

Artifacts

an original short screenplay by

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FADE IN:

INT. LOFT SPACE - PRESENT - DAWN

A factory building turned urban residence. Professional photographs decorate distressed cement walls. Artifacts of a bachelor-recluse litter the space: Empty liquor bottles. Soiled clothing. Overflowing ash tray.

A DIGITAL SLR CAMERA stands watch over the grim interior.

MAIN TITLE: "**ARTIFACTS**"

INT. LOFT SPACE - PRESENT - DAWN

CU REFLECTION IN MIRRORED SUNGLASSES: A bare foot topples an errant glass of half-finished liquor. A hand shakes the liquid from the sunglasses, picking up them up and securing them to...

A BEARDED face. CLAYTON ARDUBON (40) winces, cradling his head against its apparent hammering. His lip is split. He sits on a mattress. He turns, surveying the bed. A SIREN faintly screams through distant city streets.

CU REFLECTION IN SUNGLASSES: The bed is EMPTY.

A PHOTO BULB FLASH BRIDGES TO...

EXT. FACTORY BUILDING - FLASHBACK - NIGHT

CU CLAYTON: Lying down. Stubbled face contorted in pain.

ANOTHER PHOTO BULB FLASH...

INT. LOFT SPACE - FLASHBACK - NIGHT

Clayton stands on the bed in his boxer briefs and socks, shirt unbuttoned. No beard. Just stubble. He FLASHES photos of a BLONDE WOMAN. She lies with her face buried in a pillow, laughing. Clayton is intense, an artist consumed by his subject.

ANOTHER PHOTO BULB FLASH...

EXT. ART GALLERY/STREET - FLASHBACK - NIGHT

Clayton stands opposite MARION (39). She is blonde. Draped in a designer dress. She seems nervous, finding it difficult to look Clayton in the eye.

ANOTHER PHOTO BULB FLASH...

EXT. PARK - FLASHBACK - DAY

A MUCH YOUNGER Clayton and Marion lie in the grass, staring at the sky. Marion rests her head against Clayton's shoulder. He smiles.

PHOTO BULB FLASH...

INT. LOFT SPACE - FLASHBACK 80'S - NIGHT

QUICK SERIES OF SHOTS: YOUNGER MARION enraged. She SCREAMS M.O.S. Embraces herself. Rocking. Weeping uncontrollably.

INT. LOFT SPACE - PRESENT - DAWN

CU CLAYTON'S SUNGLASSES: The reflection of spilled drink is warped across the canvas of mirrored lens.

ABBOT (V.O.)

What is your problem?

Clayton stares at the floor, consumed with despair.

CLAYTON (V.O.)

I don't have a problem.

ABBOT (V.O.)

The hell you don't...

INT. ART GALLERY - FLASHBACK - NIGHT

Minimalist urban chic. Clayton (stubble) stands in front of a monitor displaying a montage of his work. He is accompanied by ABBOT (57). Short. Precisely groomed. Abbot is a silver fox.

ABBOT

You can't tell the difference between a brown tie and a black one.

Clayton winces. The tie could be black. It could be brown. There is no telling thanks to the BLACK & WHITE PHOTOGRAPHY.

INT. ART GALLERY - FLASHBACK - NIGHT

Abbot introduces Clayton to a TWENTY-SOMETHING WOMAN and her MOTHER.

ABBOT

This is the photographer. Clayton Ardubon...

INT. ART GALLERY - FLASHBACK - NIGHT

CU CLAYTON: Straining a thin guise of interest as Abbot introduces him again...

ABBOT (O.S.)  
Clayton Ardubon...

INT. ART GALLERY - FLASHBACK - MOMENTS LATER

And again. Clayton flashes an obligatory smile.

ABBOT (O.S.)  
And this is Mr. Hewlett and his lovely wife...

PATRON (O.S.)  
Nice to meet you.

MARION watches the exchange from across the gallery. She's beautiful, but worn out, wearing insomnia like a hangover.

INT. ART GALLERY - FLASHBACK - MOMENTS LATER

QUICK SERIES OF SHOTS: Photographs of nude women. Each photo is an extreme close up. So close, in fact, that the images look more like terrestrial landscapes than the female body.

ASPIRING MODEL (O.S.)  
I'm actually a model. So I can definitely...appreciate a brilliant eye like yours.

INT. ART GALLERY - FLASHBACK - LATER

Clayton stands in front of a floor-to-ceiling photograph of a naked woman. The curves of the subject's body resemble a valley at sunrise.

AN ASPIRING MODEL (26) sips a long stem champagne. She touches Clayton every chance she gets.

CLAYTON  
Well, had we only met sooner.

ASPIRING MODEL  
Better late than never.

A BEAT. Clayton stares into the model's eyes. Moves an errant hair behind her ear.

CLAYTON  
How would you like to see my studio?

