

GHOSTED

Written by

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Based on "A Christmas Carol" by

Charles Dickens

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INT. THORN HOUSE – TOP FLOOR – NIGHT

Christmas Eve.

A production company so clean it feels sterilised.

Not Christmas décor – seasonal compliance: a white “tree” made of acrylic rods. Each “ornament” is a QR code.

A hallway of glass rooms. People still working. Headsets. Slack pings. Cold coffee. No laughter.

A looping sizzle plays on a wall monitor: influencers unboxing – “limited drop” countdowns – a celebrity “holiday moment” – a BUY NOW button smashing onto screen

SUPER: THORN HOUSE – MULTI-PLATFORM CONTENT STUDIO – STORIES
· COMMERCE · CULTURE.

The elevator DINGS. Doors open.

Conversation dies.

People straighten as if a draft just entered.

At the end of the corridor: frosted glass: FELIX THORN.
Founder/Chief Magic Officer.

Light spills from under his door.

INT. FELIX THORN'S OFFICE – NIGHT

Cold, immaculate, expensive. No personal photos. No mess. One perfect white orchid in the centre of a desk the size of a small nation.

Three giant screens on the wall:

LEFT: a glossy Christmas “special” cut – celebs, fake snow, a choir mid-note.

MIDDLE: a live dashboard – CTR / CONVERSION / CART ADDS / DROP-OFF pulsing.

RIGHT: product tiles – candles, sweaters, “gift sets,” payment plans.

At a long table sits FELIX THORN (early 40s), beautiful in a way that feels hostile. Calm. Bored. Dangerous.

Standing beside him, close enough to be used: ROBBIE GARCIA (early 30s), assistant/dogbody. Tablet. Notepad. A man trained to disappear.

Near the door: KATIE (late 20s), junior creative exec. Earnest. Overworked. Trying to be brave. Coat and tote at her feet like she's been holding her breath for hours.

Beside her: CHAD (30s), another exec, laptop open, eyes down. A witness.

On the left screen, the HOST smiles.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Because what matters most at Christmas
is...

Felix clicks PAUSE.

The smiling faces freeze.

Felix looks at the dashboard, not the people.

FELIX

What matters most at Christmas is
nobody ever says "what matters most at
Christmas."

No one laughs. Felix doesn't care.

He taps the dashboard. A red line dips.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Explain why I'm watching warmth that
sells nothing.

Katie clears her throat.

KATIE

It's... it's a holiday piece, Felix.
It'll be shared. It builds...

Felix raises one finger. Not "wait." More like stop being a person.

FELIX

We don't build, Katie. We convert.

Felix gestures at the right screen: a carousel of overpriced "holiday essentials."

FELIX (CONT'D)

This company doesn't entertain people.
We make them want things they don't
need and can't afford.

He clicks PLAY for two seconds: glitter cannon, a celebrity tear
- then PAUSE again.

FELIX (CONT'D)

This is a screensaver, not a story.

He turns his head toward Robbie without moving the rest of his body.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Why is this still on my slate?

Robbie answers like a man reading weather.

ROBBIE

Brand partners are locked.
Deliverables are baked in. We drop
tomorrow.

Felix stands, remote in hand, and scrubs through the footage like he's trimming fat off meat.

FELIX

Lose the choir. Lose the old people.
Lose the "surprise reunion." Lose
anything that suggests people deserve
feelings for free.

Katie can't help it:

KATIE

But, Felix... it's Christmas.

Felix turns. Delighted she said it.

FELIX

Exactly. It's the easiest time of year
to sell guilt relief.

He lands on a shot: a celebrity holding a child, eyes wet.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Cut the tear. Not earned.

Katie tries to smile. Fails.

Felix notices her bag. Her coat.

FELIX (CONT'D)

You're dressed like you're leaving.

Katie's cheeks colour.

KATIE

I was hoping to... My grandma's in a
nursing home. I wanted to see her
before I drive home for Christmas.

A normal sentence. It hangs in the air like a foreign object.

Felix considers her, expression unreadable.

Then - a small softening. Katie dares to hope it means something.

Felix lets that hope live for a single beat.

FELIX

Why are you telling me this?

Katie blinks.

KATIE

I... I just thought, since it's -

FELIX

Since it's...?

Felix smiles: pleasant. Also not.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Oh... that. Katie... you can't bring your life in here. Even if it is you-know-what.

Katie swallows.

Felix gestures at the screens, at the metrics, at the frozen smiling faces.

FELIX (CONT'D)

This is not a place where personal details improve our work.

He steps closer, voice lower - intimate. Not kind.

FELIX (CONT'D)

When people start talking about grandmothers, Katie, it means they want an exception. They want to be handled gently. They want the room to change shape around them.

Katie's eyes glass despite her trying not to.

Felix watches the tears gather with the mild curiosity of someone watching water boil.

FELIX (CONT'D)

(sharp)

Don't.

Katie blinks hard. One tear slips anyway.

Felix doesn't look away.

A corner of his mouth lifts - not a smile, exactly. More like satisfaction.

He turns slightly to Chad.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Are you seeing this?

Chad's eyes remain on his laptop.

Felix nods. Like a point has been proven.

Katie wipes her cheek fast, mortified, trying to regain professionalism.

Felix lets her scramble for dignity. It costs him nothing.

Then, bright and brisk:

FELIX (CONT'D)

What else?

Katie's hands shake as she offers a one-sheet.

KATIE

Development has a spec. Small-town
Christmas movie. A jingle writer helps
save a firehouse, and -

Felix takes the page with two fingers, like it's damp.

Scans it.

FELIX

"A jingle writer helps save a
firehouse"?

He says it like he's tasting a bad wine.

Katie tries, desperate to get back on safe ground.

KATIE

It's hopeful. It's... heartfelt.

Felix glances at Robbie.

FELIX

"Heartfelt"? That's what you say when
there's no jokes and no cut-through.

(MORE)

FELIX (CONT'D)

I can't believe someone as smart as you doesn't know that.

He skims faster now, surgical.

FELIX (CONT'D)

And the stakes are, what? Adults feel all warm and fuzzy? And the climax is - oh, God - a fundraiser?

Katie swallows. Her eyes shine again.

Felix steps in a fraction - too close - voice airy.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Do you know what a jingle is, Katie? It's a sound you make to get people to buy something they don't need.

He taps the one-sheet.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Yet somehow "this" is a story where the jingle writer saves, what... morality? Christmas? America? (beat) Adorable.

Katie's breath hitches. She hates herself for it.

Felix watches it happen. Enjoys the power without needing to show it.

He drops the one-sheet into the trash.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Kill it.

Katie flinches.

Felix adds, to Robbie:

FELIX (CONT'D)

If Development brings me "save the firehouse" again, I'm going to buy an actual firehouse and burn it to the ground just to prove a point.

Katie makes a small sound - a laugh that breaks into a sob.

Felix doesn't react like a normal person would.

He just watches her lose control, calm and observant.

Then - as if granting mercy - with a sigh:

FELIX (CONT'D)

Go.

Katie looks up.

Felix gestures toward her coat, her bag.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Go see your grandma, Katie.

Relief rushes through Katie so fast it's humiliating.

KATIE

Thank you, Felix. Thank you.

Felix offers a small, generous smile.

FELIX

Merry Christmas, Katie.

Katie nods hard, wiping her face, backing out.

KATIE

Merry Christmas, Felix.

She goes. Fast. Like escape.

Chad slips out behind her.

The door closes.

Silence.

Only Felix and Robbie now.

Felix turns back to the screens. Clicks PLAY. The choir resumes beaming into the void.

Robbie stands perfectly still.

Felix doesn't look at him when he speaks.

FELIX

I want her out.

Robbie's head lifts.

ROBBIE

What?

Felix keeps watching the footage like he's choosing paint colours.

FELIX

Katie. Tonight. The crying. The...
God, the grandmother. She's finished.

Robbie tries to find a safe tone.

ROBBIE

She's under a lot of pressure, Felix.

Felix finally turns to him, mildly amused.

FELIX

And?

A beat.

Felix leans back, almost conversational - like he's complimenting Robbie's work.

FELIX (CONT'D)

That's why I keep you around, Robbie.
I don't know anything about you.

Robbie doesn't react. He's learned not to.

Felix's smile is small.

FELIX (CONT'D)

And I don't care.

Robbie's throat tightens despite himself.

Felix continues, light, casual, cruel without heat.

FELIX (CONT'D)

You never bring whatever sad little
mess your life is into my office. No
drama. No tears. (beat) No
personality.

Robbie flinches - just a flicker.

Felix catches it like a sport fisherman.

FELIX (CONT'D)

I've always liked that about you, you
know.

Robbie nods once. Automatic. Humiliating.

Felix turns back to the screen as if the conversation never happened.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Make it clean. Katie. Don't make it a thing. It is Christmas, after all.
(beat) I don't want to see it on Page Six.

Robbie opens his laptop. Fingers hover over the message he doesn't want to write.

Felix watches Robbie obey. Satisfied.

On screen, the host smiles again, about to speak sincerity.

Felix clicks PAUSE.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Also - kill the kids' choir.

Robbie types.

Felix stands, straightens his cuff, glances at Robbie like appraising furniture.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Good.

A beat.

He stands behind Robbie - watching him type Katie's dismissal letter. Then, almost fondly - an old line, repurposed as a flex:

FELIX (CONT'D)

Keep Christmas in your way, Robbie.

He looks at the glowing dashboards. The products. The manufactured joy.

FELIX (CONT'D)

And let me keep it in mine.

Robbie's eyes sting. He does not let it show.

Felix notices anyway.

And it pleases him.

INT. THORN HOUSE - ROBBIE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

A small glass box off the main corridor. Two monitors. A whiteboard packed with timings. A thick binder with colour tabs. Everything labelled. Everything cross-checked.

It's the nerve centre of someone else's life.

Robbie is mid-email when a SHADOW slides across the frosted glass.

The door opens.

Felix steps in like he's just wandered over for a chat - casual, unhurried, perfectly composed.

No knock.

Felix clocks the room: the whiteboard, the binder, the neat stacks. His eyes brighten with proprietary delight.

Robbie sits up straighter.

ROBBIE

Hey. I was going to come by. What do you need me to get done before I go home?

Felix doesn't answer yet. He picks up the binder and flips it open.

Tab read: GUESTS / ARRIVALS / GIFTS / SEATING / STAFFING / HAMPTONS RUN OF SHOW / BACKUPS.

Felix turns pages like he's enjoying a favourite magazine.

FELIX

God.

He lands on a seating chart. Smiles.

FELIX (CONT'D)

This is beautiful.

Robbie blinks. That's as close as Felix gets to praise.

ROBBIE

Everything's locked in. Drivers, staff, menu, dietary, gifts. So - what else do you need tonight?

Felix keeps reading, warming to it - expansive, indulgent, like he's narrating a fantasy he's starring in.

FELIX

It's going to be perfect.

He taps a page.

FELIX (CONT'D)

The house is "effortless." Which, as we know, takes an army.

He flips.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Arrivals staggered so nobody waits in the cold like a civilian. The comedian late, because he needs an audience. The actress by the windows, because she photographs like a saint. The singer by the fireplace so she can do "cosy."

He pauses, pleased with his own taste.

FELIX (CONT'D)

The athlete away from the wine. The producer away from the athlete. The A-list morons far from anyone who might ask them... anything.

Robbie watches Felix take credit for decisions Robbie made at 2am.

Felix flips to GIFTS.

FELIX (CONT'D)

And the gifts.

He nods, approving.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Not personal. Not cheap. Expensive enough to flatter, vague enough to be safe.

Robbie says, carefully:

ROBBIE

(quietly)

You're welcome.

Felix doesn't even register it as a claim.

He flips to the RUN OF SHOW.

FELIX

The carol singers are a good touch. Just showing up like that.

Robbie can't help it.

ROBBIE

I know. I organised them.

Felix looks up, mildly amused, as if Robbie has pointed out water is wet.

FELIX

Yes. That's why they'll feel spontaneous.

A beat. Felix goes back to the page.

FELIX (CONT'D)

I want it to feel like nobody planned anything. Just magic happening around me.

Robbie swallows his irritation.

Felix turns another page - PHASE TWO.

It's innocuous on its face. Pure logistics.

