITNEY:  
Esteban. It's not your fault.

ESTEBAN:  
Maybe not.

WHITNEY:  
No, it is not. You are sick and that makes life difficult and she made the wrong choice because of that.

ESTEBAN:  
That is what everyone says.

WHITNEY:  
Believe it. You did not do anything wrong.

ESTEBAN:  
I wish it were so simple. But there is no absolute right or wrong.

WHITNEY:  
Oh, Esteban. A writer must always put things into context, I guess.

ESTEBAN:  
I defy you to name something. Name one indefensible action.

WHITNEY:  
Rape.

ESTEBAN:  
Okay, so you thought of one.

WHITNEY:  
And cheating.

ESTEBAN:  
You can kill a man for a good reason but cheating, there's never a good reason.

WHITNEY:  
You can't try to define the black and white of life. Too much gray.

ESTEBAN:  
What have you done to your hair?

WHITNEY:  
Nothing.

ESTEBAN:  
I don't like it.

WHITNEY:  
Nothing has changed.

ESTEBAN:  
Then I don't know what I like.

A passenger jet flying very low suddenly hits the World Trade Center tower a few blocks away. ESTEBAN is not fazed by this. WHITNEY reacts with horror.

WHITNEY:  
Oh. My god.

ESTEBAN:  
Did that really happen?

There is SCREAMING up and down the street. Paper rains down on everyone. ESTEBAN is laughing and dancing in the falling paper as though it were rain.

WHITNEY:  
Esteban, this isn't funny.

ESTEBAN:  
Of course it is. My dreams have crossed over! You all see it!

INT.

ESTEBAN'S loft Night

ESTEBAN eats a bowl of cereal while watching television. The television shows, over and over again, the twin towers collapsing. ESTEBAN calmly eats his cereal. There is a SOFT KNOCK at the door.

ESTEBAN:  
(approaching the door)  
Who is there, please?

GEORGES:  
(o.c.)  
Esteban, it is Georges.

ESTEBAN:  
Why are you whispering?

GEORGES:  
You must open the door now. It is  
very important.

ESTEBAN unlocks the door, almost opens it. Then he pauses  
and slides the chain in place. He opens the door as far as  
the chain allows. GEORGES is rumpled and unkempt.

ESTEBAN:  
What is it, Georges?

GEORGES:  
It is about the woman who was here  
yesterday.

ESTEBAN:  
Mercury?

GEORGES:  
I believe I have written her.

ESTEBAN:  
Wrote her a letter?

GEORGES:  
No, in a novel.

ESTEBAN:  
That does not make sense.

GEORGES:  
Open the door so we can discuss  
this.

ESTEBAN:  
The world is not a safe place,  
Georges. I hope you appreciate my  
caution.

GEORGES:  
But this is important. If I wrote  
her as a character and she came to  
life...

ESTEBAN:  
What novel was she in?

GEORGES:  
I have written too many to  
remember.

ESTEBAN:  
Then how do you know it was her?

GEORGES:

The same way I know that your window is broken and that you were sitting in front of the television eating a bowl of cereal.

ESTEBAN:

I do not understand.

GEORGES:

Come over to my apartment. I will show you.

INT.

GEORGES' apartment Night

The door opens and GEORGES and ESTEBAN enter. The apartment is roomy and well organized. ESTEBAN instantly notices a contraption attached to the radiator by the window. He rushes up to it.

ESTEBAN:

What is it? It looks like a periscope, like a submarine.

GEORGES:

(pointing)

Do you see the mirror attached to the wall on the building across the street?

ESTEBAN:

Yes, sometimes the sun reflects off it in the morning. What does it do?

GEORGES:

Turn around and see.

ESTEBAN turns to find a large projection of his own loft filling the great white wall beside the door.

ESTEBAN:

(excitedly)

It is a telescope in reverse!

GEORGES:

Not exactly. But I use it to keep track of what happens in this building. I can focus the viewer on any apartment this side.

ESTEBAN:  
You have been spying on me?

GEORGES:  
I guess you could say that. I  
prefer to think of it as studying.  
For my writing.

ESTEBAN notices movement on the projection.

ESTEBAN:  
(alarmed)  
There is someone in my loft!

The figure walks out of the shadows and sits down in front of the television. It is ESTEBAN. He picks up the spoon and begins to eat the bowl of cereal again.

ESTEBAN:  
How can that be? I am over here  
and I am in there.

GEORGES:  
Your character is in there.

ESTEBAN:  
(surprised)  
I am one of your characters?

GEORGES:  
No. No, you are not. I do not  
know who is writing you.

ESTEBAN sits in a chair and watches the projection.

GEORGES:  
It is very strange. I am writing a  
novel about a poor man who leaves  
his town in disgrace and returns a  
wealthy man. He is going to  
surprise his family with his new  
wealth but he first checks himself  
into a hotel under a fake name. I  
can not figure out the rest.

ESTEBAN:  
Is Mercury in that one?

GEORGES:  
No, I do not believe she will be.  
The thing is, I think I wrote about  
her as France was being liberated.  
I remember wandering from town to  
town, seeing who was still alive.

ESTEBAN:

I do not understand any of this.

GEORGES:

Neither do I. It would seem that the person writing you has stolen my character and is using it himself. But you are a unique creation. And your friend, he is not one of mine either.

ESTEBAN:

Have you seen the women in my loft?

GEORGES:

I have not seen women other than Mercury, no.

ESTEBAN:

So they do not exist?

GEORGES:

I would not say that. You exist, don't you?

ESTEBAN:

What if the writer of my story has also written you as a character?

GEORGES:

(considering)

We must not even think that. Once a character becomes aware of their non-existence, they can become disruptive. They may rebel. Or they may just fade away.

ESTEBAN:

You just told me that I am a character.

GEORGES:

But I don't expect you to believe it. Or you already believed it and were acting accordingly. You are not a danger, I don't think. But Mercury...she is full of deceit. It's how I wrote her.

GEORGES spins the lens in a circle, the projection swirling rapidly through the room. It creates a strobe-like effect.

CUT TO:

INT.

ESTEBAN'S loft Night

ESTEBAN sits in front of the television again, spoon halfway to his mouth. He is frozen, as though suddenly transplanted by time. He has no knowledge of what he is doing, how he got here. He looks at the door. It is still ajar, slightly, but the chain is in place. He turns back to the tv and it is broadcasting him, sitting in HOLLY'S home, with her children GERTIE and MATTHEW.

INT.

HOLLY'S home Same time

ESTEBAN'S hair is parted strictly and he wears a tux from the 70s. HOLLY is stirring a cup of coffee. MATTHEW, 7, and GERTIE, 14, are playing Pictionary. MATTHEW draws while GERTIE guesses.

GERTIE:

It's an apple. It's an orange.  
It's a pear. It's a pear. It's a  
pear. Is it a pear? It's a pear.

The timer DINGS. MATTHEW rips up the page he drew on, frustrated. He spins on GERTIE angrily and shouts:

MATTHEW:

If it wasn't a pear the first time,  
why did you keep guessing it?!