ASPIRING MODEL (O.S.)

I'd love for your studio to see *me*.

A COMMOTION RISES from across the gallery. Clayton turns to the sound.

CLAYTON'S POV: A BLACK TIE PATRON daubs freshly spilled champagne from his tuxedo. Marion, the obvious cause, makes a beeline for the door.

Clayton flashes a perplexed look. He squeezes the model's hand as he steps away.

CLAYTON

I'll just be a minute, love.

Clayton hurries after Marion.

EXT. ART GALLERY/STREET - FLASHBACK - CONTINUOUS

Marion rushes down the street toward her parked BMW, flustered. Clayton hurries out of the building in pursuit.

CLAYTON

Marion?

Marion fumbles with her keys.

CLAYTON (CONT'D)

Marion?

MARION

(an acknowledgement)

Clay.

CLAYTON

What are you doing here?

MARION

I live here. I live here now.

CLAYTON

No. I mean what are you doing here?  
At the gallery?

MARION

I saw a promotion for the opening.  
And I...I thought we could talk...

ASPIRING MODEL (O.S.)

Clayton?

The ASPIRING MODEL steps out of the gallery looking for Clayton. Marion looks disappointed.

MARION  
You haven't changed.

Marion spins around.

CLAYTON  
What do you mean, I haven't changed?

MARION  
You haven't changed, Clayton.

Marion gets into her car.

CLAYTON  
Hey. Come on. Marion. What do you mean, haven't changed? What the -

Marion starts the engine. Throws the car in gear and speeds off. Clayton watches, perplexed.

The Aspiring Model steps up. A brief silence. Then...

ASPIRING MODEL  
So uh...we still doing this?

Clayton shakes off the encounter.

CLAYTON  
Yeah. Yeah, of course.

Clayton throws a strained smile.

INT. LOFT - PRESENT - DAWN

Clayton (bearded) walks across the enormous interior. The loft is sparsely decorated. A mattress. Scuffed leather recliner. Black muslin backdrop and photography lights.

EXT. PARK - FLASHBACK 80'S - DAY

BIRD'S EYE VIEW: Clayton and Marion, both TWENTY YEARS YOUNGER, lie on their backs, studying the sky. They hold hands. Smiling. In love.

ABBOT (V.O.)  
I don't understand why you want this.

INT. LOFT - FLASHBACK 80'S - NIGHT

QUICK SERIES OF SHOTS: YOUNGER MARION enraged. She SCREAMS M.O.S. Embraces herself. Rocking. Weeping uncontrollably.

ABBOT (V.O.)  
Why do you want to revisit something that ended like that?

INT. LOFT - FLASHBACK - DAY

Clayton (stubble) smokes a cigarette, staring out the window at the city's panorama as if searching for something lost. Abbot stands behind him. He places a piece of paper on the table in front of Clayton.

CLAYTON

She came back for a reason.

EXT. HOME - FLASHBACK - MORNING

A middle class neighborhood. Clayton (stubble) sits behind the wheel of a classic MERCEDES. He checks an address scribbled on a piece of paper against address numbers hanging on the front door of the home.

KNOCKING BRIDGES TO...

EXT. HOME - FLASHBACK - MORNING

The door opens revealing PAIGE (17). She grins, recognizing Clayton.

PAIGE

Oh my God. Hi.

This stranger's warm welcome catches Clayton off guard.

INT. LOFT - PRESENT - DAY

Clayton removes his sunglasses, revealing his badly bruised eye. He studies his grim reflection in the mirror. Then averts his eyes.

INT. HOME - FLASHBACK - MORNING

QUICK SERIES OF PHOTOGRAPHS: A PHOTO ALBUM. Faded and creased photos of a MUCH YOUNGER Marion and Clayton. Brooding artists. Clayton traces his hand across a photo of Marion posing in fashion photographs.

PAIGE (O.S.)

I found them a couple of years ago.  
And I asked her about them.

INT. HOME - FLASHBACK - MOMENTS LATER

ON MANTLE: Framed family photos. Marion, Paige, a LITTLE BOY (8), and Marion's husband, SCOTT (45).

Clayton studies the family photos.

Paige enters the room with a photo album.

PAIGE

And she was like...That's a part of my life I don't talk about. And I was like, yeah, but mom. This is Clayton Ardubon. He's like, famous.

Paige hands the photo album to Clayton.

EXT. PARK - FLASHBACK - THAT AFTERNOON

Paige and Clayton sit on a swing set. Clayton smokes. Paige thumbs through the photo album.

PAIGE (V.O.)

You guys look really happy.

INT. HOME - FLASHBACK - MORNING

Clayton and Paige study the photos. A visual journal of a close relationship.

CLAYTON

We were...Mostly.

CU PHOTO ALBUM: Clayton and Marion lying on their backs in the park. Marion grins.