LATE ARRIVALS / ALT DRIVERS / SECURITY NOTE / PHONE BASKETS / STAFF CHANGEOVER / "FRIENDS OF FRIENDS"

Felix's expression shifts into private satisfaction.

He taps the header once.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Good.

Robbie keeps neutral.

ROBBIE

That's all set, too.

Felix continues, still casual - but there's an edge of reverence, like he's talking about art.

FELIX

Lunch is the photograph. Then the photograph leaves. Then it's "me time".

He flips to a binder marked "PHASE TWO".

Robbie says nothing.

Felix's finger lands on "extras." An assortment of headshots of male models and fitness influencers.

FELIX (CONT'D)

After that, it's just my people.

Robbie shifts slightly in his seat.

Felix closes the binder, satisfied. Then - remembering why he walked in.

FELIX (CONT'D)
So. Christmas.

Robbie takes the opening.

ROBBIE
Yeah. I'm going home tonight, Felix.
To my family. And I'm not working
Christmas Day. Tell me what you need
done before I leave and I'll do it.

Felix studies him a moment, as if deciding how much leash to allow.

Then Felix smiles - not warm, but agreeable.

FELIX
Fine. Take Christmas Day.

Robbie exhales, barely.

Felix immediately adds, breezy:

FELIX (CONT'D)
I'll message you when I need to.

Robbie's relief collapses in real time.

ROBBIE
That's still work, Felix.

Felix shrugs, almost playful.

FELIX
No. That's keeping your job. Work is
you coming in.

Felix steps closer, lightly tapping Robbie's desk with one finger - ownership without raising his voice.

FELIX (CONT'D)
You can ignore me if you want.

Felix's eyes lock on Robbie.

FELIX (CONT'D)
I wouldn't recommend it.

Robbie nods once because his body has learned "yes" faster than his mind.

Felix exits.

The door clicks shut.

Robbie sits in the glow of his screens: the seating chart, the gifts, the timing, the drivers - a whole world he built that will belong to Felix in every story told about it.

His phone BUZZES almost instantly.

A text from Felix: "Call florist. Poinsettias? Is she high?"

Robbie stares at it.

Then he opens a new e-mail and starts doing the last thing Felix asked for - because "Christmas Day off" just means being on call from a distance.

C/U on laptop screen: "Dear Katie..."

EXT. THORN HOUSE - NIGHT

Felix exits into the cold.

A black limo waits at the curb, already idling. The DRIVER is already there, opening the door like this is choreography.

Felix gets in without breaking stride.

INT. LIMO - NIGHT

Soft leather. Low light. No Christmas. No warmth. Just expensive quiet.

DRIVER
Evening, Mr. Thorn.

FELIX
Home.

The limo pulls away.

Felix checks his phone. A few messages. He doesn't open them. He stares out instead, like the city is content he didn't greenlight.

Times Square is still blazing behind them - carols, ads, costumes, love sold by the square foot.

A GIANT DIGITAL BILLBOARD plays a holiday spot - glitter, slow-motion smiles, a perfect family.

Felix watches it pass, unimpressed.

For a single blink the billboard glitches - not enough to be obvious, just enough to be wrong:

The smiling image smears - the words rearrange - PAY / ALONE

Then it snaps back. Perfect again.

Felix's thumb stops mid-scroll.

He looks up sharply, but they're already past.

He doesn't like having missed it.

They stop at a red light.

Outside, a Santa with a bell rings for charity. Not showy. Tired. Cold. The bell's ding is faint through the limo, but it lands cleanly.

Felix's jaw tightens. Not sympathy - irritation. Sound intruding into his hermetic world.

The limo moves on.

A few blocks later: a COMMUNITY HALL. A banner: WINTER MEAL. Volunteers carry trays. People file in quietly.

A laugh - a real one - floats out as the limo glides past.

Felix's eyes flick toward it, then away, like it's a smell.

Another red light.

A KID steps between cars selling cheap battery candles. Plastic flame. A handful in a shoebox.

The kid approaches the limo and taps gently on the glass, holding up a candle.

Felix looks straight ahead.

The kid waits. Too long.

Felix turns his head slowly and regards the kid through tinted glass - expression neutral, attention absolute.

Then Felix lifts his phone to his ear as if taking a call. A performance of being unreachable.

The kid backs off, embarrassed.

The light changes. The limo pulls away.

Felix lowers the phone.

No call.

His screen lights up anyway: UNKNOWN CALLER

Felix stares at it.

A beat.

He DECLINES.

Instantly, the limo's interior light flickers once - like a breath.

Felix looks up, annoyed.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Is there an issue?

DRIVER

No, sir.

Felix doesn't respond. He watches his own reflection in the glass. For a second the reflection looks slightly delayed. A half-beat behind. Then it's normal.

Felix shifts, as if that fixes it.

Outside, the city begins to change. Fewer screens. Older buildings. Better streets. Less noise. Money that doesn't need neon.

Felix relaxes into it like a bath.

EXT. MANHATTAN BROWNSTONE - NIGHT

The limo pulls up to an immaculate brownstone on a quiet, tree-lined block.

Tasteful wreath. Tasteful lights. Nothing that screams Christmas - only whispers it.

The driver is out, opening Felix's door.

Felix steps onto the pavement and inhales like he's arrived somewhere civilized.

He looks up the street: a pair of neighbors walking a dog, laughing. Normal warmth.

Felix doesn't acknowledge them.

He moves to the steps.

The driver takes a few paces behind, respectful distance.

DRIVER

You need anything else tonight, sir?

Felix considers, then:

FELIX

No.

DRIVER

Merry Christmas then, Mr. Thorn.

FELIX

(looking at his phone)

Right.

The driver returns to the car.

Felix reaches the door - old brass, polished. A discreet keypad hidden inside the frame.

He enters a code.

The lock CLICKS.

Then - another sound, faint and metallic - a soft rattle somewhere behind him. Like a chain dragged lightly across stone.

Felix freezes.

Nothing. Just the street, the car pulling away, the trees moving slightly in the wind.

Felix looks down at the steps. At the iron railing. At the quiet.

He doesn't like that he turned. He turns back, forces the door open.

INT. MANHATTAN BROWNSTONE - FOYER - NIGHT

Warm lighting. "Old money" charade. Flawless curation.

A gallery wall of tasteful art. A side table with a single perfect arrangement. The kind of home that looks like it's waiting for Architectural Digest to drop by unannounced.

Felix closes the door behind him. For the first time all night, there is quiet.

Not the good quiet. The kind that listens back.

Felix removes his gloves. His coat. Hangs them with exactness.

He takes one step - and from somewhere deeper in the house, something makes a tiny sound: a paper shift, a soft click, a distant bell.

Felix stops again. He moves forward, faster now, as if speed can outpace discomfort.

INT. MANHATTAN BROWNSTONE - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

A perfect room. Fireplace. Books arranged for aesthetics, not reading. A tree that costs more than most people's rent, decorated like an art installation.

He sits, finally, and exhales - control restored.

His phone BUZZES on the table.

He ignores it.

Then, from somewhere in the house - a faint, unmistakable rattle.

Metal. Not loud. Just present.

Felix's eyes lift.

The room's warmth doesn't help. It makes the cold feel more intentional.

Felix sets his glass down carefully.

FELIX
Consuela? (beat) Robbie?

He listens. Nothing.

Then - one last, gentle sound - a keycard BEEP. Impossible in a brownstone like this.

Felix's face hardens.

He rises.

The room is perfect. Fireplace low. Tree curated, not joyful. Every ornament looks chosen by a committee.

Silence.

Then - a faint, metallic rattle again. Not loud. Not dramatic. Just close.

Felix turns toward the hallway.

He starts across the room, careful now. Annoyed that he's being careful.

As he passes the mantle, the framed art above it - an abstract piece - catches the firelight.

For a moment, Felix's reflection in the glass is wrong. Not older. Not ghostly. Just not quite him.

Felix stops. The reflection fixes itself. Of course it does. He keeps going.

INT. MANHATTAN BROWNSTONE - UPSTAIRS HALL / STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Felix stands at the landing, drink forgotten in his hand.

At the top of the stairs, MARLEY WATERSTONE (70s) is simply there.

Short. Immaculate. Fur-collared coat over dark tailoring. Perfect lipstick. Perfect hair. Eyes like old cut glass.

A cigarette burns between two fingers.

Keycards and glossy tags hang from her like jewellery. Receipts and lanyards drag softly against the wood. A modern chain. Constant. Quietly obscene.

Felix can't decide whether to shout or run.

FELIX

How did you get in here?

Marley takes a drag. Looks around the stairwell.

MARLEY

Still with the dumb questions, huh?

A beat.

MARLEY (CONT'D)

Hello, Felix.

Felix stares.

FELIX

Marley?

A beat.

FELIX (CONT'D)
But you can't, you... you're dead.

MARLEY
And yet here I am. Imagine how
thrilling that is for me.

FELIX
This is a prank. Right?

Marley exhales smoke.

It hangs in his pristine stairwell like an act of war.

MARLEY
Not so much.

FELIX
What do you want?

Marley's gaze flicks down the stairwell, taking in his curated rooms like a showroom she once could have sold for double.

MARLEY
To warn you.

Felix's face hardens.

FELIX
About what?

Marley steps forward.

The rattle follows.

MARLEY
You have one night, Felix. One.

Felix scoffs.

FELIX
I don't have time for -

MARLEY
Oh, you're gonna want to make time for
this, kid.

A beat.

MARLEY (CONT'D)
Trust me.

Felix swallows, forcing bravado.

FELIX
For what? (beat) Exactly?

MARLEY
Three visitors.

Felix blinks.

FELIX
"Visitors"?

A nervous laugh.

FELIX (CONT'D)
I'm really not set up for anyone and
my chef won't be back until...

MARLEY
Three ghosts. One. Two. Three. AM.
Just like that.

Felix tries to laugh again.

FELIX
"Ghosts"? Well, why not? What are they
supposed to do, Marley? Lecture me?
Terrify me?

Marley's eyes stay on his. Calm. Unyielding.

MARLEY
They will come.

A beat.

MARLEY (CONT'D)
And you will listen, Felix. You will
listen as if your miserable life
depends on it.

Felix's jaw tightens. He hates this - how little he can
negotiate or manage.

FELIX
This is not happening. This is...
insane. Why... why are you doing this,
Marley?

Marley studies him for a long moment.

Then, almost conversational:

MARLEY

You remember the meeting?

Felix's face twitches. He does.

MARLEY (CONT'D)

"Streamlining." "Restructure." "Not personal, Marley."

FELIX

That's not...

MARLEY

I built that business, Felix.

A beat.

MARLEY (CONT'D)

Before it was Thorn anything, it was Waterstone-Thorn.

She takes another drag.

MARLEY (CONT'D)

Though not originally, of course.

Marley smiles without warmth.

MARLEY (CONT'D)

Marlene Wasserstein was too... what? Ethnic? Old? Hard to "package", right? (beat) Hard to sell.

A beat.

MARLEY (CONT'D)

"Waterstone" tested better. (beat) Says you.

FELIX

You agreed to it, Marley. I...

MARLEY

Of course I did.

She steps down one stair. The keycards clink softly.

MARLEY (CONT'D)

I was very good at signing off on your ideas, as I recall. (beat, empty chuckle) However twisted.

She looks around his immaculate house.

MARLEY (CONT'D)

I taught you everything, Felix. (beat)
Everything.

A beat.

MARLEY (CONT'D)

Taste. Timing. Ruthlessness. How to
read a room before it had the chance
to disappoint you.

FELIX

You taught me not to confuse feelings
with business, Marley.

MARLEY

Oh boy, did I ever.

A beat.

MARLEY (CONT'D)

And look how beautifully that worked
out for both of us.

She lifts her tablet. For a blink, the screen flashes: ACCESS
DENIED. Then goes dark.

MARLEY (CONT'D)

Consultant, you said. My e-mails
stopped showing up. My name vanished
from the website. My keycard went
dead.

She takes another drag.

MARLEY (CONT'D)

And I watched it all happen... in
real time.

Felix bristles.

FELIX

We were on a growth cycle. You know
that. As a business. We evolved. You
couldn't...

Marley cuts him off, gentle as a guillotine.

MARLEY

You erased me because it was better
for you.

A beat.

MARLEY (CONT'D)

That's your talent, Felix. You remove the human element and call it evolution.