GERTIE:

Mom, he pulled a Matthew again.

HOLLY:

Gertie, you promised Dr. Rogers  
that you would not use that phrase  
again.

GERTIE:

Whatever.

GERTIE'S cell phone vibrates with a text message.

HOLLY:

She's driving me to the poor house  
with all her text messages.

(to GERTIE)

You're not going anywhere tonight.  
This is family time.

GERTIE:  
It's a message for Esteban.

HOLLY:  
Is that right?

GERTIE:  
They want him to call this number.

GERTIE hands ESTEBAN the cell phone and he types in the number. When he presses the connect button we are

BACK TO:

INT.

ESTEBAN'S loft Same time

The phone RINGS. ESTEBAN looks from the television to the phone and then back. He cautiously answers the phone.

ESTEBAN:  
Yes, who is it?

PRICEMAN:  
Esteban, it's your agent.

ESTEBAN:  
I think I am in the television.

PRICEMAN:  
Not there yet but there's time.  
Listen, I hate to be the one to  
tell you. Scribe passed on your  
novel.

ESTEBAN:  
I thought we were close to a deal.  
You said so.

PRICEMAN:  
Look, things have changed. This  
damn 9/11 thing...the bottom's  
dropped out. They don't want to do  
anything challenging. The market  
is not right for your book anymore.  
But it's not all bad news. They  
really like you. They think you're  
a good writer. So they've sort of  
put you on a list-

ESTEBAN:  
What list?

PRICEMAN:

A short list. Writers to watch.  
To be given first consideration.  
So if you can tone down, do  
something a bit more positive-

ESTEBAN:

I write what is in my heart.

PRICEMAN:

Use your head then. Half of  
writing is all mental anyway.  
They're still interested, buddy.  
If you can get something together,  
anything, it will reflect well on  
you.

A hand reaches through the small opening of the door and  
KNOCKS on the frame.

ESTEBAN:

Thank you, Mr. Priceman, I will get  
back to you.

PRICEMAN:

Stay positive, Esteban.

ESTEBAN walks to the door and looks through the crack.  
Suddenly, Whitney pops into the frame.

ESTEBAN:

How did you get up here?

WHITNEY:

I can walk through walls.

ESTEBAN:

Then come through the door.

WHITNEY:

Doors are a bit tricky. Why don't  
you just let me in?

ESTEBAN:

Are you here to seduce me again?

WHITNEY:

Feels like I'm barking up the wrong  
tree on that one. Hey, come on,  
let me in.

ESTEBAN unchains the door and lets her in. She carries a  
ukulele slung over her shoulder.

ESTEBAN:  
What is that?

WHITNEY:  
Less dangerous than glass. Give it  
a try.

She lays it on a stool and ESTEBAN carefully picks a few  
notes. Words on the wall light up. ESTEBAN smiles.

ESTEBAN:  
This is a thoughtful gift.

WHITNEY smiles back at him. Then there is an uncomfortable  
pause. WHITNEY finally breaks it.

WHITNEY:  
Do you want to talk about what  
happened the other day?

ESTEBAN:  
No, I do not.

WHITNEY:  
It was a disturbing incident. You  
seemed to be reveling in-

ESTEBAN:  
I apologize. I did not realize at  
the time that it was truly  
happening.

WHITNEY:  
You said that the world had crossed  
over.

WHITNEY begins to put a stick of gum in her mouth.

ESTEBAN:  
Please do not do that.

WHITNEY:  
Do what?

ESTEBAN:  
Chew gum. I hate it.

WHITNEY:  
Why?

ESTEBAN:  
I don't know. The smell. The idea  
of putting food in your mouth that  
you chew but do not swallow.

(MORE)

ESTEBAN: (cont'd)  
That makes me uncomfortable. And  
the smell.

WHITNEY:  
I'm sorry.

ESTEBAN:  
When you smell something, it is  
little particles coming off of the  
object. So by smelling your gum, I  
am ingesting it. And I think gum  
makes your cells divide too  
quickly. Then your insides can not  
be contained and you explode.

WHITNEY:  
That's...sort of ridiculous.

They stare at each other.

WHITNEY:  
I'm trying, Esteban.

ESTEBAN:  
I know.

WHITNEY:  
It would be nice to get any kind of  
positive signal from you.

ESTEBAN:  
Did you like sleeping beside me?

WHITNEY:  
I did.

ESTEBAN jolts a little.

WHITNEY:  
What?

ESTEBAN:  
When that second plane hit the  
tower...I felt it. I felt the  
ground shake from the impact. It  
didn't feel any more real than how  
everything else feels.

WHITNEY embraces him.

ESTEBAN:  
What are you doing?

WHITNEY:  
Traditionally, this would be known  
as comforting you.

ESTEBAN:  
Don't do it.

WHITNEY:  
I don't know what to do. I care  
about you, Esteban. Is it her?

ESTEBAN:  
Yes.

WHITNEY:  
Okay, I'm used to that. The good  
guys are either crazy, married,  
gay, or devastated by some bitch  
that got there first. Can I just  
say one thing?

ESTEBAN:  
There are other fish in the sea?

WHITNEY:  
No. Life is how it is, not how it  
was. Do you understand that?

ESTEBAN puts his arms around her waist and looks into her  
eyes. She moves to kiss him but he turns his face away at  
the last second.

WHITNEY:  
I'm sorry.

He lays his forehead against hers. He holds her and she  
holds him.

INT.

A large auditorium

ESTEBAN stands on stage, bathed in a single spotlight. The  
crowd is just vague shapes behind this light. ESTEBAN is  
reading poetry.

ESTEBAN:

I never thought I'd need someone  
 to wake me up/From this cancer  
 sleep that's spreading deep/Into  
 the parts of me in the waking  
 world/I am burying myself/I am  
 burying this life/I built it up  
 and you just tore it down/In a  
 broken rocketcar we are  
 stalled/Just outside of town/And  
 the doctors with their white  
 coats/Never have a nice thing to  
 say/It's always just more  
 medication/To put me in this  
 restless sleep/And the hand they  
 reach is the one I slap/And the  
 robots with their broken  
 gears/Never show up in the  
 mirrors/And I never thought I'd  
 need someone to wake me up/But I  
 have these memories of you and  
 me/The life we had, the life I  
 need/It's built up like a wall  
 between the waking world/And this  
 sweaty broken sleep/Filled with  
 images of everything I've hid/The  
 life we had /You said you loved  
 me/I guess you did.

The audience does not clap. There is a single COUGHING  
 SOUND.

ESTEBAN:

I swear to you, I can do better  
 than this.

He scans the pages of the notebook he holds.

ESTEBAN:

There is something good here, I  
 promise you. I will write my way  
 out of this black hole.

(beat)

Can someone turn off that  
 spotlight? I can not see anyone.

The light begins to dim and MERCURY'S figure becomes apparent  
 behind it.

ESTEBAN:

Fuck me.

The audience leaps from their seats and begin APPLAUDING  
 WILDLY.