PAIGE (V.O.)

She doesn't smile like this anymore...

INT. TOWN HOME - FLASHBACK - LATER THAT MORNING

ON MANTEL PHOTOS: Marion and Scott. Marion's smile seems strained.

PAIGE (V.O.)

...Not for dad. At least not lately.

EXT. PARK - FLASHBACK - THAT AFTERNOON

Paige and Clayton sit on the swing set.

PAIGE

It's like she's just going through the paces, you know? Not really living.

EXT. CITY STREET - FLASHBACK - THAT AFTERNOON

Clayton and Paige walk down the sidewalk. Paige grips a DIGITAL SLR that hangs around her neck.

PAIGE (V.O.)

And she's not the only one. You know?  
(MORE)



PAIGE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 I mean...adults...adults in general  
 are just so. So tuned out. Like  
 they're sleepwalking.

Paige jumps in front of an unsuspecting BUSINESS MAN. She  
 SCREAMS in his face.

PAIGE (CONT'D)  
 AAAAAAAAAAH!

SNAPS a photo of the reaction.

Paige grabs Clayton's hand and pulls him off running. Clayton  
 grins ear to ear, laughing as they run away from the yelling  
 business man.

INT. HOME - FLASHBACK - MORNING

Clayton and Paige study the photos.

PAIGE  
 I don't ever want to be like that.  
 I'd rather die than be complacent  
 with my life.

Paige looks to Clayton for approval.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - FLASHBACK - EARLIER THAT MORNING

Paige shows Clayton a photo of Scott.

ON PHOTO: Scott is walking toward Paige, out of focus. Angry.  
 Marion sits on the bed in the background. Crying.

PAIGE  
 I think they're getting a divorce.  
 All they do is argue. I mean, Dad  
 tries, but...I don't know. I think  
 there is another man.

Clayton inhales from his cigarette, knowingly.

PAIGE (CONT'D)  
 Sometimes people need a wake up call.  
 To know that they are alive.

Clayton and Paige stare at one another on the swing set.  
 Sirens crescendo in the distance.

ALTERNATIVE MUSIC BRIDGES TO:

EXT. PARK - FLASHBACK - DAY

Paige leads Clayton across a footbridge traversing a tranquil stream. She raises her chin and closes her eyes, basking in the sun's rays.

PAIGE

I love it here.

MONTAGE

- Tree tops sway in the mid-summer breeze.
- Grass sways in the wind.
- Paige swings on the swing set, backlit against the sun.
- Paige lies atop a stone wall, eyes closed, listening to the wind dance in a tree's branches.
- Paige runs her hands along the metal railing of the foot bridge.
- Clayton smokes a cigarette.
- CU CLAYTON: Paige sits on a swing set, her reflection warped in the mirrored lens of his sunglasses. Smoke dances across the image, slowly released from his lips.

INT. LOFT SPACE - FLASHBACK - THAT NIGHT

IRIS OPEN ON: Paige sits on the bed, fumbling with Clayton's DIGITAL SLR. Clayton's reflection steps into the mirror behind her. She throws a coy look. Smiles.

INT. LOFT SPACE - FLASHBACK - THAT NIGHT

Clayton stands on the bed in his boxer briefs and socks. Shirt unbuttoned. He FLASHES still photos of BLONDE WOMAN. He is intense; an artist consumed by his subject. She lies with her face buried in a pillow, laughing. She turns her face revealing PAIGE.

EXT. FACTORY BUILDING ROOF - FLASHBACK - THAT NIGHT

Clayton and Paige stare at one another, backlit by a skylight and the shimmering cityscape. Clayton moves an errant hair from her face.

CLAYTON

You look alot like her when she was younger.

Paige stares into Clayton's eyes. Clayton slowly leans in, kissing her. It's a kiss of adoration.

INT. LOFT SPACE - FLASHBACK - THAT NIGHT

A QUICK SERIES OF SHOTS intercut with CAMERA FLASHES:

Clayton and Paige kiss passionately.

The soft curves of Paige's bare back.

The hint of Paige's smiling lips.

Paige's hands (with star tattooed wrist) gripping her pillow.

Paige's mouth parted in ecstasy.

INT. LOFT SPACE - FLASHBACK - THAT NIGHT

Clayton lies on the bed, considering his actions. Paige lies on her side, facing away from Clayton. Her eyes dance in thought until finally she smiles. She turns to Clayton and kisses him gently. He kisses her back then slumps to the mattress.

INT. LOFT SPACE - FLASHBACK - MOMENTS LATER

BIRD'S EYE VIEW ON BED: Clayton and Paige lie next to one another staring at the ceiling. Their clothes are strewn about.

PAIGE

What do you think happened to her?

CLAYTON

Who? Your mother?

