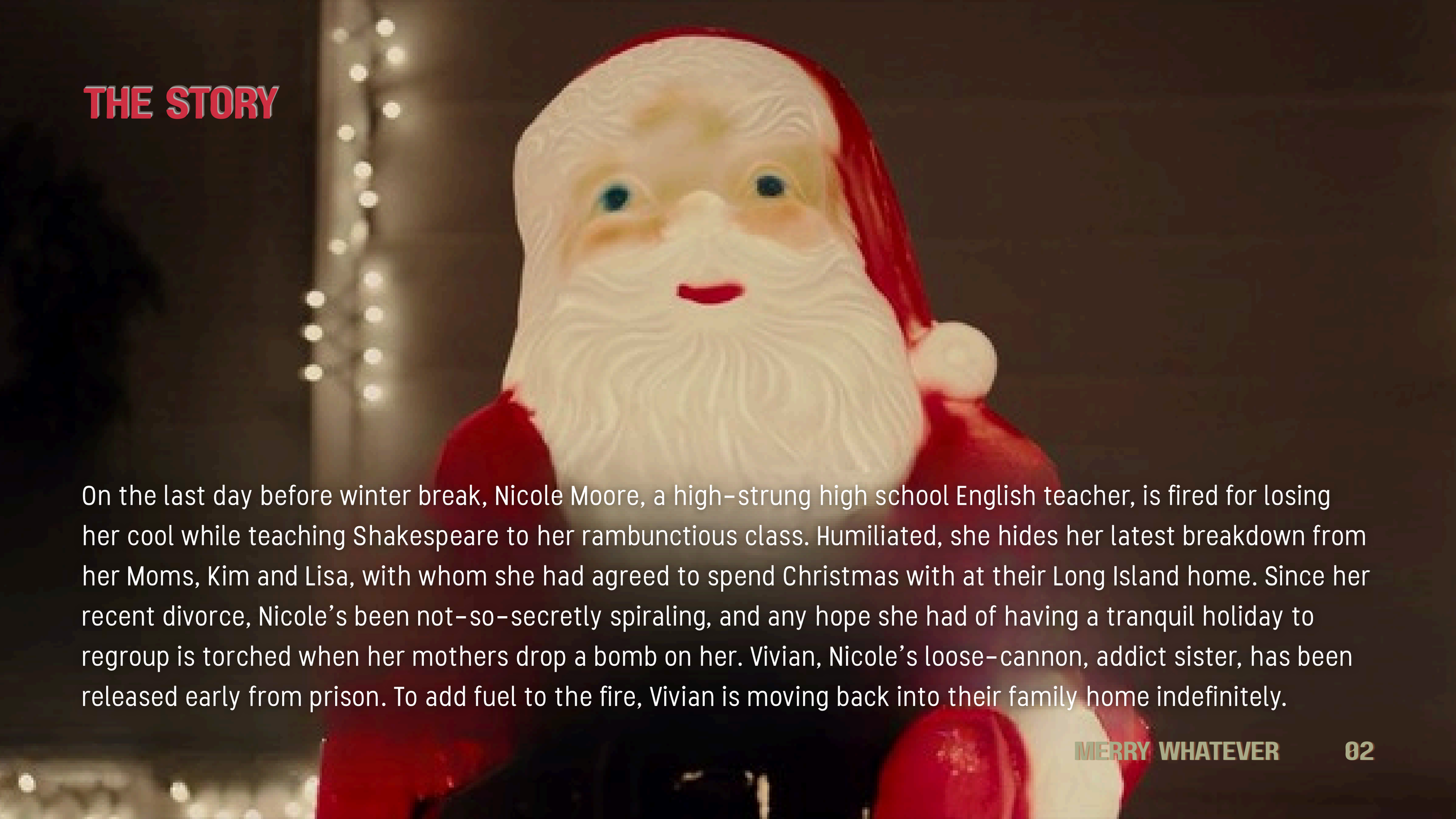

Merry
WHATEVER
From: Paige Espinosa

PREMISE



When an uptight high school teacher’s estranged sister is released from prison two days before Christmas, a family of women spends the holiday at their Long Island home, unraveling everything they’ve spent years pretending to hold together.

