

SLANT

Written by

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FADE IN:

- 1 EXT. CONDO COMPLEX - DAY 1
- Palm Springs. Early morning. The desert sun glistens over the freshly watered lawn. Mountains fill the background.
- Thirty condos designed by the architect A. Quincy Jones surround a large pool. Desolate: not a soul in sight.
- 2 INT. CONDO - BEDROOM - DAY 2
- A slant of light cuts through the half-opened blinds onto the carpeted floor. A ceiling fan disturbs the blinds and makes the light move.
- ASH (52) is in bed. He opens his eyes, watches the light, then looks up to a vintage alarm clock and a framed photograph on the bedside table.
- The slightly out-of-focus photo features his partner MICHAEL (28) in an image captured years before. Ash stares at the photo: Michael is in profile, caught in time, laughing.
- Ash reaches for the frame, brushes his thumb over Michael's face.
- 3 INT. CONDO - LIVING ROOM - DAY 3
- Books are strewn about. Six framed images (various pop-art inspired close-ups of portions of the daguerreotype taken circa 1848 of Emily Dickinson), hang on one wall.
- ASH wears a thin bathrobe and stands at a large sliding door. He sips from a steaming cup and takes in the desert view. He's a small figure in a vast, high-ceilinged room.
- Through the glass, Ash watches PATRICK (54) dry himself off from a morning swim. Patrick wraps his towel around his waist, slips on his sandals, and exits the pool area gate.
- 4 EXT. CONDO COMPLEX - DAY 4
- As he closes the pool gate, Patrick slows, then (as if he *feels* that he's being watched) looks back toward Ash's condo: Ash cannot be seen.

5 EXT. CAMINO REAL - DAY 5

A pick-up truck is parked on the street.

LUIS (25), exuberant personality, and an infectious smile, pulls a wheelbarrow and some landscaping supplies from the back of the truck: rocks, flowers, etc.

He pushes the wheelbarrow toward the interior of the complex.

6 INT. CONDO - DINING ROOM - DAY 6

Ash, now dressed, sits at a glass table and wears a pair of glasses. At his laptop, he types on the keyboard. The light of the screen, and some of the text, reflects on the glasses.

Ash, unable to concentrate, looks away from the computer, rises and moves to the sliding door. He sees Luis working at a landscape area by the pool.

7 EXT. CONDO COMPLEX - DAY 7

Luis arranges the rocks and plants the flowers. Ash walks across the lawn, and carries a bottle of water.

Luis looks up and noticeably brightens upon greeting Ash.

LUIS

Well, hello there, stranger.

Luis stands, wipes his hands on the front of his pants.

ASH

Luis.

LUIS

How was the trip to Amherst?

ASH

Very productive.

(taking in the grounds)

You've made good progress, I see.

LUIS

Yeah. It's my last day. Looks pretty good, right?

ASH

It does.

Luis bends low to the ground again and resumes his work, placing rocks.

LUIS
So, did you figure out your book?

ASH
I think so. Standing in Emily
Dickinson's bedroom, soaking in
that energy, it inspired me to keep
going.

LUIS
Cool. I'd love to see where the
famous Belle of Amherst lived.

ASH
(slight laugh)
So you did read the book.

LUIS
I really liked the poems.

ASH
That's great to hear. Any
favorites?

LUIS
(thinking for a moment)
Actually, there was one. I don't
know why it stayed with me or why I
like it. It's weird, you know?

ASH
Do you remember how it starts?

LUIS
Yeah.
(beat)
There's a certain Slant of light -
/ Winter Afternoons - / That
oppresses like the Heft / Of
Cathedral Tunes - / ...

Ash focuses on a cluster of flowers that Luis places gently
into the ground.

8

INT. NEW YORK CITY BEDROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

8

Flowers (same color as the flowers Luis is planting) are in a
small vase on a crate that serves as a bedside table in a
sparsely decorated urban space. A simple desk lamp is also on
the crate.

Ash and Michael are on a bed. Michael reads aloud from a book. Ash watches Michael; he lays on his side, faces Michael, his back to CAMERA.

Light streams in through slats covering a window. Fabric is draped across the walls.

MICHAEL

That oppresses like the Heft / Of
Cathedral Tunes - / Heavenly Hurt
it gives us / We can find no scar,
/ But internal difference - / ...

BACK TO SCENE:

9

EXT. CONDO COMPLEX - DAY

9

Ash refocuses on Luis.