CLOSE UP

ESTEBAN opens his eyes. He is laying on the sofa in HOLLY'S home. She is in the kitchen, washing dishes. ESTEBAN stands and walks to the doorway.

ESTEBAN:  
How did I get here?

HOLLY:  
Oh, you're practically family by now.

There is a pause.

HOLLY:  
What? Did you need something?

ESTEBAN:  
Can I see you naked?

HOLLY:  
(unnerved)  
Why?

ESTEBAN:  
To feel close to you.

HOLLY:  
We've never even kissed before.

ESTEBAN:  
I know that.

HOLLY:  
(turning to face him)  
Are you just some sleaze? A  
pervert?

ESTEBAN:  
(struggling to explain)  
I am sorry. It is not a sexual  
thing.

HOLLY:  
How is it not sexual?

ESTEBAN:  
I don't know. But it is not.

HOLLY:  
Esteban, you asked to see me naked.

ESTEBAN:  
It makes me feel better.

HOLLY:  
Better than what?

ESTEBAN:  
You can just say no.

HOLLY:  
But I want to know why.

ESTEBAN:  
I don't know. I am sorry. I am  
sorry I brought it up. Can we not  
talk about it anymore?

ESTEBAN begins to walk away.

HOLLY:  
Esteban, I want to talk about this.

ESTEBAN:  
I do not want to discuss it. I  
have to leave. I have to write.

HOLLY:  
Did I do something wrong?

ESTEBAN:  
Please, just let me leave.

HOLLY:  
If you go out that door, I'm never  
going to see you again, am I?

ESTEBAN:  
I don't know. I'm embarrassed. I  
feel ashamed.

ESTEBAN opens the front door and is instantly blinded by a  
spotlight in his face. He closes his eyes, recoils from it.  
It is a police officer.

OFFICER:  
Are you Esteban?

ESTEBAN:  
Yes.

OFFICER:  
We thought we might find you here.

ESTEBAN:  
What is it? What is wrong? I am  
not a pervert!

OFFICER:  
Sir, I'm going to need you to  
remain calm.

EXT.

A Queens neighborhood Night

ESTEBAN has been placed in the back of the OFFICER'S squad  
car. HOLLY watches from the doorway.

INT.

The squad car Right after

The OFFICER drives the car and talks to ESTEBAN in the back.

OFFICER:  
It's a lot of pressure on a person.  
It's hard to wonder about someone's  
safety, someone you love. Do you  
understand?

ESTEBAN:  
I am not a danger to myself or  
anyone else.

OFFICER:  
Well, we're just going to have you  
checked out. Your ex is worried.  
You said some upsetting things to  
her and her mother.

ESTEBAN:  
Her mother is upsetting to me.

The OFFICER LAUGHS.

OFFICER:  
Let me tell you something. It's a  
story my mom told me when I was a  
kid and it really kept things in  
perspective.

ESTEBAN:  
I like stories. I am a writer.

OFFICER:

So there was this young prince.  
And an evil member of the court  
killed his father and had him  
imprisoned at the top of the tower.  
He would shout all day and night  
from his little cell at the top of  
the tower. And he was so loud that  
everyone heard him. But after a  
while, everyone just got used to  
the noise of his screaming. They  
didn't notice it anymore. It  
wasn't until he died, and stopped  
screaming, that they realized he  
had been there for so many years.  
He became, I don't  
know...background noise.

ESTEBAN:

What is the meaning of that story?

OFFICER:

That people should listen to the  
ones that are in pain when they  
need help or they will stop hearing  
the pain. Does that make sense to  
you?

ESTEBAN:

That is not the meaning I take from  
it.

OFFICER:

(noticing that ESTEBAN is  
leaning his head against  
the cage that separates  
the back seat from the  
front)

I need you to sit back, sir.

INT.

A psychiatric hospital Day

ESTEBAN is in a hospital gown and they have taken his shoes.  
He is unshaven and looks dreadful. His eyes are bloodshot.  
He is led out of a room full of patients playing games and  
into a small meeting room. SILAS is waiting for him.

SILAS:

Jesus, Esteban. You look like  
shit.

ESTEBAN:  
You are not to be here. Not since  
you turned traitor.

SILAS:  
Can you blame me? You've been  
terrible lately.

ESTEBAN:  
She hasn't ruined me. But you let  
her spoil us. I would like you to  
leave.

SILAS:  
I have to tell you something. It's  
kind of major.

ESTEBAN:  
You love her?

SILAS:  
Who? What? No.

ESTEBAN:  
Then what is it?

SILAS:  
It's your book. They've picked it  
up.

ESTEBAN:  
Who?

SILAS:  
Fucking Brown and Gold. Your agent  
called me, looking for you. I told  
him you were here and he fucking  
sold it.

ESTEBAN:  
I do not understand.

SILAS:  
Van Gogh. Kurt Cobain. Hemingway.  
Hunter. Unhinged artists are the  
ones that revolutionize the art  
form. You being in here, it's the  
best thing that's ever happened for  
you.

ESTEBAN just stares at him.

SILAS:

They want to do an initial run of fifty thousand in print. They're offering you a six figure advance. But you can't sign it.

ESTEBAN:

Are you offering me more?

SILAS:

No, I'm saying you can't sign it because you've been adjudicated mentally defective. You can't sign any contract while you're in here.

ESTEBAN begins to SOB.

SILAS:

It's not the end of the world. I'll help you get out. You're at 70 hours right now, the longest they can hold you is 72 unless a judge orders confinement. So you've got one chance, buddy.

ESTEBAN:

I am not your fucking buddy!

SILAS:

I came here to help you. We've all been worried. And this could be just what you need.

ESTEBAN:

I am in here with psychos. There is a man that talks to his feet. And he thinks they answer him. People scream all night long. People shit in their bed and then walk down the halls, rubbing it around. And she put me in here!

SILAS:

But there's a way out.

ESTEBAN:

I don't know anymore.

SILAS:

Sure you do. Look, you tell the psychiatrist that you've been distraught and have not handled it well. You agree to outpatient therapy and medication.

(MORE)

SILAS: (cont'd)  
I will vouch for you as a good citizen. I can get an independent psychiatrist to offer his own evaluation.

ESTEBAN wipes his eyes and then looks at SILAS.

ESTEBAN:  
This does not make up for it.

SILAS:  
I'm coming in here and telling you that I'm getting you out so you can make hundreds of thousands of dollars with your writing. Are you honestly mad at me?

ESTEBAN:  
I refuse to answer that.

SILAS:  
There's an easy way and a hard way. I'm offering you the easy way.

ESTEBAN:  
(looking out the small window)  
Do you think maybe I belong in here?

SILAS:  
You're an artist, Esteban. Crazy is part of that, it always has been.

ESTEBAN:  
I don't want to be crazy.

SILAS:  
You have a true gift. You don't need me to tell you that. Or do you? Is that what you want? Am I your friend so that I can jerk you off over what a great artist you are?

ESTEBAN does not face him. SILAS begins to gather himself.