PAIGE

Yeah.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. PARK - FLASHBACK 80'S - DAY

BIRD'S EYE VIEW: Younger Clayton and Younger Marion lie on their backs, studying the sky. The same idyllic moment we saw earlier.

CLAYTON (V.O.)

I don't know.

INT. STUDIO - FLASHBACK 80'S - NIGHT

We rapidly push in on Younger Clayton as he snaps photos of a VOLUPTUOUS MODEL.

INT. STUDIO - FLASHBACK 80'S - NIGHT

RAPID SERIES OF SHOTS: Clayton devours the VOLUPTUOUS MODEL with kisses.

EXT. APARTMENT - FLASHBACK 80'S - DAY

YOUNGER MARION watches from her car as YOUNGER CLAYTON steps out of the apartment and kisses the same VOLUPTUOUS MODEL. Marion's eyes are wet with tears.

INT. LOFT - FLASHBACK 80'S - NIGHT

QUICK SERIES OF SHOTS: YOUNGER MARION enraged. She screams M.O.S. Embraces herself. Rocking. Weeping uncontrollably.

INT. LOFT - FLASHBACK - THAT NIGHT

Clayton stares at the ceiling. Alone in bed.

INT. LOFT - PRESENT - DAY

Clayton (bearded) stares at his battered reflection. He looks away.

INT. LOFT - FLASHBACK - THAT NIGHT

Paige stands across the loft, speaking on her mobile phone. She is dressed in panties and an 80's punk band tee shirt.

PAIGE

Why do you care where I am?

Clayton sits up in bed. Concerned.

PAIGE (CONT'D)

Who?

(beat)

Of course I know who he is, but why would I have seen him?

Clayton watches.

PAIGE (CONT'D)

So what if I did? What if I am, mom?

It's none of your business.

(beat)

Mom? Hello? Mom?

(beat)

FUCK!

Anger quickly fades to concern.

CLAYTON

What the hell happened?

Paige stares at her reflection in the loft's factory windows. She stifles her concern.

PAIGE

Nothing.

Paige crosses to a dresser. Takes a swig from a short glass of alcohol. Clayton gets out of bed.

CLAYTON

No. Tell me. What happened?

PAIGE

She found out I wasn't at Elizabeth's.

CLAYTON

Does she know where you are?

PAIGE

My neighbor saw us together and she figured it out.

CLAYTON

And you admitted it?

Paige stares like a rabbit in the headlights.

EXT. FACTORY BUILDING - FLASHBACK - THAT NIGHT

Clayton ushers Paige out of the building.

EXT. FACTORY BUILDING - FLASHBACK - MOMENTS LATER

MARION'S BMW races into the lot, SKIDDING to a halt. Marion and her Husband, SCOTT (45) jump out of the car, rushing Clayton.

SCOTT

You sick son of a bitch!

CRACK! Scott lands a hard right. Clayton reels to the asphalt.

Marion intercepts Paige, breaking down in horror at her daughter's disheveled appearance. She ushers Paige to the car.

MARION

What did you do?

Marion turns to Clayton.

MARION (CONT'D)

WHAT DID YOU DO! HE DOESN'T KNOW  
WHAT HE DID!

Marion makes a beeline for Clayton. Scott intercepts.

SCOTT  
Come on. It's not worth it!

MARION  
YES IT IS!

Marion pushes Scott aside. Scott surrenders to her drive. Marion kneels down and grabs Clayton's face.

MARION (CONT'D)  
She is just like you. Cocky! Arrogant!

Marion starts sobbing. Scott puts his hand on Marion's shoulder.

MARION (CONT'D)  
She's just like her fucking father!

Clayton flinches in surprise.

CLAYTON  
What?

MARION  
She's your daughter! You sick bastard!  
And to think I felt guilty. Guilty  
for not telling you after all of  
these years!

Marion slaps Clayton repeatedly. He tries to shield himself, tears welling.

MARION (CONT'D)  
You sick son of a bitch! YOU STAY  
AWAY FROM MY BABY!

Marion breaks down. Scott ushers her back to the car. He SLAMS the door. Crosses to Clayton. Grabs his face.

SCOTT  
If you ever come near her again...I  
will tear you apart! You understand  
me? I'll tear you apart.

Scott punches Clayton in the stomach. Clayton winces in pain. Scott turns and rushes to the car, driving off. Distant SIRENS WAIL on approach as Clayton winces and sobs on the cold pavement.

INT. LOFT SPACE - PRESENT - DAY

Clayton's emotions boil over. He rushes his lighting equipment, smashing it to pieces. Rips down his muslin. He WAILS, pulling at his hair.

Then. He suddenly stops. His eyes focus on his DIGITAL SLR CAMERA and tripod.

ON CAMERA LENS: Clayton's reflection warped by the curvature of the lens. His horror registers the monster reflected.

CUT TO BLACK.

THE END