ASH

Where the Meanings, are - /...

LUIS

What does it mean? A certain *Slant*
of light?

ASH

That can be a long conversation,
but Dickinson uses the light
imagery here - light that is
usually perceived as weightless -
as being heavy - as heavy, she
says, as the booming music that
comes from church organs. Music
which is usually meant to be
uplifting. In this context, it's
oppressive. It's a paradox.

(then)

Sorry, I've slipped a bit into
professor mode. What's your take?

Luis smiles, stops working.

LUIS

(searching)

I think it's - sad. The words:
Hurt. Affliction. Scar. It seems to
be about loss, or despair?

ASH

Well-put. You definitely have a
feel for poetry.

Luis likes the compliment. Ash remembers the water bottle in his hand.

ASH (CONT'D)
Oh - I brought this for you.

Ash hands Luis the bottle.

LUIS
Thanks, Ash.

Luis opens it, drinks - the sun makes the water in the bottle glow. Luis watches Ash cross the lawn back to his condo.

9.2 INT. CONDO - LIVING ROOM - DAY 9.2

Ash, back at his laptop, closes it and takes his glasses off. He crosses to the sliding door and looks to the area where Luis was. Luis cannot be seen.

10 EXT. CAMINO REAL - DUSK 10

Luis packs his truck. Ash approaches.

ASH
All finished?

LUIS
Yep. I'm set. It's been really nice talking to you.

ASH
You too.

Luis steps to the truck, opens the driver's side door, and stands behind it - a barrier between them.

ASH (CONT'D)
(nervous)
Luis, Do you wanna have a drink? We could talk more Dickinson.

LUIS
Oh. Like now?

ASH
Yeah.

LUIS
Thanks, but I, I already have plans tonight.

ASH
Another time?

LUIS
(unintentionally
encouraging)
Definitely.

Ash, about to make a hasty retreat, reacts at hearing Luis' positive tone.

ASH
Oh. How 'bout tomorrow?

LUIS
(hesitant)
Umm. Okay.

ASH
Excellent. I'll make us dinner. How
does seven o'clock sound?

LUIS
Fine.

Ash relieved, smiles, and walks back toward his condo; Luis is slightly stunned: *Did he really commit to dinner?*

11 INT. CONDO - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT 11

Ash wears shorts and a tank and rides an exercise bike. Ash looks to the couch and imagines Luis sprawled out; he wears shorts, reads a book.

He looks again: Luis is gone - was never there.

FADE TO BLACK.

12 EXT. CAMINO REAL - TIKI HOTEL - DAY 12

Ash walks on the sidewalk. He holds a paper coffee cup and a newspaper.

Patrick, in running clothes, jogs, comes toward Ash from the opposite direction, closes in. He slows to a stop.

PATRICK
Hi.

ASH
Good morning.

Both men stop in front of the fenced-in and falling-down Tiki Hotel. Patrick is slightly out of breath.

PATRICK

I'm new to the complex. Just moved in.

Patrick motions in the direction of his condo.

ASH

Yes, I think I've seen you around. Welcome. I'm Ash.

PATRICK

Patrick.

Ash and Patrick stroll, they pass the crumbling Tiki Hotel as they go. CAMERA TRACKS.

ASH

Are you here full or part-time?

PATRICK

Part-time. I spend most of my month in San Francisco. Buying here is my first step toward retirement. Hard to get used to that fact.

ASH

Hmm. I can relate.

PATRICK

So you live here full-time?

Ash nods.

PATRICK (CONT'D)

What do you do?

ASH

I teach at UC Riverside. How 'bout you?

PATRICK

I'm in finance. Wells Fargo. What do you teach?

ASH

English literature. More specifically: Emily Dickinson.

PATRICK

Huh. Her poetry's brilliant.

ASH

Well, nice to meet a fellow aficionado. Give me a shout if you need anything. I'm happy to help.

PATRICK

I appreciate that.

Patrick picks up his pace.

PATRICK (CONT'D)

(calling back)

We should share a bottle of wine sometime.

ASH

That would be great.