Felix stares at her, hate rising to cover fear.

FELIX

You were no kitten, Marley.

Marley lets out the smallest laugh.

MARLEY

God, no.

A beat.

MARLEY (CONT'D)

That would make this so much less embarrassing.

Now she comes another step down. Close enough to matter.

MARLEY (CONT'D)

I am paying for my sins too, kiddo.

She glances at the dragging receipts, the badges, the dead devices hanging from her.

MARLEY (CONT'D)

Every name I erased. Every person I diminished so I got bigger. Every vengeance I dressed up as a triumph.

She looks back at him.

MARLEY (CONT'D)

You didn't betray me because you were different from me, kid.

A beat.

MARLEY (CONT'D)

You betrayed me because you are me, Felix. I made you. (beat, drag) In my own goddam image.

FELIX

So?

Marley looks back up at him. Not angry. Not vengeful. Matter-of-fact.

MARLEY

So: now it's your turn.

Felix's breath catches - tiny, involuntary.

Marley's smile is thin.

MARLEY (CONT'D)

You ghosted me, Felix. You erased who I was and what I did.

A beat.

MARLEY (CONT'D)

So now it's time for you to take a long look at... you.

FELIX

What...?

MARLEY

You'll figure it out.

Felix's eyes widen despite himself.

Marley steps down one more stair. Lights another cigarette. The rattle follows like punctuation.

MARLEY (CONT'D)

Good luck, kid.

A beat.

MARLEY (CONT'D)

You're gonna need it.

She starts down toward the warm, perfect rooms, cigarette ember floating in the dark like a watchful eye.

Felix finds his voice again - too late.

FELIX

Marley, wait. I...

But she is already going.

The smoke lingers. The rattle fades.

Felix stands alone in his immaculate stairwell, listening to the grandfather clock tick toward one.

For the first time tonight, he looks afraid.

INT. MANHATTAN BROWNSTONE – MAIN ROOM – NIGHT

Felix paces. The house is too perfect to hide in.

He checks the time on his phone. 12:59.

He scoffs at himself, then hates that he did.

The grandfather clock somewhere in the house begins to chime -- just enough to mark the hour.

And then - MUSIC.

Not from a speaker. Not from outside. From inside the walls.

A distant swell of synth, applause, camera shutters - like a runway, an afterparty, and a nervous breakdown sharing the same bloodstream.

FELIX

What the...?

The Christmas tree lights POP brighter, as if someone has pushed the room from "tasteful" to "editorial."

The fireplace flares.

A gust of cold air slices through the room.

The brownstone begins to glow with impossible glamour - flashbulb reflections where there shouldn't be reflections, dressing-room mirrors in the windows, the glossy sheen of a life being documented in real time.

Felix backs up a step despite himself.

A CRASH of sound from upstairs: a laugh, a heel on wood, the clean, precise clack of someone arriving as if architecture has been waiting for them.

A SPOTLIGHT finds the staircase.

The banister becomes a runway.

Down the stairs comes the FIRST SPIRIT - THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS PAST.

A beautifully dressed man of indeterminate age - style oozing from every pore.

A black coat with a rich collar over a razor-sharp suit. Polished boots. Designer sunglasses. Rings catching the light. Hair expensive. A face immaculate in that way that suggests discipline.

The Spirit hits the bottom step and stops. He takes in Felix's room with one cool, devastating glance.

PAST

Oh.

A beat.

PAST (CONT'D)

Is there anything to drink?

FELIX

I don't drink.

PAST

No one does any more. It's so depressing.

He raises his hand and it suddenly contains a Martini. He sips.

PAST (CONT'D)

My God, is this room a disaster.

FELIX

What?

Past drifts into the room, not touching anything, just surveying it with elegant contempt.

PAST

What did you do: rob an Ethan Allen?
All this WASP-y "good taste".
Seriously?

FELIX

If you must know, some of the best designers in...

PAST

In what: the Dead Poets' Society?

FELIX

Who the hell are you?

PAST

(incredulous)
Me? I'm... God, when did everyone get so dumb? (beat) You know who I am.

FELIX

I one-hundred-percent do not.

PAST
You do, Felix.

He steps closer. Not threatening. Intimate.

PAST (CONT'D)
You worshipped me. Well, the version
of me you saw in Vanity Fair, at
least.

He studies Felix as if comparing him to an earlier sample.

PAST (CONT'D)
Such a pity you turned out... whatever
"this" is. You were promising, I'm
told. Once upon a time.

FELIX
I don't take appointments I didn't
schedule.

Past lets out a bright, disbelieving laugh.

PAST
Is that so? Life is a series of
unscheduled appointments, Felix.
(pointed) "I can't believe someone as
smart as you doesn't know that."
(beat) We're going. If I see one more
accent pillow, I may vomit.

FELIX
Going where, exactly?

Past turns back with a look that is almost pity and almost
anticipation.

PAST
Back.

FELIX
I'm not going anywhere with you...
you, whatever the hell you are.

PAST
Mm.

He extends a hand to Felix.

PAST (CONT'D)
That will be surprising news to the
hand you're about to take.

Felix stares at it.

PAST (CONT'D)

You may think you have all the time in the world, Felix. Trust me. (beat) You don't.

He takes Past's hand.

The music HITS - not brassy, but electric.

A flash. A camera pop. A bass note under the floorboards. The whole room floods white.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. SUBURBAN COUNTRY CLUB - NIGHT (WINTER 2007)

Felix stands in a car park edged with dirty piles of snow, under security lights trying and failing to look festive.

Beyond: a suburban country club done up for a winter event.

Too much aspiration. Not enough money. Exactly the kind of place trying to look more expensive than it is.

Through the windows: fairy lights, uplighting, teenagers in formalwear, adults drinking too much white wine and congratulating themselves on community.

A banner over the entrance: ST. AGNES WINTER BENEFIT ENCHANTED FOREST

Felix looks down at himself - too sleek, too expensive, wrong for the year.

Past stands beside him like he's arrived exactly where he meant to.

FELIX

Where is this?

Past looks at the building with a smile that knows exactly where to press.

PAST

This is where you learned a very valuable lesson, Felix. Two, actually.

From inside: the muffled thump of a playlist, laughter too loud to be kind, the thin feedback squeal of a microphone.

They move toward the entrance without walking - more like the world pulls them.

As they near the glass, the reflections sharpen. Inside, we glimpse it: a ballroom Felix has made beautiful.

Paper trees. Hanging lights. A whole cheap room transformed by talent.

And, near the doors, YOUNG FELIX - seventeen, slim, watchful, beautifully put together without quite having the money for it - adjusting a centerpiece nobody else could have made look that good.

PAST (CONT'D)

There you are. Cute kid, weren't ya?

INT. SUBURBAN COUNTRY CLUB - BALLROOM - NIGHT (WINTER 2007)

A room transformed by ambition. Not expensive. Made to look expensive.

Paper birch trees sprayed silver. Strings of borrowed fairy lights. Glass bowls with floating candles. Branches dusted with fake snow. A cheap ballroom alchemised into something almost magical.

Teenagers in formalwear sweep through the room performing adulthood.

Adults hover at the edges with wine.

PAST

There it is. Your first triumph. In all its... glory.

And he's right. The room sings. Nothing in it should work this well. But it does.

A GIRL in an expensive dress - CHLOE, eighteen, committee-perfect, glides past, fixing a bracelet.

CHLOE

Felix, the lights by the raffle table are doing that sad flicker thing again.

YOUNG FELIX

The extension lead's overloaded, I guess.

CHLOE

Can you fix it? Like, now.

Young Felix is already moving.

PAST

Hear that?

FELIX

Hear what?

PAST

That's being needed. Oh, the most addictive sound in the world when you're the boy who never gets picked for anything.

Young Felix crouches by the raffle table, reworking the cables with quick, competent hands.

A BOY appears above him - OLIVER, 18, golden, easy - the kind of rich school prince who mistakes charm for character. Tux. Good haircut. Smile rehearsed by nature.

OLIVER

There he is.

Young Felix looks up too fast. That tells Felix everything.

OLIVER (CONT'D)

You saved us, man.

He offers a hand. Young Felix takes it. Gets hauled up.

OLIVER (CONT'D)

Seriously, this looks insane. My mom thinks we hired someone.

YOUNG FELIX

You basically did.

OLIVER

No, I mean it. You made this place look...

He turns, taking in the ballroom.

OLIVER (CONT'D)

Well, it looks amazing. Thanks to you.

Young Felix smiles because Oliver is looking at him.

OLIVER (CONT'D)

Come here, dude.

He reaches up and straightens Young Felix's tie. A small gesture. Too intimate for nothing. Not intimate enough for truth.

Past watches Felix watching the exchange.

PAST

My, he was a very pretty problem,
wasn't he?

FELIX

Shut up.

OLIVER

You got changed?

YOUNG FELIX

Is this okay?

OLIVER

Um, sure. You look great. Well, you
should. You're basically on the
committee at this point.

Young Felix tries not to let that mean too much.

At the stage, a TEACHER with a clipboard calls out:

TEACHER

Committee photo in thirty seconds! If
your name's on the program, I need you
by the stage. Now, people!

The room shifts.

Chloe heads straight over. Other committee kids gather,
smoothing outfits, checking hair, claiming their places.

Young Felix looks to Oliver.

OLIVER

C'mon.

Young Felix follows.

PAST

Aha. The moment you thought the secret
door had finally opened.

They weave through the tables.

Young Felix is almost glowing now - not with vanity. With
relief.

Near the stage, a PHOTOGRAPHER begins arranging bodies.

PHOTOGRAPHER

Taller ones in back. Girls in front:
unless you hate the girls, in which
case, tell me now.

Laughter.

Young Felix hovers just inside the group. Not quite placed. Not yet excluded.

The teacher checks the printed program in her hand. Her finger moves down the names. Stops. She looks up.

TEACHER

Oh.

Young Felix's smile falters by a millimetre.

TEACHER (CONT'D)

Felix, sweetheart, not this one.

YOUNG FELIX

But, I decorated the whole room.

A few heads turn. The teacher lowers her voice as if kindness can erase context.

TEACHER

And you were a lifesaver, Felix.
Truly. But this is committee and
family only, honey.

That word hangs there. "Family."

Oliver sees the hit land. Does not step in quickly enough.

YOUNG FELIX

Oliver said -

OLIVER

We'll get one after, bro. With
everybody.

He says it lightly. Automatically. The way people promise things they never intend to remember.

Then, because the room needs smoothing more than Felix does -

OLIVER (CONT'D)

Can you check the candles by the
silent auction, buddy? A few of them
died, I think.

There it is. Not thrown out. Reassigned.

Felix goes still.

PAST

No one shoved you. No one called you
anything ugly or mean. (beat, rueful)
That's how it works.

Young Felix stands there for one humiliating beat too long.

The photographer lifts the camera.

PHOTOGRAPHER

Beautiful.

FLASH.

Young Felix flinches.

PAST

Lesson number one.

The photo group breaks into chatter immediately. Which makes it worse.

A DONOR WOMAN in lacquered hair and a fur-trimmed wrap turns to Young Felix, mistaking his black shirt and tie for staff.

DONOR WOMAN

Sparkling water?

Young Felix stares at her. She smiles, waiting. He takes the glass from her hand. Automatically.

YOUNG FELIX

Sure.

FELIX

Why did he do that?

PAST

Because he already knew.

Young Felix crosses to the bar.

Behind him, the committee reforms for smaller photos: best friends, parents, laughing clusters, the real guests of the evening.

Oliver throws an arm around somebody else. Gone already.

Young Felix waits at the bar while a BARMAN opens sparkling water.

Onstage, a giant projection screen flickers to life with the event slide: ST. AGNES WINTER BENEFIT HOST COMMITTEE

A list of names. Chloe. Oliver. Rajiv. Cassie. Shawna. Tom.

No Felix.

He takes the sparkling water. Turns. Delivers it.

The donor woman barely looks at him.

Young Felix nods. Invisible now in the correct way.

FELIX

It was just a dumb photo.

PAST

No. It was the night you understood that making the room special didn't mean you got invited in.

Across the room, people glow inside his work. He is not in the picture: he's the reason there is a picture.

The mic at the stage gives a little burst of feedback.

TEACHER

Alright, folks, places please.