THE STORY

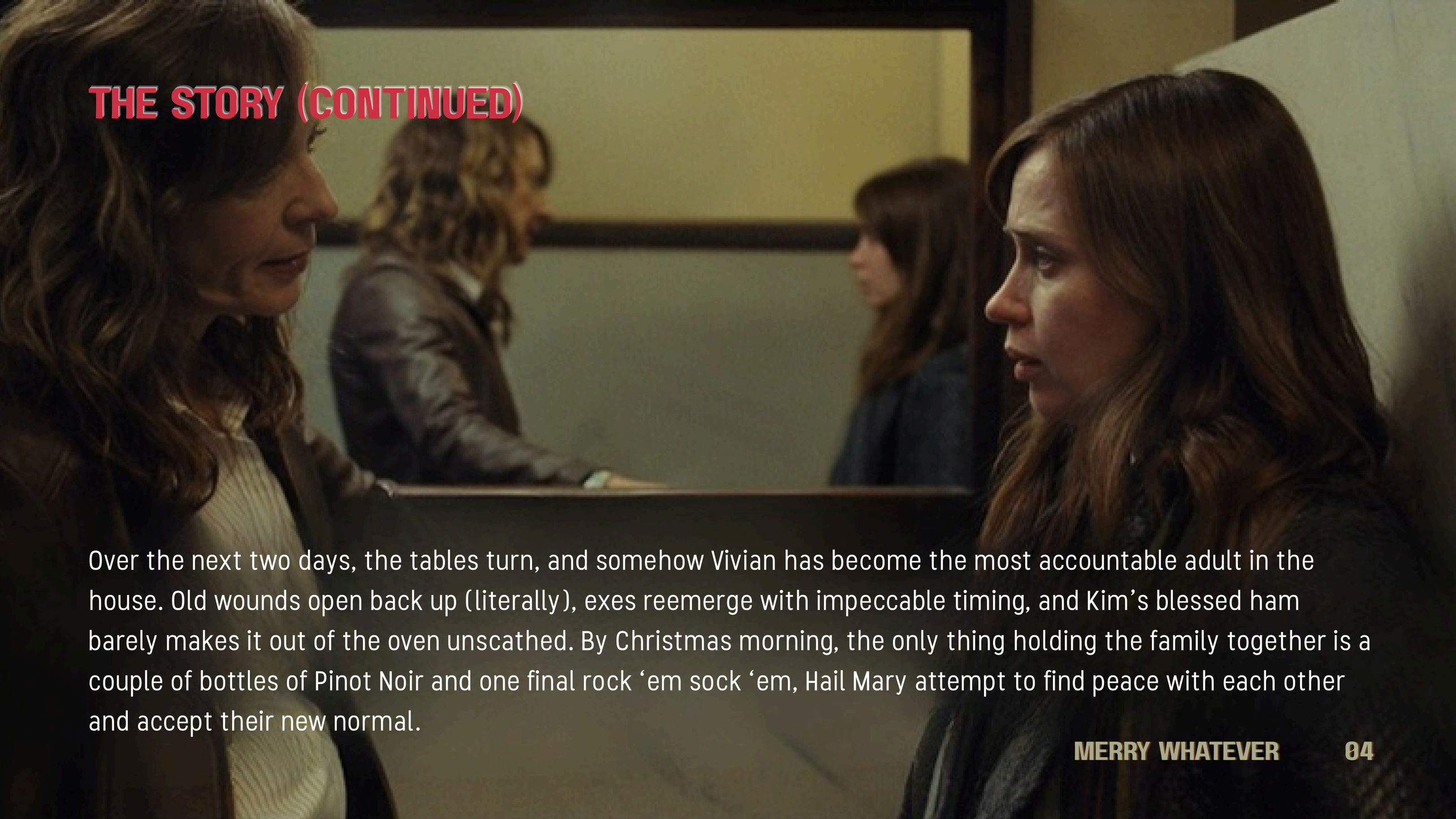


On the last day before winter break, Nicole Moore, a high-strung high school English teacher, is fired for losing her cool while teaching Shakespeare to her rambunctious class. Humiliated, she hides her latest breakdown from her Moms, Kim and Lisa, with whom she had agreed to spend Christmas with at their Long Island home. Since her recent