SILAS:  
Fine, have it your way. Look, I'm going to leave the contract here.  
(MORE)

SILAS: (cont'd)  
It's in Chinese because I'm not a lawyer but it's real and you can count the zeroes in it. So here it is.

He lays down a piece of paper.

SILAS:  
So how about it? Forgive me and we're friends again?

ESTEBAN:  
I have a new friend now.

SILAS:  
Who?

ESTEBAN:  
My neighbor.

SILAS:  
You have a neighbor?

ESTEBAN:  
Georges Simenon.

SILAS:  
Right. Fuck you too, then.

SILAS exits.

INT.

A court room Day

We are behind the benches filled with people, watching ESTEBAN stand in his dirty, wrinkled clothes, as the JUDGE stares at him.

ESTEBAN:  
Your honor, I have had a rough time. 9/11 has had a terrible impact on me. My girlfriend of three and a half years slept with another man. I will admit that I have not been at my best, but only because of trying circumstances. I have a substantial book deal waiting for me and I think with money, I can seek the treatment I need, independently.

(MORE)

ESTEBAN: (cont'd)  
I really believe it is medication  
and analysis that I require, and  
only that. I do not need to be  
locked up. I am not a danger to  
anyone.

MERCURY stands up and walks to the front of the court room.

JUDGE:  
Miss Wallace, we will hear from you  
now. You were the one that asked  
the state to intervene, is that  
correct?

MERCURY:  
Yes, your honor.

JUDGE:  
What do you see here today? Has  
Esteban reclaimed normalcy?

MERCURY gives ESTEBAN a long look.

MERCURY:  
I would have to say that he does  
seem more calm and in control.

JUDGE:  
Do you have any fear for your  
safety or for his?

MERCURY:  
I can't answer that after ten  
minutes with him. But I feel safer  
than I did when I made the call.

There is CLAPPING in the audience. It is soon joined by MORE  
CLAPPING until it is full APPLAUSE.

EXT.

The streets of New York Day

ESTEBAN steps out of the courthouse to find GEORGES waiting  
at the top of the steps.

ESTEBAN:  
Did you use your influence?

GEORGES:  
Yes. I used my influence.

ESTEBAN:  
 What influence do you have with the  
 New York district courts?

GEORGES:  
 (laughing)  
 I wrote that.

ESTEBAN:  
 Pardon?

GEORGES:  
 I write Mercury, yes? Well, I also  
 wrote the judge and the audience.  
 They cheered for you, yes?

ESTEBAN:  
 They did.

GEORGES:  
 That was my giveaway to you. Come,  
 let's discuss your novel.

They begin to walk away from us. Dark shadows begin to pass  
 over them. GEORGES does not seem to notice but ESTEBAN looks  
 up as he walks and talks. The shadows are shaped like  
 pterodactyls.

A MONTAGE OF:  
 ESTEBAN spending time with WHITNEY and HOLLY in separate  
 locations. Over this:

ESTEBAN:  
 (v.o.)  
  
 A burned out compass led me  
 backwards I couldn't conceive of  
 forwards  
  
 I was most sorry  
  
 That I had to attend my own  
 funeral  
  
 I saw a black swan eating bread  
 Tossed by a child  
  
 They both seemed to understand  
 what was happening  
  
 But I can't be sure I've ever  
 felt the same

I drill holes in windows In case  
there's a reflection

You drill holes in yourself

To lock up your past

I open doors halfway in my sleep  
And then wake up Because I can't  
sleep with an open door So I  
close it halfway again And  
someday it all might stop  
Someday I'll hold a vigil

Someday is for certain

Tomorrow's not for sure

People always want to live On  
the front of a postcard

I've been to the back

And I know where it's headed

I told you to build a coffin To  
put me in when I die

I told you to dig a grave

For me to look at while alive

INT.

ESTEBAN'S apartment Night

ESTEBAN is painting again. The buzzer BUZZES. ESTEBAN  
answers it.

MERCURY:

Esteban, it's me. I need to talk  
to you.

ESTEBAN thinks for a second and then buzzes her in. She  
enters. ESTEBAN will not look at her.

MERCURY:

Esteban, I'm sorry I was a baby.

ESTEBAN:

Don't be. We were all babies at  
one time.

MERCURY:  
(laughs a little)  
See? It doesn't have to be  
terrible.

ESTEBAN sits against the wall.

ESTEBAN:  
It is all terrible, Mercury.

MERCURY:  
I am sorry. You have to believe  
me.

ESTEBAN:  
Sorry doesn't fix things.  
(beat)  
You know what is the worst part?

MERCURY:  
What?

ESTEBAN:  
That when I was sick, so very sick  
with agoraphobia and scared to  
leave the apartment, you tried to  
be there for me. I wish I could  
have been there for you.

MERCURY:  
Well. Regret is sometimes wasted  
when everyone is wrong.

ESTEBAN gives her a sharp glance.

ESTEBAN:  
I did nothing wrong. I was sick,  
Mercury. Sick. Just like if I had  
cancer. I did not choose to become  
phobic. I did not choose to damage  
our relationship. I needed you and  
you cheated on me.

MERCURY:  
After a year of trying to break  
down your wall. That first year we  
were together, there were walls all  
over. You'd been fucked over  
before and-

ESTEBAN:  
Yes, I acknowledge that.

MERCURY:

Well, it was just hard when it came back. There was a giant elephant in the room named Trust. I felt like I couldn't trust you. You just receded into yourself. You built that wall back up.

ESTEBAN:

I was sick.

MERCURY:

I know that. But so was I. And I didn't put my guard up. I didn't retreat from you.

ESTEBAN:

I did not handle it well. It was my first experience with it. How was I to know? I was in denial.

MERCURY:

I know you were. And if I had known as much about panic syndrome then as I do now, I would have understood it. But you left me scared, Esteban. You left me scared and alone in a relationship. And that's no way to live.

ESTEBAN:

(beat)

Do you regret it?

MERCURY:

Every day. Do you?

ESTEBAN:

I regret that I could not understand what was happening and have it fixed. I regret what I put you through...but, damn it, I went through it as well. You made me feel so guilty. Everyone did. Everyone told you to leave me. My closest friends told you to leave me.

MERCURY:

They saw how hard it was on me.

ESTEBAN:

I know that now. I hated them. I wanted to...I will not finish that sentence. But I was angry with everyone.

MERCURY:

You're still angry with everyone. Especially me.

ESTEBAN reaches out and moves her hair out of her eyes.

ESTEBAN:

Anger passes, Mercury.

MERCURY:

You think you can forgive me?

ESTEBAN:

What was broken here does not go back together. What do I do? I just go out and love again? I grow another heart?

MERCURY:

It's not the end of the world.  
(beat)  
Have you slept with anyone else?

ESTEBAN:

Yes.

MERCURY looks wounded.

ESTEBAN:

You had to know that I would by now.  
(beat)  
Now I feel guilty all over again. You make me feel guilty for sleeping with other women while I am single. What do you want from me? You've taken everything. You broke my insides.