She clocks Young Felix immediately.

TEACHER (CONT'D)

Felix, honey, could you stay near the sound desk? In case anything goes wrong?

Young Felix nods. Because of course. Because it is always him. He heads toward the side of the room.

As he passes a mirror-paneled wall, he catches himself in it: black shirt, tie, good face, wrong category. A beautiful boy dressed like staff.

PAST

Here comes the vow.

Young Felix stops at the sound desk. The music swells. The room applauds. The committee takes their seats at the front.

He remains standing. Working. Watching.

Young Felix's face goes still in that precise, frightening way we already know from the man he becomes.

The hurt doesn't vanish. It gets arranged. Filed.

YOUNG FELIX
(under his breath)
Never again.

FELIX
(to Past)
Stop.

Young Felix looks back toward the room one last time. To Oliver.
To the tables. To the photograph he is not in.

PAST
They weren't cruel because they hated
you. They didn't. They were cruel
because you didn't matter.

Young Felix turns to the sound board as the emcee begins.

FELIX
Can we go?

PAST
No. Not yet.

Past nods toward the stage.

PAST (CONT'D)
Time for lesson number two.

Young Felix slips through a side door - Past and Felix are
pulled after him.

INT. COUNTRY CLUB - SERVICE CORRIDOR - NIGHT (WINTER 2007)

The ballroom door swings shut behind Young Felix.

Instant muffled bass. Stacked chairs. Linens. A mop bucket. Cold
fluorescent light.

Young Felix stands very still. Not crying. Just holding his face
together.

Through the wall: APPLAUSE.

Then the door opens. Oliver slips in. Glowing from the room.

OLIVER
Hey.

YOUNG FELIX
You need something else fixed, Oliver?
Get you a Coke, maybe?

OLIVER
C'mon, man.

YOUNG FELIX
It's "committee and family", right?

OLIVER
You know what they're like.

Oliver steps closer.

OLIVER (CONT'D)
I didn't want to embarrass you.

YOUNG FELIX
Too late for that.

Oliver reaches out, straightens Felix's tie. The same gesture as before. Only private now.

OLIVER
You know you're not "staff", right?
You're the reason any of this looks
good at all. (beat) You look good.

Oliver glances back at the ballroom. Then kisses him.

Young Felix kisses him back anyway.

Felix shuts his eyes.

FELIX
Make it stop. I can't...

PAST
This is the part you kept, wasn't it?
Somewhere in the back of your mind.

OLIVER
You know I think you're amazing,
right?

YOUNG FELIX
That's a useful thing to think in
secret, Oliver.

Oliver flinches.

OLIVER
Are you okay, man?

YOUNG FELIX
I'm... fine.

OLIVER
You're the best, Felix. I mean it,
man.

He slips back into the ballroom. Young Felix stays where he is.
His phone buzzes.

A text from Oliver: u okay? Then, instantly: don't be weird

Young Felix stares at it; types back: all good x.

PAST
First, they taught you being useful
was safer than being wanted.

Young Felix adjusts one candle by a fraction. Perfect.

PAST (CONT'D)
Then they taught you that if anyone
wanted you, it would only ever be
where no one else could see.

Young Felix looks at his reflection in the steel shelf. A boy
almost in the picture. Almost.

YOUNG FELIX
(quietly)
Never again.

Past turns to Felix.

PAST
He was right, that kid. No next time.
(beat) Next time, he'd own the goddam
room. (beat) Listen, looks like
someone needs a Christmas pick-me-up -
God knows I do. Thankfully, I know
just the place.

The corridor lights flare white.

INT. DOWNTOWN DIGITAL STUDIO - NIGHT (EARLY 2010S)

A cramped downtown studio in a converted storefront: ring
lights, cables everywhere, folding chairs, garment racks,
monitor glow, a makeup station made from a desk and nerve.

A handmade sign over the set: "MISS FIZZY WIG AFTER DARK -
HOLIDAY SPECIAL".

A cheap skyline backdrop. Tinsel. A disco ball with ambition.

COLLEGE FELIX, 20, intern badge clipped to his coat, steps in carrying drinks.

Braced for judgment. Instead –

VOICE (O.S.)

Careful, baby, if you spill my tea, I
will not be responsible for my
actions.

Felix looks up.

MISS FIZZY WIG, 50s/60s, downtown legend in drag, on set in a jewel-coloured suit and a face that says she's survived worse than low budgets. Sharp, glamorous, hilarious. Not retro. Iconic.

FELIX

Miss Fizzy Wig?! God, I... This was
my first internship back in...
whenever. She was so incredible.

PAST

She's got something, I'll give her
that. Not bad for an Internet
"star" before the whole shooting
match became a cesspit.

Miss Fizzy clocks Felix in one glance.

MISS FIZZY WIG

My, my. Pretty, uptight, and dressed
like a choir boy. You must be my new
intern.

A few CREW laugh. Not at him. With delight.

COLLEGE FELIX

Felix.

She takes a tea from the tray. Felix is visibly nervous and the tray shakes.

MISS FIZZY WIG

Relax, honey. Nobody here is cool
enough to judge you.

Felix exhales for what may be the first time all day.

Across the studio, a CAMERA is rolled into place by MIGUEL, 20s. Easy smile. Work boots. T-shirt, flannel, good forearms. Calm in the middle of chaos.

He catches Felix looking. Notices. Likes that Felix looked.

MIGUEL
You new, man?

COLLEGE FELIX
Yeah. Just started.

MIGUEL
Miguel.

He offers a hand. Felix takes it.

The contact lingers half a beat. Enough.

MISS FIZZY WIG
Miguel, don't flirt with the staff. We cannot afford a lawsuit or a romance.

MIGUEL
Who says it can't be both, Miss Fizzy?

A laugh from the crew.

College Felix blushes.

A PRODUCER with a headset leans in from video village.

PRODUCER
We're ninety seconds out.

The room sharpens. People move. Lights adjust.

Miss Fizzy rises from her stool, suddenly all command.

MISS FIZZY WIG
Alright, children, Christmas special time. I want cheap magic and expensive timing.

She points at College Felix.

MISS FIZZY WIG (CONT'D)
You. Stay by monitor two. Look useful. If something catches fire, make it part of the show.

College Felix nods.

Miguel rolls camera past him, close enough for College Felix to catch soap, sweat, studio heat.

MIGUEL
You're good.

College Felix looks at him.

For once, he believes someone.

Miss Fizzy glances back at College Felix - sees the whole thing, understands it instantly.

Her voice softens, just for him.

MISS FIZZY WIG

Hey.

College Felix looks over.

MISS FIZZY WIG (CONT'D)

You're safe here, child.

College Felix doesn't know what to do with it.

The FLOOR MANAGER raises a hand.

FLOOR MANAGER

Rolling in five...

On the monitor: Miss Fizzy in frame, glorious.

Miguel settles behind camera. College Felix at the edge of the set. Inside it, somehow.

For the first time, he is not outside the room making it happen. He is in it.

The tally light clicks red.

CLOSE ON: the camera lens - a perfect circle of light.

INT. DOWNTOWN DIGITAL STUDIO - NIGHT (EARLY 2010S)

The Christmas special has wrapped.

The lights are lower now. Crew half-striking the set. Somebody sweeping glitter that will never fully leave.

College Felix emerges from the edit bay carrying a stack of labelled tapes.

He stops.

The studio has changed.

The cheap skyline backdrop remains, but now the set has been dragged wider, looser, made human.

A folding table groans under aluminum trays of food. Paper plates. Plastic cups. A supermarket ham. Baked ziti. Cookies on a tray covered in foil. A tiny plastic tree made glorious by sheer force of will.

A handwritten sign taped to a camera case: "MISS FIZZY'S ORPHAN CHRISTMAS. TWO DRINK MAX IF YOU CRY PRETTY."

The place is filling up.

Crew. Neighbours. A couple of queens still half in drag. A lonely-looking old man in a good coat. A trans girl from makeup with a bag of clementines. Two boys from somewhere downtown who are too dressed up for nobody to have invited them anywhere better.

It is not chic. It is alive.

COLLEGE FELIX

What's going on?

Miss Fizzy sweeps past carrying a tray of pigs in blankets like a duchess doing wartime service.

MISS FIZZY WIG

Christmas, baby boy. Try to keep up.

COLLEGE FELIX

I thought everyone was going home?

MISS FIZZY WIG

Some. The rest of the Internet gypsies are coming here.

She deposits the tray. Clocks a lonely newcomer by the door. Clocks an underfed PA trying not to hover near the food.

She is across the room before the thought has finished.

MISS FIZZY WIG (CONT'D)

(to newcomer)

You came. Good. Hang up your tragic little coat and take a drink.

(to Floor Manager)

Eat first, spiral later, honey.

The room laughs. The tension breaks.

Past and Felix watch from the edge of it.

PAST

That's what you responded to.

FELIX

What?

PAST

Competence with flair. Mercy with structure. The very best kind of queen. Old school.

At the table, Miss Fizzy is now rearranging three sad grocery store bouquets into one magnificent centerpiece.

Miguel appears beside College Felix, carrying a crate of beer.

MIGUEL

You staying, Felix?

COLLEGE FELIX

I don't want to intrude.

Miguel looks around the room.

MIGUEL

On this? That's not really the vibe, man.

Across the studio, a SOUND GUY in a Santa hat plugs a phone into the speakers.

A Christmas song starts. Not classy. Perfect.

Miss Fizzy claps once for attention.

MISS FIZZY WIG

Alright, my broken angels, listen up.

The room hushes.

MISS FIZZY WIG (CONT'D)

If you have somewhere fabulous to be, you are free to leave immediately and never darken my door again.

A beat.

MISS FIZZY WIG (CONT'D)

If, however, your family is impossible, your ex is basic, your landlord is a criminal, or you simply prefer my ham to despair -

She throws her arms wide.

MISS FIZZY WIG (CONT'D)

- welcome home, babies.

Applause. Cheering. Someone wolf-whistles.

College Felix stands very still.

Miguel notices. He offers College Felix a plastic cup.

MIGUEL

Come on. Before the ziti goes.

College Felix takes the cup.

Miss Fizzy has moved on to a box under the little tree: cheap wrapped presents, each tagged in Sharpie.

COLLEGE FELIX

You bought gifts?

MISS FIZZY WIG

Donated. Stolen. Misdirected. Who can say?

She digs through them, triumphant.

MISS FIZZY WIG (CONT'D)

Ah. Bath salts for Tony, because he's been through enough. Candles for Jean, because every lesbian deserves atmosphere. And for whichever one of you children said you'd never had a proper stocking -

A shy production assistant raises a hand.

Miss Fizzy tosses her a glittery sock stuffed with nonsense.

The girl looks like she might cry.

MISS FIZZY WIG (CONT'D)

Don't do that, sweetheart. I'm wearing silk.

Laughter again.

College Felix looks around: people eating, people arriving, people being noticed, people folded into the room before they can pretend they're fine.

No one here is impressive. No one is being sold. No one has to earn their place.

And still, or because of that, the room feels miraculous.

PAST

You see?

FELIX

What?

PAST

She made it special. Not for her. For them.

Miguel nudges College Felix toward the food table.

MIGUEL

Listen, the drag queens are mainlining the chips 'n salsa. I'm just saying.

College Felix laughs and lets himself be moved.

For one brief, dangerous moment, he does not stand at the edge of the room.

He enters the party.

INT. STUDIO EDIT SUITE – NIGHT

Dark except for monitor glow.

Felix and Past now stand in a cramped little edit bay off the main studio floor.

An old translucent iMac. External hard drives stacked like bricks. MiniDV tapes in a milk crate. The room hums with old electricity and stale coffee.

Past takes in the setup with a half-smile.

PAST

Oh, goody. Nothing wrecks a man faster than his browser history.

On the desk: an early edit timeline already open. Clips scattered across it. Felix's life before the cut.

Past drops into the chair like he owns it. Taps a key.

PAST (CONT'D)

I couldn't walk you through it all. A life like yours? We could be here for weeks. Months even.

He taps the keyboard.

PAST (CONT'D)

I'm skipping to the part where you almost became a person. I know: shocking, right?

The machine WHIRS awake.

On-screen: frozen DV footage. Timecode. A paused frame of Miguel turning toward camera, mid-laugh.

Felix goes still.