divorce, Nicole's been not-so-secretly spiraling, and any hope she had of having a tranquil holiday to regroup is torched when her mothers drop a bomb on her. Vivian, Nicole's loose-cannon, addict sister, has been released early from prison. To add fuel to the fire, Vivian is moving back into their family home indefinitely.

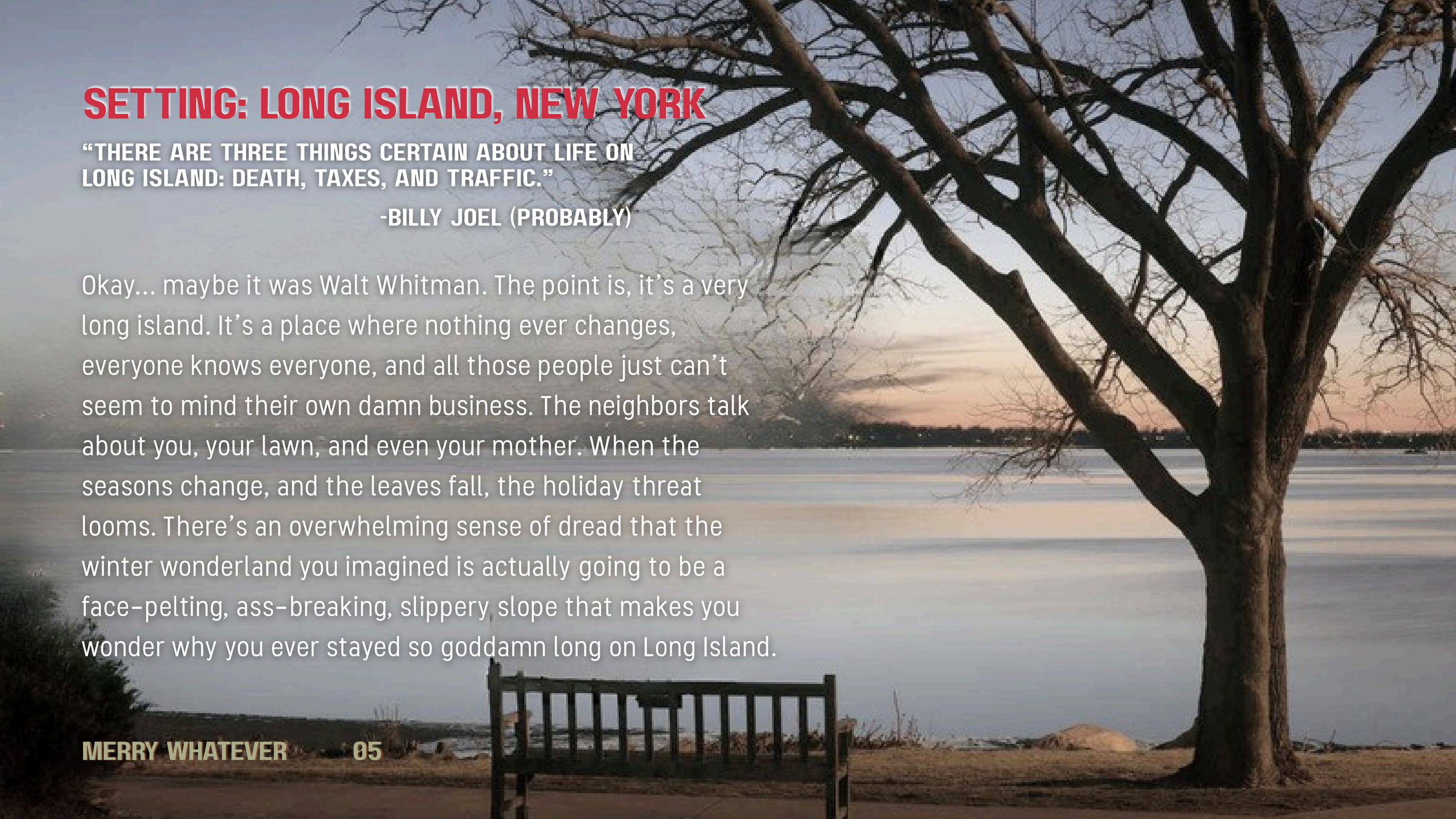
THE STORY (CONTINUED)