MERCURY:

Can I hold you?

ESTEBAN:

Of course you can.

They lay on the bed together and wrap arms around each other. They are nose to nose.

MERCURY:

I am so sorry, Esteban. I had been through a lot. I was working full time and couldn't support us and he had money and he made me feel important again and-

ESTEBAN:

Stop. Just stop.

MERCURY:

But there's so much I want to tell you. My life is so different now. And it feels like if I didn't share an experience with you, then it didn't really happen. Do you know what I mean?

ESTEBAN:

I have a lot of trouble telling what did or did not happen.

MERCURY:

Can I have a kiss?

ESTEBAN:

No.

MERCURY:

I'm sorry.

ESTEBAN:

Remember when I tried to draw you in the nude?

MERCURY:

Yes.

ESTEBAN:

That is what I will always remember.

MERCURY:

That's...crude.

ESTEBAN:

No, it was beautiful. You placed your trust in me. To be nude and let me capture that. It was like letting me in completely. And I just shut you out. You got the worst of me and I got angry that you weren't happy to have it.

MERCURY:

Can you at least tell me you gave  
it your best shot?

ESTEBAN:

I wish I could. I did try. I  
tried very hard. But not always.  
Sometimes I took the path of least  
resistance. Because it was easier  
to just stay inside, in my  
bathrobe, and not even worry about  
facing the world outside.  
Agoraphobia is very hard.

ESTEBAN becomes very emotional.

ESTEBAN:

I should be apologizing to you. I  
am the one that put us in that  
situation. I am the one that  
should take the blame.

MERCURY:

Esteban, honey, you were sick.

ESTEBAN:

A sickness that no one could see.  
It felt like I was dying inside. I  
wanted to die sometimes.

MERCURY buries her face in his shoulder.

ESTEBAN:

It's true. And sometimes I still  
want to. But I don't. I go on.

MERCURY:

I'm glad that you haven't given up.

ESTEBAN:

Sometimes I hate life so much that  
I wish I would die. And the only  
thing that stops me is that I'm  
frightened of death. And I think  
that's where the problem lies. If  
you've already died you have to let  
go. That is how I feel.

MERCURY:

Is there anything I can do?

A long pause.

ESTEBAN:  
Is it better with him?

MERCURY:  
No.

ESTEBAN:  
Do you wish you could take it back?

MERCURY:  
I...don't know.

ESTEBAN:  
Was I really so terrible?

The power suddenly goes out. They sit in the dark for a couple of seconds until the lights come back on. But when the electricity returns, the scene rewinds back to the point where the intercom BUZZES. ESTEBAN moves to answer it but is interrupted by a KNOCK at the door. He opens the door. It is GEORGES.

GEORGES:  
Don't do it, Esteban.

ESTEBAN:  
Did that just happen?

GEORGES:  
I was writing that scene. I thought I could give you closure with Mercury but I'm afraid I'm losing my grip on her. I knew it for certain when she said she wouldn't take it back.

The intercom BUZZES again.

GEORGES:  
Do not even answer it. Let her think you are out.

ESTEBAN:  
She was not really saying those things to me?

GEORGES:  
In a way, she was. Because I have no power over her anymore. But the scene was scripted and it started to go in a different direction than I had intended.

ESTEBAN:  
How dare you! You fuck with my  
life!

GEORGES:  
I was trying to help.

ESTEBAN:  
It is unethical!

GEORGES:  
Believe me when I say I had the  
best intentions.

ESTEBAN:  
Get out of here. And write her out  
of my life entirely. White out her  
name.

GEORGES:  
That's not a bad idea, Esteban.  
Because life is now, not the past.  
You must move on.

ESTEBAN:  
What about the other women? Are  
you writing them as well?

GEORGES:  
No, I am not.

ESTEBAN:  
Then they are real?

GEORGES:  
I wouldn't know.

ESTEBAN:  
You are of no use. I would like  
you to leave.

GEORGES shrugs and takes a step away.

ESTEBAN:  
Wait. Am I one of your characters?

GEORGES turns back.

GEORGES:  
No, Esteban. You are not.

INT.

An office Day

ESTEBAN is led into a large office by a TESSA. OSCAR, the head of the publishing company, and VICTOR, ESTEBAN'S editor, wait with ESTEBAN'S agent, PRICEMAN.

OSCAR:

Esteban, so great to meet you. I hear you've got quite a mind in there.

PRICEMAN:

I was just telling Victor here that you're the best writer of the new century.

OSCAR:

I didn't hire you to write romance novels, Esteban. Although you could, why couldn't you? You're god damn Esteban the writer, you can write anything. Victor, tell him the plan.

VICTOR:

It's a fascinating book, Esteban. I just want to say up front that it's an honor to be working on this manuscript with-

OSCAR:

Damn it, Victor, I didn't ask for the price of tea in China. Though they'd love that. Damn nips have been trying to corner the market on tea since the fall of the Dutch East India company.

VICTOR:

Yes, well, as I was saying, I think we can alter the story in minimal ways. Technical details, really, which is to say-

OSCAR SLAMS HIS FIST ON HIS DESK.

OSCAR:

You think you can tell this artist how to create?! You should be down on your knees begging him to spew forth the words of wisdom his head contains.

ESTEBAN:

There is no need to-

OSCAR:

God damn it, Victor, now you've upset him. You've upset the greatest writer of our generation before he's even signed the contract. Do you know what a welcoming committee is? Do you know how to relate to the delicate sensibilities of genius?

VICTOR:

Well, I-

OSCAR:

You're fired.

ESTEBAN:

No. No, no-

OSCAR:

Too bad that I had to do it in front of you but I also want you to see what respect I have for you, Esteban. I won't let some company man toe the line for the bean counters and interfere with a real artist's vision. You like macadamia nuts, Esteban?

ESTEBAN:

Not particularly.

OSCAR:

I have them flown in from Borneo. My dad caught some Jap shrapnel in a strafing run over the same field. The very same field. A dollar and eighty cents a nut, you sure you don't want one?

ESTEBAN:

Is he really fired?

OSCAR:

It breaks my heart, I swear it does.

ESTEBAN:

I would like him to not be fired.

OSCAR:

Victor, you're re-hired. Esteban has saved your ass, and not for the last time. Esteban, let me ask you this: What writers do you rank as your peers?

ESTEBAN:

Well, I would have to think. Obviously I enjoy the work of Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Tom Robbins. Hemingway when he's not too in love with masculinity.

OSCAR:

Useless bunch of sappers. I think Kerouac, maybe a tamed Hunter S. Thompson, or-

ESTEBAN:

Well, you asked.

OSCAR:

You're right and I'm wrong. Who am I to tell you what great art is? I'd be like Victor.

VICTOR:

Thank you, sir.

OSCAR:

Quiet, Victor, you're already on thin ice. Now, Esteban, we have worked out the deal, the contract has been drawn up. All I need is your signature and we will proceed. Do you have any misapprehensions about any of this?

ESTEBAN:

I am just happy for the opportunity.