- 13 INT. CONDO BEDROOM - DAY 13
- Ash lays down three different shirts upon the bed. He looks down, chooses.
- Ash takes a watch from a box. He winds it.
- 14 INT. LUIS' STUDIO APARTMENT - NIGHT 14
- Messy - typical guy's room. A clock with large numerals, hangs on the wall. The clock reads: 6:45.
- Luis reclines on his bed, wears earbuds and listens to an iPod. A Emily Dickinson book sits close-by.
- 15 INT. CONDO - KITCHEN - DAY 15
- Ash puts grocery store-bought food onto plates: carrots, roast chicken, salad.
- 16 INT. LUIS' STUDIO APARTMENT - NIGHT 16
- The clock hands are at 7:00.
- 17 EXT. CONDO - ATRIUM - NIGHT 17
- Ash places a plate on the table.

18 INT. LUIS' STUDIO APARTMENT - NIGHT 18

Luis can't concentrate. He sees Emily Dickinson's face on the cover of the book - it's like she's watching him. Luis covers the book with his comforter.

He pulls the ear buds from his ear; he sees the clock now reads: 7:35. Luis rises and grabs his keys off a table. He expresses frustration and aggravation at feeling guilty for not intending to go.

He exits.

19 EXT. CONDO - ATRIUM - NIGHT 19

Ash sits at his patio table set for two. White lights are strung across the roof above the table.

A wine glass, nearly empty, stands within reach on the table. Flowers are in a small vase (same vase as FLASHBACK) also on the table.

Ash catches his reflection in the sliding glass door.

DOORBELL RINGS.

Ash, suddenly optimistic of Luis' arrival, slightly adjusts the vase/flowers to make sure the table looks flawless. He smooths the front of his shirt.

20 INT. CONDO ENTRYWAY - NIGHT 20

Ash approaches the front door of the condo and opens it, revealing Patrick, bottle of wine in hand.

ASH
(tentative)
Oh. Hello.

PATRICK
I thought I'd take a chance and see
if you were free to share that
bottle of wine.

ASH
Sure, come on in.

Patrick hands Ash the bottle and enters. He immediately notices the table, set for two.

PATRICK
Oh, you're expecting company.

ASH

It may look like that, but I'm actually dining alone. Would you like to join me?

21 EXT. CONDO - ATRIUM - NIGHT

21

Patrick follows Ash outside.

ASH

It's been a long time since I've been stood up.

Ash places the unopened wine bottle on the table. Patrick sits.

PATRICK

That makes for a rough night.

Ash fills Patrick's glass with the last of the open bottle.

ASH

Well, he was just a kid. I should know better.

Ash puts the bottle down. Patrick raises his glass in a toast.

PATRICK

The young. They're nice to look at but not worth the trouble.

ASH

I suppose not. I had high hopes though: he was actually into poetry.

PATRICK

Speaking of, I went back and read some Dickinson.

ASH

Really?

PATRICK

Her poems remind me of Scott. My partner. He died of AIDS in '87.

ASH

Oh, I'm sorry. My partner died in '89. We lived in New York. I lost nearly everyone.

(beat)

(MORE)

ASH (CONT'D)
 For a long time, I couldn't
 understand why I emerged from all
 that unscathed.

PATRICK
 I know what you mean. But I
 wouldn't say unscathed.

Beat.

PATRICK (CONT'D)
 Anyway. I know it's one of her most
 famous poems, but it's still one of
 my favorites. I remember the ending
 so clearly: None may teach it - /
 Any - / 'Tis the Seal Despair /...

FADE TO:

22 INT. NEW YORK CITY BEDROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

22

Ash and Michael are on the bed. Ash's back faces CAMERA.
 Beyond him, Michael holds the same book.

MICHAEL
 An imperial affliction / Sent us of
 the Air - /...

Light streams in through slats at an angle.

Michael places the book down, next to the small vase on the
 crate.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
 When it comes, the landscape
 listens - /...

Michael reaches for and pulls the quilt up, covering them.

MICHAEL & ASH
 (ASH in Voice Over)
 Shadows hold their breath - /...

Ash reaches for Michael and the two men move toward one
 another, spooning.

MICHAEL
 When it goes...

Michael takes and holds Ash's hand. He stares toward the
 fabric on the wall.

ASH & PATRICK
(voices in unison)
'tis like the Distance / On the
look of death - /

Michael closes his eyes.

BACK TO SCENE:

23 EXT. CONDO ATRIUM - NIGHT

23

Ash sits there, eyes averted from Patrick.

PATRICK
Ash.

Ash looks up, locks eyes with Patrick. Patrick has leaned in,
extended his hand. Ash takes it.

FADE OUT.