PAST (CONT'D)

There he is.

Past hits PLAY. The screen floods the room with soft, low-res light.

MONTAGE - FELIX / MIGUEL - PLAYING BACK ON THE OLD COMPUTER

Grainy studio footage. Miguel swings camera toward College Felix.

College Felix flinches, then laughs.

The two of them on a fire escape in winter, passing a cigarette back and forth, city sodium-orange behind them.

A smeary late-night bodega clip; Miguel holding up terrible coffee; College Felix mock-offended; young enough to think exhaustion is glamor.

College Felix at a monitor bank, headphones around his neck, working fast. Miguel leans into frame, says something we don't hear.

College Felix smiles without guarding it.

Miss Fizzy in full face, smoking outside the stage door, clocking them both, amused.

Miguel pulling College Felix by the hand through a crowded dive bar, camera jolting, lights streaking.

Younger Marley - tiny, immaculate, chain-smoking at an open window - reaches past College Felix and shifts one image on a pitch board half an inch. Smiles.

Morning light through blinds. College Felix shirtless in bed, half-hiding from the camera with a pillow. Miguel filming him anyway. College Felix laughing.

A cheap kitchen. Miguel cooking. College Felix dancing badly with a wooden spoon. The frame goes out of focus because whoever's filming is laughing too hard.

At a small party: Miguel talking; College Felix checking a vibrating phone; Miguel seeing it; pretending not to.

College Felix on set giving notes. Quick. Good. Admired. Marley keeping him talking. Miguel in the background, loading gear.

Fire escape again. Same place, colder somehow. Miguel smoking alone while College Felix talks into a phone inside.

Studio footage: Miguel filming. College Felix at monitor village. They catch each other's eye across the room. Still love there. Now distance too.

A text on the old screen, shaky handheld insert: u okay? Then: don't be weird. College Felix's face in reflected monitor glass as he reads it. No reaction visible.

Last image: Miguel in candid profile, looking off-camera toward College Felix, open, patient, still there.

The image freezes. Timecode flickers. Tape grain swims.

END MONTAGE.

Felix stands in its light like a man being identified.

PAST

That was the closest you ever got,
wasn't it? You were so young you
almost let yourself have it.

Felix looks at the screen. At Miguel. At the version of himself not yet fully edited into hardness.

FELIX

Turn it off.

Past pulls the plug. As he does so the screen goes blank and he and Felix find themselves transported once again.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

The black screen is now a switched-off hospital TV. A private room. Bright. Airless. Flowers. A chair slept in. Machines doing the talking.

Miguel in the bed. Smaller now. Oxygen. IV. Hospital bracelet.

Miss Fizzy beside him, out of drag, holding Miguel's hand.

At the door: College Felix. Perfect coat. Perfect hair.

Felix and Past stand unseen.

Miguel turns. Sees College Felix.

MIGUEL

Hey.

College Felix nods.

On the bedside table: an unopened card, a pharmacy bag, a folded NYU sweatshirt College Felix forgot when they broke up.

MISS FIZZY

He asked for you, you know. A lot.

College Felix doesn't move.

MIGUEL

You keeping busy, Felix?

College Felix tries for a smile.

COLLEGE FELIX

I can't stay. I have... a thing.

Miss Fizzy closes her eyes.

MIGUEL

Sure.

MISS FIZZY

Stay. It's the least you...

College Felix can't. He steps back.

Miguel sees it. Says nothing.

College Felix turns and goes. The door closes softly.

BEEP. BEEP. BEEP.

Miss Fizzy leans her forehead to Miguel's.

PAST

Oh, God.

Felix looks stricken. The implacable tension of trying not to feel.

INT. MANHATTAN BROWNSTONE – MAIN ROOM – NIGHT

Felix lands back in his perfect living room like he's been thrown.

One hand catches the edge of a console table. A vase wobbles. He steadies it - reflexively - because: control.

He's breathing too hard. His eyes are wet. He hates both facts. He stands there, staring at nothing.

His phone screen glares up at him: 1:59.

The grandfather clock downstairs gathers itself and CHIMES the hour. Two clean chimes.

Silence. Then - a distant BASS THUMP. Not outside. Not from the street. From inside the house.

FELIX

Shit.

The bass comes again. Closer. Warmer. A heartbeat with no respect for grief.

A wash of colour rolls across the room - green, pink, gold - nightclub light bleeding through all the good taste.

The Christmas tree lights begin pulsing in time. The fireplace flares brighter - then settles.

Felix turns toward the staircase.

From upstairs:

VOICE (O.S.)

Wow!

A beat.

VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

This is bleak, man.

Footsteps - fast - with a tiny jingle.

Then a figure appears at the top of the stairs and starts down like he is halfway through arriving somewhere better. THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT.

A live-for-today circuit boy in his twenties - tan, muscular, glowing with health and heat. No shirt. Ever. Festive nonsense on principle: low-slung trousers, glittering scarf.

He is smiling like the world has never once occurred to him as a permanent condition.

He takes in the room with genuine amazement.

PRESENT

No way, dude.

Felix doesn't move.

FELIX

Who are you?

Present looks at him properly now - blinks - then brightens.

PRESENT

There you are. Felix, right?

He comes down the last steps, still looking around.

PRESENT (CONT'D)

I'm Present. (beat) Obviously.

FELIX

Get out of my house.

Present laughs - not cruelly. Just because the line is, to him, ridiculous.

PRESENT

I can't, man. I'm only here for a hot minute. Like, literally.

Present moves through the room, touching nothing for long, all wonder and impatience.

PRESENT (CONT'D)

Also - not to be difficult - but this isn't really a "stay indoors" kind of assignment.

He clocks the designer Christmas tree.

PRESENT (CONT'D)

Wow. You really committed to loneliness on a budget.

Felix's anger flares.

FELIX

I'm not going anywhere with you.

Present turns back to him. Not offended. Not insightful. Just surprised.

PRESENT

Why not?

FELIX

Because I don't know you.

PRESENT

You don't have to.

He says it lightly. Almost kindly.

PRESENT (CONT'D)

You only get me tonight, Felix. Come on.

Felix looks at him.

For the first time, there is something underneath the glow: a flicker of sadness, or maybe just brevity. A being built to blaze and vanish.

Present holds out a hand.

FELIX

I can't with this. This is insane.

Present looks bemused, but is still holding out his hand.

Felix looks at the hand. At the room. At the lights pulsing around them.

FELIX (CONT'D)

What if I don't take it?

Present smiles.

PRESENT

I don't know, man. But wouldn't you rather go? Like: out there?

A beat.

PRESENT (CONT'D)

And honestly? Staying in would be such a waste of leg day.

Felix almost reacts.

Present wiggles his fingers.

PRESENT (CONT'D)

C'mon, man. It's Christmas Eve.

Felix takes his hand. Present lights up.

PRESENT (CONT'D)

Man, I knew you had some life in you.
(beat) Like, somewhere.

The bass drops out for one perfect beat then SLAMS back in. The room floods with colour.

INT. ULTRA-CHIC GAY NIGHTCLUB – NIGHT

Felix and Present appear in the middle of a room so expensively beautiful it looks unreal.

A Manhattan nightlife cathedral: mirrored columns, smoked glass, icy white florals, bartenders who look cast rather than hired. The crowd is pure A-gay excellence.

Men in perfect tailoring. Men in designer harnesses. Women in architectural sequins. Non-binary beauties in looks so exact they ought to come with credits.

Everyone is lit for a close-up. Everyone knows it.

Felix stops. For the first time tonight, he isn't resisting.

FELIX

Finally.

Present takes one look around.

PRESENT

Aw, crap.

But Felix is already taking it in:

A minor celebrity in a banquette pretending not to be seen. A pair of flawless men kissing beneath an installation of crystal icicles. A bartender torching rosemary over cocktails served under glass domes.

Felix's face relaxes into something perilously close to pleasure.

FELIX

This is more like it. I approve.

Present shuts his eyes for one beat.

PRESENT

Yeah. That's on me.

Felix watches the room with unmistakable approval.

FELIX

This is beautiful. It's elevated. Grown-up. No one's made a reindeer out of toilet rolls.

PRESENT

I know. That's how I know we're in trouble.

On the dance floor, a cluster of beautiful, shirtless men lift their phones as one before they dance.

Felix doesn't see the problem.

FELIX

You wanted to show me a good time,
right? This looks like a very good
time.

Present watches the room pose first, move second.

PRESENT

Well...

FELIX

At least these people made an effort.

Present turns slowly to look at him.

PRESENT

Wow.

A remix of a Christmas song drops - sleek, expensive,
emotionally airless.

FELIX

This, I understand. These are my
people.

Present rubs his face.

PRESENT

Yeah. I was afraid of that.

FELIX

What's wrong with this?

Present glances around again - at the lighting, the bodies, the
self-awareness of it all.

PRESENT

Nothing, if your kink is serving
thirst.

FELIX

Oh, please. From the guy who doesn't
own a shirt?

PRESENT

No, I mean - good for them. Gorgeous.
Expensive. Ripped. But this is not
what I meant for you.

FELIX
You say that like it's a criticism.

PRESENT
For tonight? Tiny bit, yeah.

He looks genuinely apologetic.

PRESENT (CONT'D)
Sorry. I overshot. This is less
Christmas, more Instaporn.

FELIX
I fail to see the issue.

Present looks at him, then at the room, then back.

PRESENT
You do.

A beat.

PRESENT (CONT'D)
Right. Let's fix this.

He claps once - sharp.

The MUSIC STUTTERS. The mirrored room warps. The crystal icicles smear into streaks of cheap tinsel.

FELIX
What are you doing?

PRESENT
Course-correcting.

The gorgeous room folds inward like a closing eye.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. RUN-DOWN GAY BAR - NIGHT

A CHRISTMAS SONG, sung too loudly by people who know maybe seventy percent of the words.

Felix and Present stand in a narrow, battered, gloriously unglamorous gay bar that looks like it has survived by habit, memory, and refusing to close.

Dubious carpet. Sticky tables. Low lights doing double duty as atmosphere and mercy. Tinsel so old it may be load-bearing.

A handwritten sign behind the bar: "XMAS EVE KARAOKE - FREE EGG NOG - NO FIGHTING IN THE TOILETS"

The place is PACKED.

Old queens in Christmas brooches. Leather daddies gone comfortably to seed. A lesbian couple in matching bad knitwear. Young trans kids with pharmacy eyeliner and great posture. Drag artists between eras and eyelashes. Office refugees. Lonely people trying not to look lonely. Two elderly men slow-dancing like they invented tenderness.

Felix stops dead.

FELIX
Absolutely not.

Present looks around, delighted.

PRESENT
Oh, thank God. This place rocks.

On the tiny stage area, a big middle-aged man in a cheap snowman jumper is butchering "Last Christmas."

FELIX
He can't even sing, for Christ's sake.

PRESENT
Counterpoint: who cares?

The singer misses the chorus entirely. A DRAG QUEEN grabs the spare mic and barrels in anyway. A SECOND DRAG QUEEN joins, dressed like a festive widow in sequins from at least three tax brackets ago.

The bar erupts.

Felix stares, appalled.

FELIX
This is your course-correction?

PRESENT
Mm-hmm.

FELIX
It smells like bleach and disappointment.

PRESENT
And cinnamon. And radiators. And people. It's gorgeous.

Felix watches:

A very OLD QUEEN in a brocade waistcoat sliding peanuts toward a nervous YOUNG MAN clearly having his first Christmas out.

A BARTENDER already pouring water for someone before they ask.

A WOMAN IN BIKER BOOTS passing tissues down the bar with no fuss.

A DRAG PERFORMER hopping offstage to straighten the scarf of an ELDERLY MAN with shaking hands.

At the bar sits an urn of PAY-WHAT-YOU-CAN MULLED WINE, steam rising beside a stack of paper cups.

Present wanders over, mesmerised by it.

PRESENT (CONT'D)

Oh, now we're talking.

He places his hand over the steam.

When he lifts it, a ghost-copy of a paper cup forms in his hand: warm, fragrant, glowing faintly.

Felix stares.

FELIX

I'm not drinking that. I don't drink.

Present hands it to him.

PRESENT

The house special. And yes you do.

FELIX

I'm not drinking ghost wine.

PRESENT

It's not wine. I mean, it is wine...
It's... just shut up and drink it,
okay?