Scarred by years of parenting Vivian and well-versed in the tactics of her addiction, Kim and Lisa adjust to finding the level of trust needed to bring their daughter back into their home. While they tiptoe through their own marriage separation, each one has their own unique way of dealing with the stress. Lisa, hell-bent on psychoanalyzing her adult children and making her way through the bar cart, ignites an already on-the-verge Nicole around the dinner table. Kim, meanwhile, in her own passive-aggressive way, blindly preoccupies herself with cooking and decorating, ensuring one perfect final Christmas together. Unable to accept Vivian's seemingly changed ways or process her newfound holier-than-thou attitude, Nicole eventually boils over.

THE STORY (CONTINUED)



Over the next two days, the tables turn, and somehow Vivian has become the most accountable adult in the house. Old wounds open back up (literally), exes reemerge with impeccable timing, and Kim’s blessed ham barely makes it out of the oven unscathed. By Christmas morning, the only thing holding the family together is a couple of bottles of Pinot Noir and one final rock ‘em sock ‘em, Hail Mary attempt to find peace with each other and accept their new normal.



SETTING: LONG ISLAND, NEW YORK

“THERE ARE THREE THINGS CERTAIN ABOUT LIFE ON LONG ISLAND: DEATH, TAXES, AND TRAFFIC.”

-BILLY JOEL (PROBABLY)

Okay... maybe it was Walt Whitman. The point is, it’s a very long island. It’s a place where nothing ever changes, everyone knows everyone, and all those people just can’t seem to mind their own damn business. The neighbors talk about you, your lawn, and even your mother. When the seasons change, and the leaves fall, the holiday threat looms. There’s an overwhelming sense of dread that the winter wonderland you imagined is actually going to be a face-pelting, ass-breaking, slippery slope that makes you wonder why you ever stayed so goddamn long on Long Island.

SETTING: THE MOORE HOUSE

A character in itself, there's always something to eat in the fridge and classic rock rings out through the surround sound. It's not perfect; it's lived in. There's the busted basement railing where Kim caught herself from falling on a soccer ball. Don't worry, she managed to hit every step on the way down. Then there's the stain they don't talk about on the Pottery Barn dining room carpet from Lisa's failed Barolo decanting incident.

This colonial saltbox along the North Shore of Long Island is a cozy and charming old gal, sprinkled with a few elegant, more expensive pieces, but she's a little outdated. The kitchen should have probably been remodeled, and the master bathroom was slated for demolition in 2008, but that nest egg went to The Massapequa Center for Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation. It screams ' Home Sweet Home' in the anal-retentive way, so don't use the embroidered hand towel; Kim says that's only for company. If the ' Chantilly Lace' (also known as white) painted walls could talk, they'd say, ' What a beautiful shitshow it's all been.'

TONE



MERRY WHATEVER examines the holiday season through a sarcastic, quick-tongued, and relatable offbeat New York lens. It’s a contemporary family dramedy that explores the heart of motherhood, sisterhood, and what it takes to rebuild a damaged family in the modern world.

COMPARABLES


August: Osage County (2013)


The Skeleton Twins (2014)


Silver Linings Playbook (2012)


The Family Stone (2005)


His Three Daughters (2023)


Dan In Real Life (2007)

THE SISTERS



INT. MOORE HOUSE - NICOLE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Nicole's Room is almost museum-like. A perfect little millennial time capsule. It's packed with old trophies, diplomas, and photos of Nicole's crowning achievements.