OSCAR:

You hear that, Victor? The kid's smart as a whip. And gracious. You could learn from him.

(beat)

So, if you'd like to sign on the dotted line...

ESTEBAN picks up the pen from the desk and signs the contract. OSCAR is beaming. PRICEMAN gives ESTEBAN a brotherly hug from the side.

ESTEBAN:

Mr. Oscar-

OSCAR:

Just Oscar, please. Look at me, telling Esteban, greatest writer of our generation, how to address someone!

ESTEBAN:

Oscar. Who was that girl that showed me in? She seemed very familiar to me.

OSCAR:

Oh, I can't keep up. We have such high turnover. Victor is so hard on the staff. I don't have to tell you, you've seen how he acted today.

ESTEBAN:

I'd like to talk to her.

OSCAR:

Talk? Hell, take her home with you. There's nothing I won't give you. You want the shirt off my back? It's one hundred percent cotton. There may be some wool in there. Cotton lets you breathe a bit more. Here, take my shirt.

ESTEBAN:

I do not want the shirt off your back, I would just like to talk to that woman.

OSCAR:

Victor, what is her name?

VICTOR:

It's Tessa, sir.

OSCAR:

What the hell are you still doing here? Get out there and bring this magnificent artist the woman he wants. Go. Go! GO!

VICTOR scurries out the door.

OSCAR:

The nerve of that guy. I really do apologize, Esteban. I'd have him horse-whipped if it were still legal. Do you follow sports?

ESTEBAN:

No, I do not.

OSCAR:

Oh, well, I've got box seats at every arena in the tri-state area. You say the word and you're floating in a hot tub while the Knicks flounder. You're eating sushi while the Rangers lose teeth. Quite a lot of weather we're having, isn't it?

ESTEBAN:

Yes, Oscar.

OSCAR beams.

OSCAR:

God damn, that makes me proud. To hear my name come out of those perfect lips. If you weren't here, I'd cry. But you are here and I won't cry in front of you, I don't want to make you uncomfortable. Oh, here he is with the girl.

VICTOR and TESSA stand at the door. TESSA has a projection of a beating heart on the middle of her chest.

OSCAR:

I'd like you to do whatever Esteban wants, okay? He's our most important client and if you love this company-

TESSA:

Oh, I think I already know Esteban.

OSCAR:

God damn, that's swell. What a sweet way to ingratiate yourself with him. It brings a tear to my eye. Or it would, if I could cry. Botched face-lift, you don't want to know.

INT.

An elevator    Soon after

ESTEBAN and TESSA are holding hands, facing each other, inches apart, nose to nose.

ESTEBAN:

You are the one I've dreamed of since-

TESSA:

Don't tell me. I don't want to know.

ESTEBAN:

It is important I talk about it. My therapist says so.

TESSA:

You see a therapist?

ESTEBAN:

I am not insane.

TESSA:

I never said-

ESTEBAN:

Okay, I am not healthy. Mentally. I have illnesses.

TESSA:

I see.

ESTEBAN:

But don't you see how unique this is? I've been looking for you! The universe delivered you into my arms!

TESSA:

Calm down, Esteban.

ESTEBAN:

Will you come home with me?

TESSA:

Yes.

ESTEBAN:

There are other women. Is that okay?

TESSA:

I guess so.

ESTEBAN:

You are not the jealous type?

TESSA:

Esteban, I don't even understand what you're asking of me.

ESTEBAN:

I want you to live with me and love me and help keep me in reality.

She releases his hands and takes a step back.

TESSA:

I like you. I do, Esteban. But I hardly know you. We've only met a couple of times. And, to be honest, you really freaked me out.

ESTEBAN:

But Tessa! Don't you see that we were drawn together? I was led here by my ambition and you happen to be here as an employee. It's a magical solution to an unusual problem.

TESSA:

What problem?

ESTEBAN:

Growing a new heart.

TESSA:

I think you're mixed up.

ESTEBAN:

Yes, definitely. I will admit that. But I have overcome so much. I am healthier. I eat right and I walk more for exercise. I am in reality again. I know what is real and what is not.

TESSA:

(with a laugh)  
Am I real?

ESTEBAN:  
Absolutely you are. I thought not  
when we last met, but I know for  
sure now.

TESSA:  
Why?

ESTEBAN:  
What floor are we on, right now?

TESSA looks up at the display above the elevator doors.

TESSA:  
Twelve.

There is a puff of smoke and ESTEBAN holds up his hand to  
show the word "Twelve" written on his palm in marker.

TESSA:  
How did you know?

ESTEBAN:  
I did not. I wrote that on my hand  
last night and was waiting for the  
right time to show it.

TESSA:  
How does that prove-

ESTEBAN reaches out and pushes the button for the tenth  
floor. The indicator panel above the elevator comes to ten.  
They do not stop. It continues to the ninth floor.

ESTEBAN:  
Do you see? We are not in control  
anymore. This is destiny and fate.  
There is no side-stepping it. We  
are to be together. I do not even  
have to ask. You are coming to  
stay with me.

There is a DING and the elevator doors open on the lobby.  
TESSA begins to walk out but ESTEBAN grabs her hand.

TESSA:  
Let me go.

ESTEBAN:  
But don't you see that we are fated  
to be together? Your job-

TESSA:

Fine. I quit. Tell Oscar, you seem to be friends.

TESSA pulls away from his grasp and walks off. ESTEBAN stares at her walking through the lobby. People line the path, holding up signs proclaiming slogans like "Don't let her go!" and "Go after her!" There is another DING and the doors close. They suddenly open again and ESTEBAN is sprinting out after TESSA. He can see a glow around her in the distance. The music is rising to a crescendo. He is bumping into people as he rushes to catch her.

EXT.

Streets of New York Moments later

ESTEBAN flies out the front door of the building. He looks to the left and the right but does not see the glow. He looks up and the sky is bright red, very menacing. A vent beneath his feet blows wind all around him. Something clicks in his mind. He spots the subway entrance and runs for it. As he begins to descend the stairs, he trips and falls, sliding down a few stairs. He comes to a stop and looks up to find WHITNEY staring back at him.

WHITNEY:

Esteban!

ESTEBAN:

I can not talk. I am chasing the woman I love.

He begins to stand up but she puts her foot on his chest and pushes him back to the ground.

WHITNEY:

The woman you love? The woman you love?!

ESTEBAN:

What? What did I do?

WHITNEY:

You have no class, Esteban. No compassion. There is nothing inside you, is there?

ESTEBAN:

Please let me up. I have to catch her.

WHITNEY:

Then go. You won't see me again.

ESTEBAN:

That is what I am hoping.

WHITNEY begins to cry. ESTEBAN stands and runs past her. We stay on WHITNEY. She covers her eyes and falls to her knees. She lets out a SHRIEK that merges with the SHRIEK of a departing subway train.

INT.