Felix looks at the cup.

Steam of orange peel, clove, cheap red fruit, sugar. Warmth.

PRESENT (CONT'D)

It's the closest thing I got to the
milk of human kindness.

FELIX

The milk of human what?

PRESENT

That tracks.

Felix, despite himself, takes a sip.

The effect is immediate. Not intoxication. Release.

Color comes back into the room by a degree. The bar warms. The sharpness goes out of everything for half a second.

Felix hates that it helps.

FELIX

That's absurd.

PRESENT

Right? Have some more.

At the far wall: a plaque board.

IN MEMORY OF OUR BOYS.

Dozens of names. Dates stretching across decades.

Below it: fairy lights, cards, a cheap wreath, a half-finished drink left for someone gone.

Felix sees it. Says nothing.

Present glances over too but does not force the moment.

Onstage, the song collapses into laughter and applause. The next singer is already being shoved toward the mic by friends who know she'll refuse three times before caving.

Felix looks around again.

No one here is curated. No one here is a photograph. No one here would make his guest list. And yet the room feels rich.

FELIX

They look ridiculous.

PRESENT

Yeah. I love it.

A bartender rings a bell.

BARTENDER

Top of the hour, babies. Tip your queens, drink your drinks. And if anyone says "chosen family" with too much feeling, I'm cutting the mic.

Huge applause.

Felix watches a frail older man in a paper crown being coaxed onto the floor by two younger men who dance with him like it's an honor, not a favor. No irony. No pity. Just delight.

FELIX

Why here?

Present looks around, softer now. Not solemn. Just honest.

PRESENT

Because when the fancy places spit people out, someplace has to take them in, right? That's... that's Christmas, man.

The karaoke host grabs the mic.

KARAOKE HOST

Okay, enough foreplay. Everybody up. No moping, no tasteful nodding, and if you don't know the words, there will be bloodshed.

The opening synth stab of a gay classic: "I WILL SURVIVE."

The whole room LOSES IT.

A scream of recognition. Hands in the air. People rushing the tiny floor like it's church.

Present lights up.

PRESENT

Oh, this is epic. Come on.

FELIX

I'd sooner die.

Present grabs his wrist.

PRESENT

You're invisible, bro. Take the win.

He drags Felix into the crush of bodies. No one sees them. No one hears them. Which means Felix has nothing to protect.

The room belts the first verse. Badly. Magnificently.

Felix stands stiff with horror as Present throws himself into it, singing full-throated, joyous, terrible.

PRESENT (CONT'D)

(singing)

"At first, I was afraid, I was petrified"

He shoves the ghost-cup back into Felix's hand.

PRESENT (CONT'D)

Drink.

Felix does.

FELIX

(singing, under his breath)

"Kept thinking I could never live without you by my side."

Present wheels on him in triumph.

PRESENT

There he is!

Felix realises what he's doing. Stops. Too late.

The chorus hits. And something in him gives. He sings. At first small. Then louder. Then properly.

No one hears him but Present. No one is judging him. No one can freeze him out of the picture.

For thirty seconds Felix Thorn has a whale of a time.

He points on the chorus. He laughs. He dances - badly, beautifully, like a man with no reputation to protect.

Present is ecstatic.

PRESENT (CONT'D)

Yes! Hips, Felix! Shake your money maker, baby!

Felix laughs - real, helpless, appalled at himself.

The room around them is pure low-budget rapture: old men shouting the lyrics, drag queens testifying, the trans kids spinning each other, the nervous young man now screaming the chorus with tears in his eyes while the old queen pounds the bar in approval.

Felix is in it. Really in it.

The song ends in glorious chaos. The room erupts. So does Felix. He is breathless. Flushed. Alive.

And then he remembers himself.

It drops away.

He looks around the bar, suddenly raw. His eyes drift back to the memorial wall.

This time the fairy lights catch on one photo. Miguel.

Smiling in candid profile. His name beneath. His dates. Twenty-eight.

Felix goes still. The warmth leaves his face.

Present sees the change.

Felix steps toward the wall. Doesn't touch it. Just looks.

The room behind him is still cheering, resetting, living.

Felix stares at Miguel's face among the lost.

His eyes fill.

FELIX

Take me out of here. Please.

A beat.

FELIX (CONT'D)

I can't do this.

Present's brightness dims, just for a second. Not because he's wise. Because his time is short.

He takes Felix's hand.

The bar lights flare. The fairy lights bloom white. The memorial wall dissolves into glow.

And they are gone.

INT. ROBBIE AND KARIM'S HOUSE – LIVING ROOM / KITCHEN – NIGHT

Felix and Present appear in the middle of a noisy, overfull, deeply lived-in family Christmas.

Too many people. Too much food. Too many shoes by the door. Paper chains. Kids' drawings. Tinsel hung with optimism rather than skill.

A tree listing slightly to one side under the weight of homemade ornaments and school projects.

The room is alive.

Young kids tearing round in pyjamas and paper crowns. An older girl trying to tape a broken angel back together. A toddler wailing because someone else got the red cup. Someone in the kitchen yelling for more foil.

At the centre of it all: Robbie and his husband: KARIM HASSAN (30s).

Robbie, in a Christmas sweater and apron, carrying a tray of pasta. Karim at the stove.

ELENA (60s), Robbie's mother - presides from an armchair like a queen surrounded by wrapping paper and grandchildren.

FELIX

Oh God.

PRESENT

Right? Isn't it awesome!

A SMALL BOY skids past in socks and nearly wipes out.

ROBBIE

Mateo, corners!

MATEO

It wasn't my fault, the floor moved!

KARIM

That's not how floors work, habibi.

Present is delighted.

PRESENT

This is just... Wow.

FELIX

This is chaos.

PRESENT

Exactly.

Robbie crosses to the tree, fixes an ornament, kisses Karim on the cheek in passing, steals a carrot off a tray, keeps moving.

The choreography is chaos. The chaos is choreography.

FELIX

How many children are there?

PRESENT

(beaming)

The perfect amount of children.

On the sofa, Elena is helping a little girl tie ribbon round a present while also refereeing a dispute over a battery-operated sheep.

ELENA

No, sweetheart, Nana did not "steal" the tape. Nana rescued the tape from an idiot.

The older kids laugh. One of them sets plates without being asked.

Karim clocks an empty glass across the room, refills it on his way past, steadies a wobbling child, and catches Robbie's eye for half a second.

A whole marriage in one glance.

FELIX

He never told me any of this. Not the husband. The kids. (beat) None of it.

PRESENT

Yeah.

A beat.

PRESENT (CONT'D)

Weird, huh?

Robbie pauses in the doorway between kitchen and living room.

He watches the room: his husband, his mother, the children, the noise, the mess, the life of it.

Felix sees it. And hates how much it affects him.

FELIX

He looks...

PRESENT

Happy?

FELIX

Content. With... "this"?

Then - a tiny flicker. Robbie's eyes move, involuntarily, toward the hall. Toward upstairs.

Karim sees it too. Just a glance. Just enough.

The room keeps going. But now Felix can feel the strain running underneath it. Not fake. Not broken. Held.

Present watches Felix clock it.

PRESENT

Okay. Here it is.

FELIX

What?

PRESENT

Yeah. Here's the thing.

A child runs in from the hall clutching a paper star.

CHILD

Can I show Timmy?

The room shifts. Almost imperceptibly.

Robbie turns at once.

ROBBIE

In a sec, baby.

Felix goes still. Present takes his hand.

PRESENT

Come.

The warm room blurs at the edges - the lights stretching, the laughter muffling - and they are gone.

INT. CHILD'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Silence. Not empty silence. Medical silence.

A low machine HUM. The soft pulse of monitored breath. Christmas muffled by a closed door.

Felix and Present appear in the corner of a small child's bedroom.

A boy's room overtaken by care: glow-in-the-dark stars, a stuffed fox, toy cars lined up precisely, and among them - an oxygen concentrator, a feeding pump, medication trays, tape, tubes, a notebook full of timings.

In the bed: TIMMY, eight. Very pale. Very thin. A nasal cannula beneath his nose. A knit dinosaur under one arm.

Felix stops.

FELIX
Who's that?

Present looks at the boy.

PRESENT
You'll see.

The door opens softly.

Robbie enters with a tray: bowl, medicine syringe, folded cloth, a children's book.

He sets the tray down, crosses to the bed, checks the monitor, checks the tubing, checks Timmy.

His body knows the routine before his mind does. He puts a hand on Timmy's shoulder.

ROBBIE
Mijo.

Timmy wakes.

TIMMY
Daddy.

ROBBIE
Sorry Christmas got loud, baby.

TIMMY
I like it.

Robbie sits on the bed and starts feeding him tiny spoonfuls. Slow. Timed. Careful.

PRESENT
He does this every night.

A beat.

PRESENT (CONT'D)
That's the good news.

The door opens again.

Karim slips in with a folded blanket and charger cable.

He kisses Timmy's forehead, then Robbie's temple.

KARIM
Temp stayed down.

ROBBIE
 (to Timmy)
 That's great. Way to go, Mr. Freeze.

KARIM
 The line's behaving, too.

Karim tucks the blanket around Timmy's legs. Robbie draws up the medicine. The choreography between them is seamless.

Timmy's right hand rests outside the blanket. On it: a star-shaped birthmark.

Robbie takes the hand gently. Kisses it.

ROBBIE
 Well, hello, little star.

TIMMY
 It's still there?

ROBBIE
 I'd be worried if it wasn't.

TIMMY
 Does it mean something?

A tiny beat between Robbie and Karim.

KARIM
 Absolutely.

ROBBIE
 That you're special, baby.

TIMMY
 Even like this?

KARIM
 Especially like this.

Felix takes in the room: the shadows under Robbie's eyes, Karim's tired hands, the chart taped on the wardrobe door, the unpaid bills half-hidden under the meds.

FELIX
 Why isn't his insurance covering this?

PRESENT
 Because Robbie's insurance is garbage.

Felix turns to him.

PRESENT (CONT'D)

Barely touches any of it. Machines, meds, specialists, home care, night stuff, emergency stuff, stuff they call "non-essential" because they've never met the kid.

Timmy winces as Robbie gives the medicine. Karim is there with water instantly.

TIMMY

Bleh.

ROBBIE

I know, baby.

KARIM

Heroic, though. Superhero stuff.

Timmy settles back.

Robbie opens the book.

TIMMY

The moon one.

ROBBIE

Again?

TIMMY

The moon one.

Robbie nods. Opens it.

Timmy reaches for Robbie's hand first. Robbie gives it instantly.

The star-mark visible against Robbie's skin.

ROBBIE

(reading)

"In the dark between the stars, the little ship kept going..."

As Robbie reads, Karim clears the bowl, resets the tray, checks the machine readout. No one complains. But the cost is everywhere.

FELIX

I didn't know.

Present is suddenly more serious than before.

PRESENT

(quoting Felix)

"That's why I keep you around, Robbie.
I don't know anything about you. And I
don't care."

Felix takes his own words in.

Timmy's eyes grow heavy.

TIMMY

Daddy?

ROBBIE

Mm-hm?

TIMMY

Are we still doing Christmas if I'm
tired?

ROBBIE

We do Christmas however it comes,
mijo.

TIMMY

Even in here?

ROBBIE

Christmas isn't a place, sweetheart.
It happens wherever we want it to.

Timmy nods. Satisfied. His eyes close.

Robbie keeps reading. Voice thinning with fatigue.

Karim rests a hand, light and brief, on the back of Robbie's
neck.

Felix watches the birthmark. The machines. The unpaid bills. The
two men holding their world together.

FELIX

Does he... I mean: will he be...?

He can't finish.

FELIX (CONT'D)

(trying not to cry)

So, what do we...?

PRESENT

Yeah, this part sucks. (beat) Now you
talk consequences, Felix. But not with
me.

Before he can say more, Present starts to fade. Felix looks confused.

FELIX

Wait. Where are you going?

PRESENT

Sorry bro, gotta bounce.

FELIX

Don't leave me alone. Please, I...

PRESENT

(wistfully)

"YOLO", am I right?

And with that, Present is gone.

The room feels instantly colder.

The machine hum remains. Timmy sleeps. Robbie reads. Karim stands watch.

Felix turns - and finds himself alone.