NICOLE
We flushed it all.

VIVIAN
Aren't you just a little hero?

Vivian avoids the rage bait and opens the window for air.

NICOLE
If you're gonna jump, try not to land on the rhododendrons. Ma will freak.

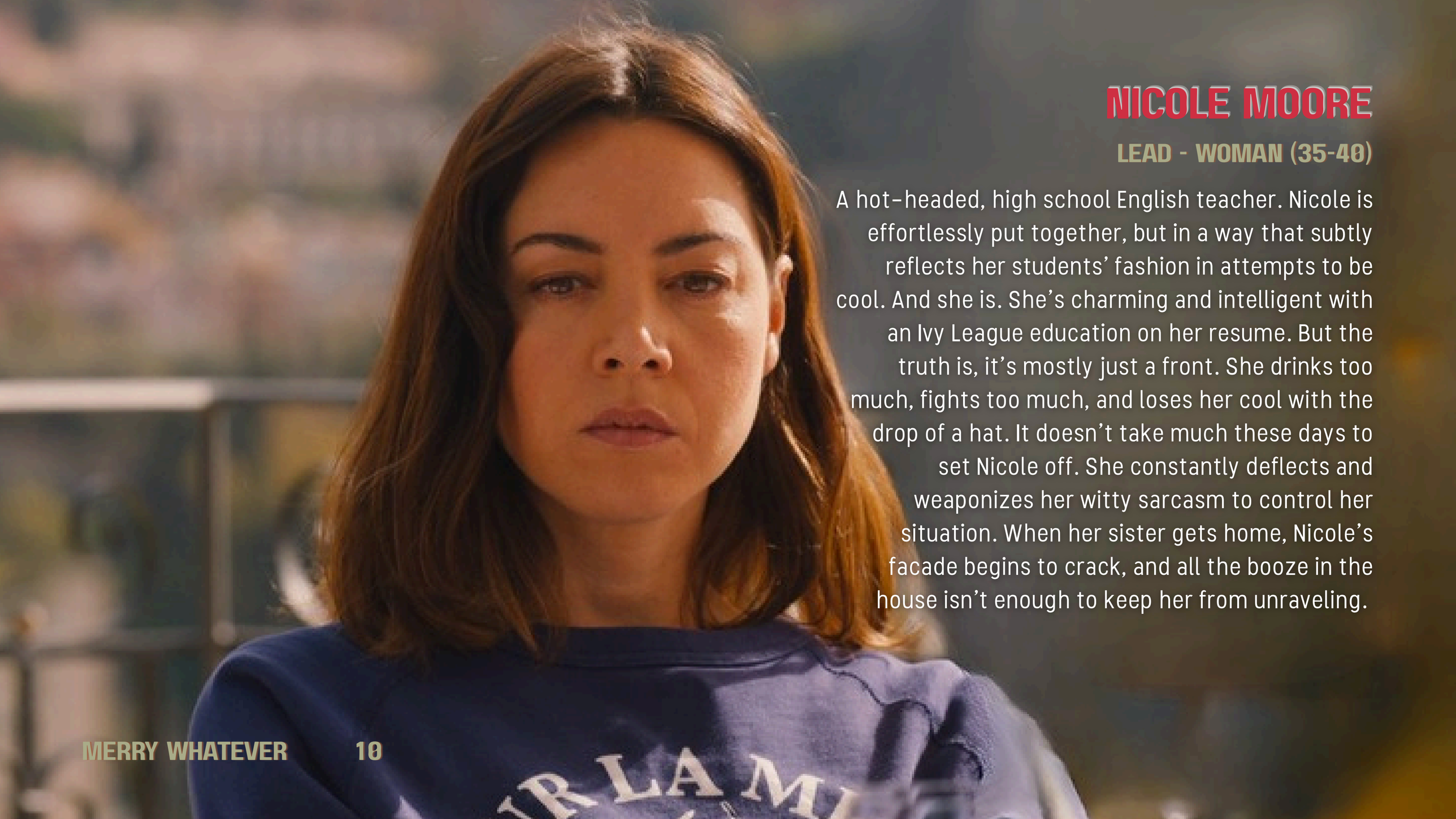
VIVIAN
Wow, you're the world's worst babysitter.