Subway platform Moments later

ESTEBAN fights through the crowd and emerges on the edge of the platform right as the train is pulling away. He scans the people inside, does not see TESSA. The train passes. He looks after it and, in the back window, sees TESSA, glowing yellow. ESTEBAN nearly leaps onto the tracks to chase the train but is restrained by a man. ESTEBAN falls backwards and lands on the ground. He struggles to get up but the platform is coated with ice. He can not get up, he slips and slides and lands over and over.

EXT.

The streets of New York Day

ESTEBAN walks down the street, his head lowered. His shadow does not match his movements.

INT.

ESTEBAN'S loft Night

ESTEBAN sits at the typewriter, staring at a blank page. GEORGES sits on a futon.

GEORGES:

Maybe all of them are characters.

ESTEBAN:

What do you mean?

GEORGES:

Well, there was Mercury. She was one of mine. This Whitney and Tessa and Holly could all be part of someone else's stories. You could be a character.

ESTEBAN:

But if I am a character and aware  
of my own inexistence-

GEORGES:

Precisely. Just as I explained.  
You've gone rogue, I think is the  
saying. You can wreak havoc on  
other stories.

ESTEBAN:

I can not believe that. I can not  
believe that I am a fictional  
character.

GEORGES:

It happens all the time. These  
words you have written on the wall  
really interest me. There's a  
beauty in pain and madness. They  
seem random but-

ESTEBAN:

Why would someone create me?

GEORGES:

Oh, it happens all the time,  
Esteban. People need someone to  
work through their problems.  
Artists especially. I remember  
Henry Miller telling me that all  
great artists have made themselves  
the subject of their work. Or was  
that Andy Warhol?

ESTEBAN:

I do not want it.

GEORGES:

(with a small chuckle)  
Forgive me, son, but you have no  
choice. You've been created, now  
you must live.

ESTEBAN:

I should be on top of the world. I  
have two women that love me, I am  
wealthy, I am succeeding at my  
chosen profession.

GEORGES:

Yes.

ESTEBAN:  
But I am not.

GEORGES:  
No?

ESTEBAN:  
No, I am not. I am miserable. I  
feel as bad as when- I feel bad.

GEORGES:  
As when Mercury left you.

ESTEBAN:  
If she had left, I could deal with  
that. But she did not leave. She  
cheated on me. And then she comes  
around over and over to check on  
me.

GEORGES:  
It is a gentle, brutal form of  
torture.

ESTEBAN:  
It is.

GEORGES:  
Not you. Love.

ESTEBAN:  
Why are you so philosophical now?

GEORGES:  
Oh, I've had a few drinks.

ESTEBAN begins to tentatively PUNCH KEYS on the typewriter.

GEORGES:  
That won't help.

ESTEBAN:  
How do you know?

GEORGES:  
As the author of over 500 novels, I  
can tell you that you will never  
write your way out.

ESTEBAN stops and turns to look at the wall.

ESTEBAN:  
I did not write those words.

GEORGES:  
Who did? They're fascinating.

ESTEBAN:  
I can not say for sure. While I was fighting with Mercury, they began to appear. A word or two each day. But they are not mine.

GEORGES:  
It is a sick mind at work.

ESTEBAN:  
Fuck you, then.

GEORGES:  
You take it all so personally, Esteban. Do you think you can be a successful writer if you can't even take criticism of your work? You won't even admit that you wrote them. You must write and stand behind it. That is the game of writing. If you are ashamed of-

ESTEBAN:  
You are not helping me.

GEORGES:  
I'm sorry, but there are very few ways to help you. I tried my best by writing a resolution with Mercury.

ESTEBAN:  
(pause)  
What would you do?

GEORGES:  
If I was a character that had gone rogue?

ESTEBAN:  
Yes. You tell me: What would you do?

GEORGES:  
I would first decide who I truly love. And it is not any of these women.

ESTEBAN:  
It's not?

GEORGES:

Of course not. Our first true love is ourself. You spend your life with yourself and you work to be a better person, you try to be the person you are. And why? Because you love it. The writer loves the character he produces. The human loves the person he thinks he is.

ESTEBAN:

I do not love myself, though.

GEORGES:

You do.

ESTEBAN:

I do not. I am a liar. I am unpredictable. I am useless at helping others. I hurt others on a whim, for no good reason. And I think too much.

GEORGES:

About what?

ESTEBAN:

Everything. I've imagined a whole lifetime with these women already.

GEORGES:

Which one do you want to live?

ESTEBAN:

The life with Tessa. I thought it was fated.

GEORGES:

And now?

ESTEBAN:

And now she may not exist.

GEORGES:

Is that the only reason she would reject you?

ESTEBAN:

I think I frightened her.

GEORGES:

Sure. Love causes unease. You are passionate, Esteban. That unnerves people.

ESTEBAN:  
You are comfortable with me.

GEORGES:  
You are not in love with me.

ESTEBAN:  
If I killed the writer, would I die  
as well?

GEORGES:  
I have no idea. I had never  
considered it. It's very  
Nietzsche, isn't it? God is dead  
and all.

ESTEBAN:  
I would do it. I would murder the  
writer to see if I could change the  
story.

GEORGES:  
You're already changing the story.

ESTEBAN:  
Two of these women seem to love me.

GEORGES:  
Then marry one of them.

ESTEBAN:  
I have to know that they are real,  
though. Does that make sense?

GEORGES:  
I can not tell you what you want to  
hear.

ESTEBAN:  
I know you can't. You are useless  
to me.

GEORGES:  
There is no need to be rude.  
Sometimes you just ask more than I  
can give.

ESTEBAN:  
I just don't know what to do.

GEORGES:  
Find reality.

ESTEBAN:  
And how would I do that?

GEORGES:  
Get the three together.

ESTEBAN:  
I do not know if that's possible.

GEORGES:  
I think the writer will arrange it.  
It is the only reasonable ending,  
isn't it?

ESTEBAN:  
I guess you're right. I must  
prepare for the eventuality.

INT.

A pawn shop Day

ESTEBAN stands over a glass case, examining.

ESTEBAN:  
What about this one? It's not too  
heavy, is it?

SALESMAN:  
No, it's pretty light.

ESTEBAN:  
I want a holy shit one. One that  
can't be refused when I pull it  
out.

SALESMAN:  
This piece here is a classic.  
It'll give you...uh...

ESTEBAN:  
Satisfaction?

SALESMAN:  
Peace of mind.

EXT.

Streets of New York Day

ESTEBAN walks the street, his hand fingering the object in  
his coat pocket.

He pauses as he passes a bookstore, seeing dozens of copies of his book in the window. He smiles and looks around the street. He notices everyone is carrying a copy of his book. He begins to walk again when a voice says:

HOLLY:  
Oh famous writer!

ESTEBAN turns to face her.

HOLLY:  
I can't believe it. I haven't seen you since the night you...

ESTEBAN:  
I must apologize for that. I think I could have made a better impression.

HOLLY:  
Oh, I don't care about that, I've just been so worried. And then this week, right after I'd forgotten you existed, (oh: and thanks for calling me, asshole) here you are! In print and large as life! Come here, give me a hug!

ESTEBAN walks back to her and they embrace.