INT. SUBWAY PLATFORM - NIGHT

A classic New York nowhere-space. Too bright. Too empty. Too late. Tile walls the colour of old teeth. A wet black track bed.

Fluorescent buzz. A gust of stale air from nowhere.

No one else on the platform.

Felix stands under a sign he doesn't quite clock. For the first time all night, there is no Spirit beside him.

Just distance. And the low thunder of an approaching train.

Felix looks down the tunnel.

Lights bloom.

The train ROARS in.

For a second, in the rush of dark and steel and headlight, it could be anything. A reaper. A verdict. A mouth opening.

The train SCREAMS to a stop. The doors slide open. Nothing.

Empty carriage after empty carriage. Harsh light. Plastic seats. A ghost city in motion.

Then - from the centre car - someone steps out.

A YOUNG MAN, late twenties. THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS FUTURE.

Dark overcoat. Scrubs. Doctor's bag slung over one shoulder.

Kind face. Tired eyes. A quiet self-possession that makes the empty platform feel even stranger. Not sinister. Not theatrical. Not what Felix was expecting.

Future looks at him. Says nothing.

FELIX

You're it?

No answer.

The man steps onto the platform fully. The train doors close behind him. It pulls away. Leaving them in the fluorescent after-silence.

Felix studies him.

FELIX (CONT'D)

You are very much not what I was expecting.

Future says nothing. Just waits.

Felix swallows.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Look - I won't pretend I'm thrilled to be here. To be honest, you scare the shit out of me. Even more than the other two.

That hangs between them.

FELIX (CONT'D)

But... if you really are here to help me, or to... If there's still time for me to... then...

He hates how sincere he sounds.

FELIX (CONT'D)

I'll come with you.

Future lifts one hand slightly: come on.

He turns and walks toward the dark end of the platform.

Felix follows.

As they reach the far end, the tunnel wall seems to open into black.

INT. UPTOWN FUNERAL RECEPTION ROOM – DAY

Soft jazz. White flowers. Good black wool.

A polished Manhattan wake in a room trying very hard to look solemn and landing on expensive.

Guests drift with wine and canapés. Media people. Gallery people. Brand people.

At the front of the room: an easel with a framed portrait, turned just enough away that Felix can't see it clearly.

He scans the room.

FELIX

What is this?

Across the room -

WOMAN IN VELVET

He'd have hated the lilies.

MAN WITH ROUND GLASSES

He'd have hated everything. That was his brand, remember?

WOMAN IN VELVET

So... how long do we have to stay?

A small laugh.

Near the drinks:

GUEST #1

I bet the new owners keep the house exactly the same.

GUEST #2

Of course they will. The man curated oxygen, for God's sake.

Another low laugh.

FELIX

Is... is it one of my crowd?

Future stands a few feet away. Silent. Watching.

At the front, a HOSTESS touches a glass.

HOSTESS

Thank you all for coming today.

The room softens into attention.

HOSTESS (CONT'D)

He was impossible, obviously.

That gets a murmur of recognition. A little laugh.

HOSTESS (CONT'D)

But brilliant. In his way. Exacting.
Original. And whether you admired him,
feared him, or... merely survived him -

Another ripple. Sharper this time.

HOSTESS (CONT'D)

- he certainly left a... mark.

Felix's expression shifts.

He looks around the room again. Less grief than performance.
More turnout than sorrow.

FELIX

This is a wake, right? But who...?

The hostess raises her glass.

HOSTESS

To a singular man.

The room echoes it.

ALL

A singular man.

They drink. Not warmly. Just efficiently.

Felix watches, unsettled.

Future turns. Starts toward the door. Felix follows him out.

As they pass the easel at last, WE SEE what Felix does not: his
own face.

And beneath it: FELIX JAMES THORN, 1990 - 20--. The latter date
is obscured by the flowers

INT. ROBBIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN / LIVING SPACE - NIGHT

The same house. And not the same at all.

Still warm. Still lived-in. But quieter now. Careful where it used to be noisy.

Christmas lights still up. Tree still standing. Children's drawings still pegged across the wall.

On the sideboard: a framed photo of Timmy beside a little felt star.

Felix appears in the doorway. The silent Future a few steps ahead.

Karim at the stove, stirring something with one hand while helping a little one with homework with the other.

Elena on the sofa, wrapping presents with two younger kids, making a game of ribbon and tape.

The older kids move through the room with the competence of children promoted too early: laying plates, finding batteries, settling arguments before they start.

No one is cheerful. Everyone is trying.

A LITTLE GIRL holds up an ornament.

LITTLE GIRL

Does this one go on Timmy's shelf or the tree?

KARIM

The tree, habibti. You know he hates being left out.

She nods and hangs it carefully.

Elena doesn't stop wrapping.

ELENA

Not too low, mija.

Ava, older now, steadier, glances toward the front door.

AVA

Has Dad texted?

KARIM

Not yet.

YOUNGER BOY

Is he coming back before stockings?

Karim doesn't answer at once. His eyes are red.

ELENA
We'll see, sweetheart.

On the mantle: another photo. Timmy in bed, grinning, star-mark visible on his hand.

The room keeps moving.

One of the older boys carries in a tray of mugs.

OLDER BOY
There's only one clean snowman mug.

ELENA
Then your little brother gets it. He's only five.

OLDER BOY
That is tyranny, abuela.

A tiny laugh. Hard-won.

Karim serves bowls. The system still works.

FELIX
(to Future)
Where's Robbie?

Future says nothing.

Karim sets down a bowl, then quietly to Ava --

KARIM
Did he take his scarf?

AVA
Yeah.

KARIM
And the flowers?

Ava nods.

YOUNGER CHILD
Can we still do stockings if Daddy's sad?

ELENA
We can, mijo. We'll do them together, si?

Karim looks toward the dark window. Toward the street. Toward wherever Robbie has gone.

KARIM

Eat it while it's hot. C'mon.

The older kids take over without being asked. The younger ones bicker over spoons. Life continues. Untidily. Without permission.

Felix looks at Timmy's photo. The felt star.

FELIX

Where's Timmy?

Future turns to him.

Then he lifts one hand and points - not upstairs.

Out.

EXT. CEMETERY - NIGHT

A small city cemetery under winter lights from the street beyond. Bare branches. Wet stone. Breath in the dark.

Felix and Future stand at the gate.

Ahead of them, a single figure among the graves:

Robbie. Coat buttoned wrong. Scarf half-done. A bunch of fresh flowers in one hand.

He kneels at a small grave.

FELIX

Wait...

Robbie clears dead stems from the little vase. Replaces them with new flowers. Straightens a weathered toy rocket propped against the stone.

Then, quietly - as if continuing an old conversation:

ROBBIE

Sorry I'm late, mijo.

Felix goes still.

Robbie brushes rainwater from the top of the stone with his bare hand.

ROBBIE (CONT'D)

The little ones made a hundred paper snowflakes - oh, and Ava says Karim's gravy still tastes like slurry.

A tiny breath of a laugh. Gone fast.

ROBBIE (CONT'D)

You'd have liked that. Karim got so mad...

Felix looks at Future. His voice rises with tension.

FELIX

No. This is... this is all wrong. No, he... he's in hospital. This is a dream, right? It's not real. None of it, right? He's... It's just... I mean... He could still...

Future says nothing. He only walks forward.

Felix follows as if pulled. They reach the grave. And there it is.

A small stone: "TIMOTEO 'TIMMY' GARCIA-HASSAN, 2018 - 2028, BRIGHT STAR."

Felix stares. Does not breathe.

Robbie, still kneeling, touches the earth lightly.

ROBBIE

I miss you every day, baby. (beat) So much.

Robbie starts to cry. That does it. Felix folds.

He drops to his knees in the wet grass: all composure gone.

FELIX

No. No, no, no...

He is weeping. Not neatly. Not beautifully. Broken.

A huge intake of breath.

FELIX (CONT'D)

I could have helped them. I could have paid for doctors. I could've fixed the insurance. I could have given Robbie... time... money - any of it. All of it. I could've...

He looks at the grave. At Robbie. At the whole unbearable shape of what he failed to see.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Oh, God. Oh, God. Miguel. Marley.
Katie. Robbie. (choke) Timmy. All of
them.

He shakes his head, sobbing.

FELIX (CONT'D)

I saw it. I saw everything. I did...
nothing. Why? Why didn't I...?

Robbie bows his head over the grave. Alone in his grief. Unable
to hear any of this.

Felix crawls a little closer, wrecked.

FELIX (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, Robbie. I'm so sorry. I'm
so sorry.

Future comes to him then. No judgement. Only an expression of
almost unbearable tenderness. He kneels beside Felix in the wet
grass and holds out a hand.

Felix looks up through tears. Takes the offered hand. And only
then sees it.

On Future's hand: the star-shaped birthmark.

Felix stares. Understands. A shudder goes through him.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Timmy? Oh, Timmy.

Future says nothing. He only holds Felix's hand tighter. His
smile is pure love.

Felix grabs Future's lapels.

FELIX (CONT'D)

I swear. I... swear on my life,
Timmy. I will... I can fix it. I
can fix all of it. Just please...
Please let me try... I... oh God, I
am so sorry. Please. Please.
Please.

The cemetery begins to brighten - the light growing in intensity
and Felix sobs and sobs. And then-

INT. MANHATTAN BROWNSTONE – MAIN ROOM – DAY

Felix opens his eyes. Instead of Timmy's lapels, he is grasping the curtains.

The tree. The fireplace. The perfect room. Everything exactly where he left it. Only now it looks obscene.

Felix drags in air. Checks his hand. His face. The room.

The grandfather clock begins to CHIME.

He flinches. Then - looks at the clock.

He scrambles for his phone. Finds it. Sees the date. Christmas morning.

Felix starts to laugh. Broken at first. Then with relief so violent it's almost another kind of crying.

FELIX

Oh, thank God.

He gets to his feet too fast. Almost falls. Doesn't care.

He grabs his coat. His keys. His wallet.

Stops. Turns back.

Looks at the immaculate room. At the tree. At the life he built to keep everyone out.

Then he is moving again - faster now.

Out the door.

EXT. MANHATTAN BROWNSTONE – CHRISTMAS MORNING

Felix bursts out onto the pavement. Breath fogging. Coat half-on. Alive and in motion.

He stops.

The city is already happening around him. Deliveries. Church bells. Cabs. Christmas.

Felix spins once, wild with purpose.

FELIX

Okay. Okay.

A beat. Then the horrible realization hits.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Okay. I have absolutely no idea what I'm doing.

He yanks out his phone and scrolls fast.

Stops on: ROBBIE.

His thumb hovers over CALL.

FELIX (CONT'D)

No. No, no, no - what am I doing?

He drops the phone from his ear. For one brief second, he looks genuinely lost.

Then - a brainwave.

He scrolls again. Finds: PLATINUM CONCIERGE SERVICES

FELIX (CONT'D)

Yes! I am a genius.

He hits CALL.

A beat.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Oh - hi. Yes. Platinum Concierge? This is Felix Thorn.

He starts pacing.

Then stops.

Listens.

Winces.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Oh. Right. Yes, I suppose I do sound different. But, real quick...

Another beat.

FELIX (CONT'D)

No, oh no, please don't cry. I...

He cringes hard.

FELIX (CONT'D)

God. Did I really say that? I'm sure I...

Listens.

FELIX (CONT'D)
Okay, fair.

Another beat.

FELIX (CONT'D)
Listen, listen: I am about to make several impossible things happen before lunch, and I need help from people who are better than me at all of this.

He starts walking now, fast, animated, alive in a way we've never seen.

He listens.

Nods.

FELIX (CONT'D)
And also - I owe you an apology, a bonus, and possibly therapy.

Another beat.

FELIX (CONT'D)
No, I am not drunk, Estelle.

He strides off down the block, talking fast, waking up as he moves.

FELIX (CONT'D)
Okay. You ready? Take notes.

INT. RUN-DOWN GAY BAR - CHRISTMAS DAY

The bar from last night.

Less chaotic now. Still shabby. Still glorious.

Tables shoved together. A few REGULARS in paper hats and yesterday's eyeliner. The bartender behind the bar.

The door flies open.

In strides Felix. Cashmere coat. Purpose. No idea how insane he looks in here.

Behind him: two DELIVERY GUYS with crates. Then more. Then a CHEF in whites, carrying knives like a field surgeon.