NICOLE
Are you clean?

VIVIAN
Yes.

NICOLE
Your eyes are red.





NICOLE MOORE

LEAD - WOMAN (35-40)

A hot-headed, high school English teacher. Nicole is effortlessly put together, but in a way that subtly reflects her students' fashion in attempts to be cool. And she is. She's charming and intelligent with an Ivy League education on her resume. But the truth is, it's mostly just a front. She drinks too much, fights too much, and loses her cool with the drop of a hat. It doesn't take much these days to set Nicole off. She constantly deflects and weaponizes her witty sarcasm to control her situation. When her sister gets home, Nicole's facade begins to crack, and all the booze in the house isn't enough to keep her from unraveling.

VIVIAN MOORE

LEAD - WOMAN (30-35)

Nicole’s rebellious, addict younger sister recently released from prison. She’s slightly damaged, yet surprisingly creative, and altogether incredibly hard to put a label on. Everyone in the neighborhood knows Vivi Moore, and not just because she used to supply half the PTA with ‘ Mother’s little helpers’ . She’s made a name for herself with both the Neighborhood Watch and the NYPD. Vivian’s clean and sober presence upsets the family dynamic, previously focused on her, and exposes their need to address their own issues.



THE MOMS

INT. MOORE HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Kim confronts Lisa, who serves herself at the bar cart.

LISA
Now what?

KIM
A little patience? She doesn't need the goddamned interrogation police jumping down her throat on her first night home.

LISA
But Hun... sewing? What in God's name kind of job is she going to get *sewing*?

KIM
Well, it's better than her love for methamphetamines and heroin, don't you think?

Lisa downs her drink and helps herself to another.

KIM
Patience. Please.