HOLLY:  
Oh, my god. I can't believe it. They published it, Esteban! They published your book!

ESTEBAN notices those around him staring, whispering to each other behind their hands.

ESTEBAN:  
It has been like a strange dream.

HOLLY:  
Oh, I totally know what you mean. I couldn't believe it when I first saw your book in the store.

ESTEBAN:  
Did you buy it?

HOLLY:  
Buy it? Try like ten! To give to friends. Now, I expect you to autograph my copy.

ESTEBAN LAUGHS, SOFTLY. He is embarrassed.

HOLLY:

Don't be self-conscious. This is a big thing! This is the biggest thing in your life!

ESTEBAN:

Oh, geez. I don't know about that.

HOLLY:

Having a book published? Come on! What else is there? Being born?

ESTEBAN:

Okay, I will concede the point. It just...doesn't seem real.

HOLLY:

It is real, Esteban. What are you fiddling with in your pocket?

ESTEBAN:

Would you like to come back to my loft? I have invited a few friends over.

HOLLY:

(hesitantly)  
Well, I should really... No. I will come. I want to come.

ESTEBAN:

(to the people staring at them)  
This is not a tabloid!

HOLLY:

Easy, Esteban. They're just impressed to see a great writer in person. Everyone's gonna be staring from now on.

EXT.

ESTEBAN'S apartment building Day

MERCURY and SILAS stand at the door. ESTEBAN appears with HOLLY.

SILAS:

Thirty minutes you've had me standing out here, Esteban! It is cold and I'm not wearing a coat!

ESTEBAN:

Why aren't you wearing a coat?

SILAS:

Because it doesn't go with jeans and a t-shirt. What am I, a CEO?

MERCURY:

Thank you for seeing me, Esteban.

There is a tense pause.

MERCURY:

Okay...so why did you invite us over?

ESTEBAN:

I want to share something with you.

SILAS:

We're having a party? I didn't bring any wine.

ESTEBAN:

Celebration of reality.

INT.

ESTEBAN'S loft Minutes later

ESTEBAN, MERCURY, SILAS, HOLLY, GEORGES, and WHITNEY are seated around the loft, sharing wine and laughing. They are talking randomly.

GEORGES:

Esteban. Why are we all here?

ESTEBAN:

I wanted to do something nice for my friends.

GEORGES:

I am glad to meet all of them.

SILAS:  
 You have done something nice,  
 Esteban. How are you...you know,  
 dealing with things?

ESTEBAN:  
 Things will soon be very clear.  
 Wait until Tessa arrives. Then  
 you'll see.

WHITNEY:  
 Is Tessa the girl from the subway?

ESTEBAN:  
 Yes.

MERCURY:  
 What girl?

WHITNEY:  
 Oh, Esteban has a secret love with  
 the subway girl. I never got a  
 look at her.

MERCURY:  
 Will she be here soon?

ESTEBAN:  
 If Georges is correct.

MERCURY:  
 Who?

GEORGES:  
 My god, she's so drunk!

ESTEBAN LAUGHS LOUDLY, a bit drunk himself. There is a KNOCK  
 at the door.

ESTEBAN:  
 That must be her!

WHITNEY:  
 What?

ESTEBAN leaps up and rushes for the door. He opens it.  
 TESSA stands before him, glowing blue. ESTEBAN invites her  
 in and then explains to the rest:

ESTEBAN:  
 I had Oscar track her down.

SILAS:  
 Who?

ESTEBAN:  
Oscar. The publisher.

SILAS:  
Was someone at the door?

ESTEBAN:  
And now I have a question to ask.

He reaches into his pocket and withdraws a revolver. SILAS ducks out of the way and there is shouting.

ESTEBAN:  
It is the only way to tell who is real and who is not.

MERCURY:  
Esteban! Drop the gun!

ESTEBAN:  
Not just yet.

He turns to face GEORGES.

GEORGES:  
Esteban, what are you-

ESTEBAN:  
Are you real?

GEORGES:  
Of course I am.

ESTEBAN levels the gun on him and pulls the trigger. The BANG is deafening. GEORGES disappears instantly.

SILAS:  
What are you doing?!

ESTEBAN turns to HOLLY.

ESTEBAN:  
Are you real?

HOLLY:  
Yes.

ESTEBAN pulls the trigger. Another BANG and HOLLY disappears. Everyone is in turmoil now, the small party has broken into disarray. Everyone sort of freezes as they see ESTEBAN put the revolver up to WHITNEY'S head.

ESTEBAN:  
Are you real?

WHITNEY:  
Esteban, don't do-

He pulls the trigger. BANG! There is a spray of blood and her body falls backwards over the chair and lands on the floor. ESTEBAN freezes.

MERCURY:  
Why, Esteban?! Why?!

ESTEBAN:  
My god. Oh my god!

SILAS lunges at the gun in ESTEBAN'S hand and he instinctively pulls the trigger again. BANG! SILAS collapses on the floor, GASPING FOR AIR.

TESSA:  
Esteban, what have you done?

MERCURY:  
ESTEBAN! NO MORE! STOP!

ESTEBAN turns on TESSA. He points the gun.

TESSA:  
Don't point that at me.

ESTEBAN:  
You are not real.

TESSA:  
Does it matter?

ESTEBAN pulls the trigger. BANG! TESSA vanishes. SILAS grabs ESTEBAN'S leg and tries to knock him to the ground. ESTEBAN coolly pulls the trigger again, BANG!, blasting out the top of SILAS'S head. MERCURY is SCREAMING in horror. He points the gun at her and she stops. She is crying, scared to death. ESTEBAN looks around the room. Three have vanished. SILAS and WHITNEY are dead. MERCURY is shaking.

ESTEBAN:  
Jesus! What have I done?!

MERCURY continues trembling in fear. ESTEBAN puts the gun under his chin and pulls the trigger. There is an EMPTY CLICK. The revolver is out of bullets. He repeats several time. An EMPTY CLICK every time.

## OVERHEAD

A haunting acoustic cover of I Saved the World Today by The Eurythmics plays. We look down on the two bodies. MERCURY is giving a report to a policeman while sobbing. The gun lays on the floor in a plastic bag. ESTEBAN is on his knees, in handcuffs.

POV of ESTEBAN as he is dragged toward the street by the police.

ESTEBAN:

(v.o.)

I knew the tabloids would ruin me over what had happened. I expected everyone to be shouting for my blood. I had killed my best friend. I had killed a woman that loved me. I had ruined my career just as it started and-

EXT.

Outside ESTEBAN'S apartment building Same time

The doors open and we are taken onto the front steps. There is a large crowd gathered, held back by police. They are clutching copies of ESTEBAN'S novel. They are all CHEERING. There are shouts of "We love you, Esteban!" ESTEBAN smiles, as we break from his POV.

ESTEBAN:

(v.o.)

They loved me. I was a star.

ESTEBAN is pushed into the back of the patrol car. The crowd begins beating on the windows, pushing their faces against the glass.

ESTEBAN:

(v.o.)

I would be infamous and live forever.

End.