The whole bar turns.

BARTENDER
We're closed.

FELIX
(ignoring him)
So, what's on the menu?

BARTENDER
Microwave mac and cheese. If it's
any of your business.

FELIX
(to the chef)
I think we can do better than that,
don't you?

CHEF
I've worked in worse. (beat) Maybe.

BARTENDER
Who the hell are you?

FELIX
Someone who should've come by a long
time ago. (to chef and staff) Get
going, guys.

Felix's team heads to the kitchen.

Now the regulars are paying attention.

OLD QUEEN
Did we win something?

FELIX
No. Not exactly. Listen: you're open
for people with nowhere else to go.
That's enough.

The nervous YOUNG MAN from last night is here too. Still
tentative. Still hovering.

Felix clocks him. Clocks all of them. Felix smiles at him.

FELIX (CONT'D)
You're safe here. (beat) Okay
everybody eats. Nobody pays.
Understood? Right, let's get this room
into some kinda shape. Trust me, trust
me: I've done this before.

A REGULAR starts moving chairs. Another starts laying out paper crackers from a box.

The place begins, reluctantly, to believe him.

OLD QUEEN
What's the catch, fancy pants?

Felix stops.

FELIX
No catch. (beat) Actually, no. One catch.

Everyone stiffens.

Felix points to the karaoke machine.

FELIX (CONT'D)
Nobody sings until I'm gone.

BARTENDER
(hand at his throat)
Monster.

Everyone's smiling now.

Felix smiles too. Small. Real.

He looks around the room as it begins to transform.

MONTAGE - A BLIZZARD OF DONATIONS

INT. QUEER YOUTH DROP-IN CENTRE - DAY

A tired DIRECTOR opens an envelope Felix has just handed over.

Inside: a bank draft.

The director looks up, stunned.

Felix is already gone.

INT. COMMUNITY HALL / WINTER MEAL - DAY

Volunteers carrying trays stop as Felix presses a check into an organiser's hand.

The organiser looks at the amount.

Then at Felix.

Then back at the check.

Felix keeps moving.

INT. THORN HOUSE – RECEPTION – DAY

Christmas skeleton staff.

Felix sweeps through reception, signs a document off a clipboard, hands it back, and keeps going without breaking stride.

Behind him, a security guard reads it.

Freezes.

Looks up in disbelief as Felix disappears into the building.

CLOSE UP on clipboard: "Xmas Day. Triple Time. FT."

INT. ROBBIE'S HOUSE – FRONT DOOR / HALL – CHRISTMAS DAY

A KNOCK at the door.

Not festive. Precise.

Robbie appears from the kitchen, wiping his hands on a tea towel, already tense.

He opens the door.

Felix stands there.

Coat buttoned. Hair perfect. An envelope in one hand.

To Robbie, he looks exactly like bad news. Robbie's stomach drops.

ROBBIE

Felix, I -

FELIX

(icy)
Yes?

ROBBIE

I was going to call. I... I know I should have called. It's just - we have a kid, and... I know you don't care, I'm sorry, and... he had a night and Karim needed me and, um, I know how important Connecticut was...

Karim appears behind Robbie.

One look at Felix and he's ready for war.

KARIM
Absolutely not.

ROBBIE
Karim, honey...

KARIM
No. He does not get to come here on
Christmas and do this on our goddam
doorstep.

Felix holds out the envelope to Robbie. Face like thunder.

ROBBIE
What is that?

FELIX
Open it.

Robbie goes still. He takes the envelope like it might contain a knife.

ROBBIE
Felix, if this is about Connecticut, I
can fix it. I can still fix it.

Felix hears, maybe for the first time, how trained Robbie is to take the blow before it lands.

ROBBIE (CONT'D)
Just give me an hour. I'll get my
laptop, I'll call the florist, I'll -

KARIM
Babe, don't.

Robbie opens the envelope.

Pulls out - a check.

He stares at it.

Doesn't understand what he's looking at.

Karim clocks Robbie's face, takes the paper from him.

His own face changes.

KARIM (CONT'D)
What the hell is this?

FELIX

A start.

Robbie looks up.

Truly lost now.

ROBBIE

A start to what?

A beat.

Felix drops the old voice. The old posture. The old smile.

FELIX

To me telling the truth.

Silence.

Behind them, the house hums: kids, wrapping paper, a pan on the stove, Christmas still trying to happen.

FELIX (CONT'D)

I came here to say I was wrong. About you. About all of it.

Karim still has the check in his hand. Still doesn't trust this.

KARIM

What kind of messed up game are you playing, Thorn?

FELIX

No game.

He reaches into his coat again. Pulls out a folder.

FELIX (CONT'D)

The check is for immediate expenses. The folder is the real thing.

He offers it to Robbie.

FELIX (CONT'D)

I've arranged a suite at Sloan Kettering for Timmy.

The air changes.

ROBBIE

You've... you've what? But you didn't even...

FELIX
They're expecting him. Day after
tomorrow.

ROBBIE
But we can't... I mean... we don't
have...

FELIX
I'm covering everything.

KARIM
What?

FELIX
Every consultation. Every specialist.
Every machine. Every overnight. Every
fight with insurance they were
planning to make you have.

ROBBIE
Felix...

FELIX
No. Let me finish. Please.

A beat.

FELIX (CONT'D)
I should have known what was
happening, Robbie. I should have
cared. Caring is not optional. I
should have used what I have for
something... better.

He glances at the check in Karim's hand.

FELIX (CONT'D)
That's for now. The rest is in there.

Karim opens the folder. Scans. His eyes move faster.

Stops. Looks at Robbie.

KARIM
It's real, babe.

Robbie takes the folder. Reads.

The kids have gone quiet somewhere behind them. The whole house
listening now.

ROBBIE
You did all this today?

FELIX

Yes.

ROBBIE

How? (beat) Why?

Felix laughs once. Broken.

FELIX

Because whoever said "it's never too late" is a cast-iron idiot. And I'm not waiting until "too late" - not ever again.

Robbie looks back at the pages. At the numbers. At the hospital name. At the possibility. His eyes fill with tears. For that matter, everyone's do.

Hope enters the room in its most frightening form.

Karim sits down hard on the bottom stair.

ROBBIE

(very quietly, like a prayer)
Timmy.

Felix says nothing.

This moment does not belong to him.

He just stands there on the doorstep, holding himself together badly, while inside the house the meaning of Christmas changes shape.

Felix, suddenly aware of himself again, steps back toward the door.

FELIX

I should... go.

No one stops him at first.

He nods once - awkward, trying not to intrude on what is not his.

FELIX (CONT'D)

I'll be available if there are forms, or calls, or anything.

He hates how quickly that starts to sound like old him.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Sorry. Ignore that. I'll just...

ROBBIE

Felix.

Felix stops.

Robbie is still holding the folder. Still stunned by it. But looking at Felix differently now. Not with trust. Not yet. Just with the first faint suggestion of it.

ROBBIE (CONT'D)

Would you... stay for lunch with us?

Felix blinks.

Of all the things he expected, this was not one of them.

FELIX

Lunch?

ROBBIE

It's not exactly a masterpiece. And Karim's going to glare at you the entire time.

From the stairs:

KARIM

Correct.

A tiny laugh moves through the room. Small. Real.

Robbie looks back at Felix.

ROBBIE

But... yes.

Felix doesn't know what to do with kindness offered this gently.

FELIX

I'd like that.

A beat.

Then Robbie glances toward the stairs.

ROBBIE

And after, when he wakes up... if you'd like...

He swallows.

ROBBIE (CONT'D)

You could come meet Timmy.

Felix's eyes fill almost instantly. He nods. Can't quite trust his voice.

FELIX
(shaky with emotion)
Yeah. I'd like that too.

Robbie gives him a small, tired smile. Not forgiveness. An opening.

ROBBIE
Okay.

Karim rises, still wary, but with nowhere near the violence from before.

KARIM
Well. If he's staying, he can at least set the table.

Felix looks at him.

KARIM (CONT'D)
Don't make me ask twice.

And for the first time, Felix Thorn walks into someone else's life: not to command it - but to help.

INT. TIMMY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A quieter light now. Winter afternoon dimming at the edges.

Lunch has happened downstairs. The house hums gently beyond the door: dishes, wrapping paper, distant laughter, somebody losing at a board game.

Timmy is propped up in bed with a book.

Robbie sits beside him with a small bowl of melting ice cream, feeding him slow spoonfuls.

TIMMY
Is this medicine?

ROBBIE
Absolutely. Doctor's orders.

TIMMY
(laughing)
No doctor would say that.

ROBBIE
Clearly you need better doctors.

Timmy smiles. Takes another spoonful.

A gentle TAP at the door.

Robbie looks up. Felix stands in the doorway. Not entering yet. Almost shy.

FELIX

Hi.

Timmy looks over. Brightens.

TIMMY

You came back!

A look of astonishment flashes in Felix's eyes. Back?

ROBBIE

No, mijo. This is Mr. Thorn,
daddy's boss. You've never met.

Timmy makes eye contact with Felix for just a moment.

TIMMY

Okay. Well, I'm glad you came back
anyway.

Robbie gestures him in with the smallest nod. Felix steps into the room carefully, as if afraid to disturb the air.

ROBBIE

We're doing medicinal ice cream.

FELIX

An excellent protocol.

TIMMY

Daddy says it's a limited trial.

FELIX

Then I hope the data's promising.

Timmy considers that very seriously.

TIMMY

It is.

Robbie offers one last spoonful. Timmy takes it, then settles back into the pillows.

A small beat.

Felix looks at the bowl, then at Robbie.

FELIX

Would you like me to...?

Robbie hands him the bowl without ceremony.

Felix takes it like it matters. Because it does.

Felix stands there with the empty bowl in his hand, looking at the little tree, the stars on the ceiling, the room he once only knew as fear and consequence.

Now: quiet. A child. Ice cream. A door Felix was invited through.

Timmy gestures to his father and then whispers something in his ear.

Robbie takes the book from Timmy's hand and sets it on the bed.

ROBBIE

He wants you to read.

Felix looks at Timmy.

TIMMY

The end bit, Mr. Thorn.

Felix nods. He pulls up the chair. Sits. And opens the book.

FELIX

"And it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge. May that be truly said of us, and all of us! And so, as Tiny Tim observed..."

TIMMY

(quietly)
"God bless us, everyone."

FELIX

(closing the book)
Amen.

Felix takes Timmy by the hand: the hand with the star-shaped birthmark.

A small circle of love. A new part of the circle. Hope is here now. New hope.

FADE OUT:

THE END.

ROLL CREDITS.

MID-CREDIT SEQUENCE:

INT. THORN FOUNDATION – BOARDROOM – DAY

A beautiful room. But this time, lived in. Light. Papers. Coffee. Real work. Not curation. Purpose.

On the wall: THORN FOUNDATION Beneath it, in smaller letters: FOR PEOPLE, NOT OPTICS.

Around the table sits the inaugural board: Robbie and Karim among them. At the head of the table: Felix. Not softened beyond recognition. But human now. Present.

He stands with a slim folder in hand.

FELIX

Thank you for being here. It means a lot.

A beat.

FELIX (CONT'D)

This foundation exists because for too long I confused success with solitude, taste with worth, and power with permission not to care.

He lets that sit.

FELIX (CONT'D)

I was wrong. About all of it.

He looks to Robbie and Karim.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Robbie. Karim. You taught me that love is not a mood, it's a practice.

Then to a handsome, distinguished GENTLEMAN in a suit.

FELIX (CONT'D)

To our city's LGBTQ champion, who makes every day better for our queer family: thank you, Oliver.

Oliver (the same Oliver) smiles and gives a small nod.

FELIX (CONT'D)

This is not about redemption, people.
It's about responsibility. And writing
very large checks before anyone can
stop us.

Felix closes the folder.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Which is why I am delighted to hand
the reins over to someone infinitely
better at running it than I am.

He turns to a woman at the far end of the table. We do not see
her face, as she is looking down.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Take it away, Katie.

Katie looks up. The same Katie. No longer frightened. Composed.
capable. Ready.

KATIE

Thank you, Felix.

She looks around the table.

KATIE (CONT'D)

Right. Item one.

Felix sits.

Not shaping the narrative any more. Part of the story.