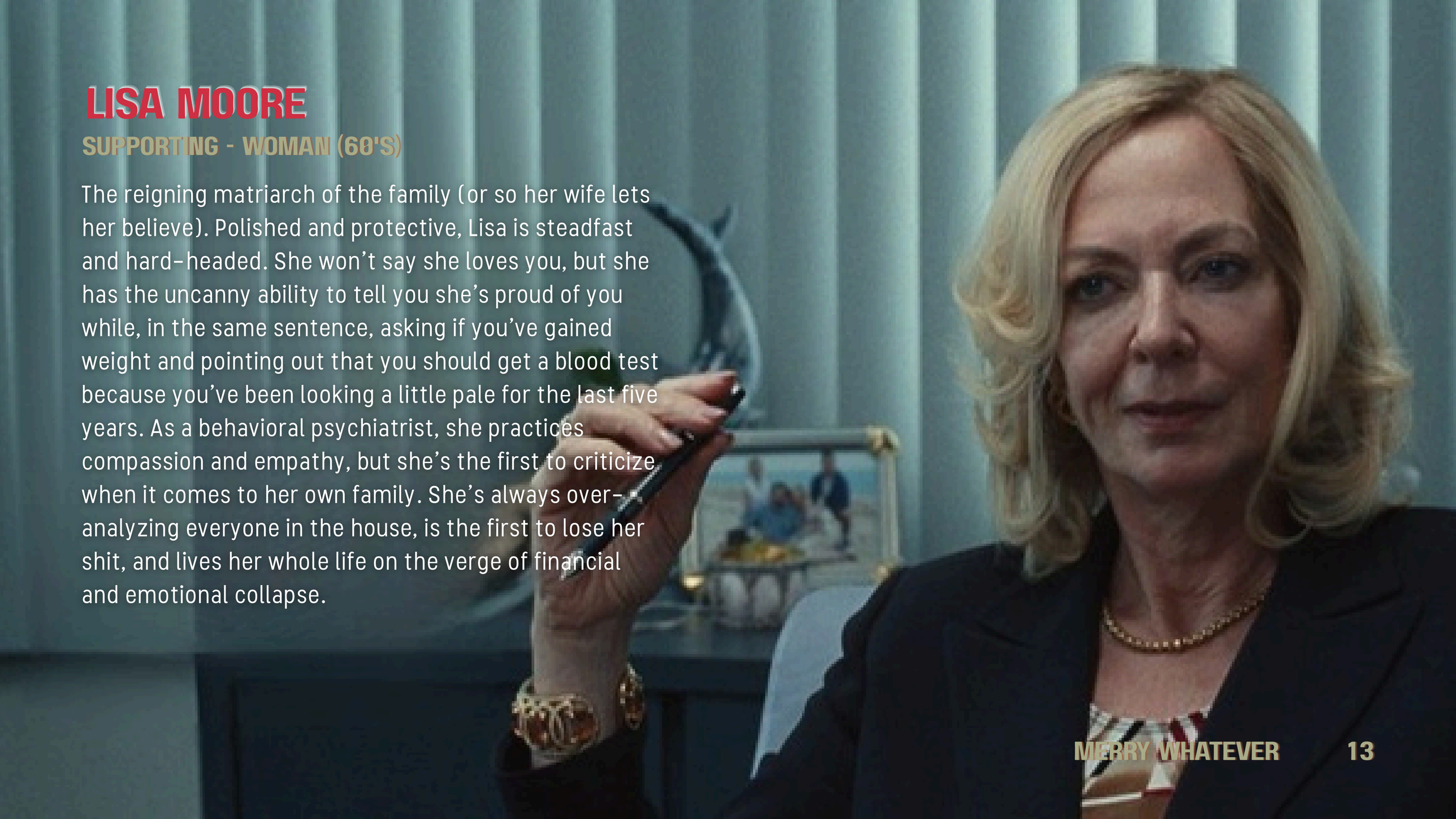




LISA MOORE

SUPPORTING - WOMAN (60'S)

The reigning matriarch of the family (or so her wife lets her believe). Polished and protective, Lisa is steadfast and hard-headed. She won't say she loves you, but she has the uncanny ability to tell you she's proud of you while, in the same sentence, asking if you've gained weight and pointing out that you should get a blood test because you've been looking a little pale for the last five years. As a behavioral psychiatrist, she practices compassion and empathy, but she's the first to criticize when it comes to her own family. She's always over-analyzing everyone in the house, is the first to lose her shit, and lives her whole life on the verge of financial and emotional collapse.

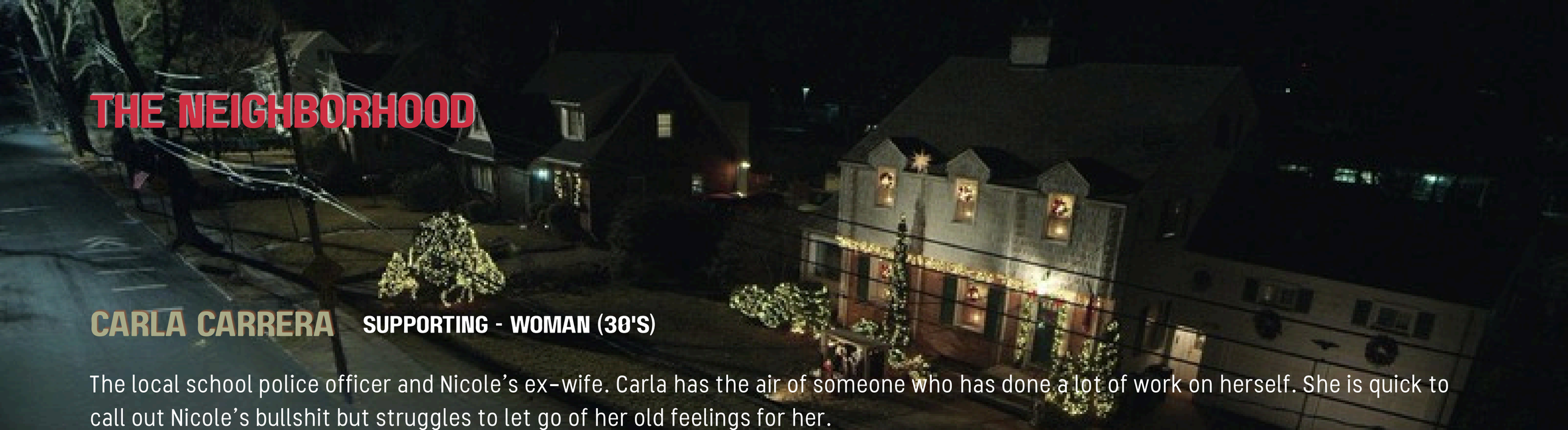


KIM MOORE

SUPPORTING - WOMAN (60'S)

The actual reigning anal-retentive matriarch (Lisa's wife). Kim is a brash, loudmouthed New Yorker. She's warm and generous, but don't be fooled; Kim can guilt-trip you from here to Staten Island before you even open your mouth for a bite of her famous Chicken Cacciatore. Kim is the rock of the family, and everyone knows it. Behind the scenes, Kim runs her house like she runs her kindergarten classroom, by insisting everyone play nice and clean the hell up after themselves. If tough love was an Olympic sport, Kim would be its Michael Phelps.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD



CARLA CARRERA **SUPPORTING - WOMAN (30'S)**

The local school police officer and Nicole’s ex-wife. Carla has the air of someone who has done a lot of work on herself. She is quick to call out Nicole’s bullshit but struggles to let go of her old feelings for her.

WILL ABBOT **SUPPORTING - MAN (40'S)**

Vivian’s longtime drug-dealing ex-boyfriend. Will navigated his ups and downs while somehow managing to stay out of trouble. His presence in the neighborhood remains a reminder of Vivian’s dark past.

GINA DE LUCA **SUPPORTING - WOMAN (40'S)**

The Moores’ nagging neighbor. With her full face of makeup and a squared-off French manicure, she’s the type of woman who’s content to live on the same block her entire life and hell-bent on making sure you know she runs that shit too. She sees everything, and yes, she’ll definitely report it to the HOA.

SUMMARY

GENRE	Drama, Dramedy, Holiday Family
RUNTIME	100 – 110 minutes
FORMAT	Feature film (theatrical and streaming)
TARGET AUDIENCE	Ages 30–65. Fans of character-driven dramedies, dysfunctional family stories, and holiday films.
TONE	Sharp, dry, female-driven, honest, bittersweet, & darkly funny
KEY THEMES	Sisterhood, motherhood, family, forgiveness, home, & second chances
STRUCTURE	Three-act character-driven ensemble
VISUAL STYLE	Naturalistic. Warm, Lived-in. Weathered. Nostalgic. Gritty Long Island, New York, with intimate, observational camerawork to capture raw moments between people who struggle to communicate.
MUSIC STYLE	70s and 80s classic rock, ironic use of holiday standards, and an emotionally grounded indie score.
ESTIMATED BUDGET	$8M–15M
RELEASE GOAL	Festival premiere followed by a theatrical release with streaming distribution.

ABOUT THE WRITER

PAIGE ESPINOSA

Based in Los Angeles, Paige is a writer/actor originally from Cherry Hill, New Jersey. After receiving her BFA in Musical Theatre from Long Island University Post, she went on to work in film and television production in NY and LA. An avid Philly sports fan, Paige spends most of her days screaming at the TV and waiting for another Eagles Super Bowl. When she's not doing that, she works in media marketing, but she'd really rather just be writing. Specializing in stories often set on the East Coast and in the Tri-State area, Paige writes what she wants to see. With strong female-driven plots, she hopes to bring more work to women and appeal to the larger demographic of people craving real, funny, honest, human stories.



CONTACT

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