

## LASTING ATTRACTIONS

LOGLINE: She overlooks a boorish, drunken come-on, sensing there's more to his story. That's all they need to riddle each other out by the time the lights dim.

FADE IN:

EXT. A BOTANICAL GARDEN IN SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA  
- SUNNY EARLY AFTERNOON

MATEO BROWN (26) stands near a manzanita nursery just inside the garden's entrance. From there, the path leads past succulents -- agaves, aloes -- and purple sage. Mateo casts occasional nervous glances outside the garden entrance, and otherwise adopts an air of composure, taking in the arid, colorful ambience. He's dressed western-casual, his black hair combed back.

BETTY GIFFORD (23) enters the garden, while Mateo's back is turned. She's wearing jeans and a loose-fitting cotton blouse with embroidered flowers. Country-style: she's from eastern Tennessee, a recent arrival. Armed with a degree in textiles, she's come for a job as a seamstress. She's tall, her long brown hair swept back from a wide face with a few freckles.

BETTY

Well? Do I look as good when you're  
sober?

Mateo gives a sudden involuntary start from his faux-nonchalant posture and turns to look at her. He regains his composure.

MATEO

Yeah, sure. But it was your  
conversation that drew me in. Direct  
and to the point. That's my type.

Betty laughs. They start walking along the garden path. She takes in with interest the Western flora as they talk.

BETTY

You sure surprised me with your call  
this morning.

MATEO

Why? You gave me your phone number  
when I asked at the party. You must  
have known I'd give it a try.

BETTY

I only gave it to you because I  
thought you were too drunk to remember  
it. I'm impressed you did. So here I

am. But don't get your hopes up, if you have any. I appreciate the idea to come here. This is beautiful.

Mateo smiles, appreciating the clarity of her boundaries.

MATEO

I'm a newspaper reporter. I try to stay clear of hopes. In any case, I like making friends.

He takes a facetious tone, but wants a glimmer of hope:

MATEO (CONT'D)

But you know, I've heard it said I can be deceptively charming. It's how I get stories.

Betty laughs. She's having none of it, but good-naturedly:

BETTY

Think I haven't seen every kind of charm where I'm from? And tons more subtle than the way you danced the other night. I keep my stories to myself. You might try that with your hands!

EXT. A LARGE BACKYARD - MID-AFTERNOON

The house is a big Victorian that's seen better days. A vegetable garden takes up a far corner. A clothesline is draped with laundry, both men's and women's. Betty rents a room here. She sits in the yard, in front of a wooden table, cradling a guitar, playing and singing "Wildwood Flower."

Mateo is led to the yard by a male tenant. He approaches Betty, who stops her finger-picking and singing.

MATEO

You play beautifully.

Betty sets the guitar aside. Mateo takes a seat opposite Betty.

BETTY

Oh, it just takes practice. I could teach you that pattern. It consoles me. Has all my life.

Mateo hands her a booklet.

MATEO

Here's the booklet you asked about.  
This tells you where the local food co-  
ops, skill-exchange registries, and  
such things are.

BETTY

Thank you. Nice of you to drop by with  
it. Well. Nice to see you too.

Mateo looks at the clothesline, at a long, flower-print  
dress, elegant country-style. He recognizes it. They're  
friends, but he wants to remind her of his attraction.

MATEO

You were wearing that at the party. I  
remember better than the phone number.  
Look at the wind bring it to life. But  
not like you when you danced in it.

Betty smiles, rolling her eyes. But a bit flattered.

BETTY

Thank you, Mr. Charm. I made it  
myself.

MATEO

You have a future in your trade that I  
predict will lead you away from this  
little Western college town that is,  
uh, a bit lacking in style.

BETTY

Can't say. It's a wide world. Maybe  
Tennessee needs me eventually.

MATEO

I'll be a distant memory by then. But  
can I entice you to dinner at my  
place? My untold talent. I'm not a bad  
cook. Italian, particularly.

BETTY

We'll see, buddy. But you are speaking  
my language now.

Mateo gets up to leave, and Betty gets up to show him out.  
After a moment, they spontaneously embrace -- for longer and  
tighter than either intended. Betty breaks away, a little

taken with the moment, but looks at Mateo intently.

BETTY  
I love my freedom.

Mateo pauses, mouths a few attempts at something to say, and comes up with:

MATEO  
Ain't gonna lie, it looks good on you.

INT. A GOOD-SIZED LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Mateo and Betty enter. The room is dimly lit by two wall-mounted kerosene lamps that cast a moody glow.

BETTY  
Very romantic, but can we turn on the light? I'm going to trip on something.

MATEO  
Well, here we turn off the dark. But it's the same effect. You're closer to the dark switch than I am.

Betty flips the switch for the ceiling light, revealing a room full of house plants -- bamboo palm, coleus, hanging ferns and more.

BETTY  
Oh my. You have more plants than any guy I know.

MATEO  
Keeps my mind off things, tending them. The extra oxygen is a tonic. Some wine?

Betty takes a seat on the couch.

BETTY  
Of course.

Mateo pours two goblets of red wine, hands one to Betty, and takes a seat next to her. She decides to draw him out a bit.

BETTY (CONT'D)  
I'm going to say the party was a one-off. And that you can hold your booze.

Mateo laughs, then turns serious.

MATEO

Yes. I've had a rough spell. My sister committed suicide last month.

Betty gasps, puts her hand to her mouth.

MATEO (CONT'D)

I'd just gotten back from Iowa for the funeral. And the home scene. (Faintly) She just needed more time. And me to be there to get her out more.

BETTY

I'm so sorry. Don't blame yourself. I knew there was something, but that's awful. I know hard drinkers, enough to know you don't fit. Daddy was one, and he left us. I came out here getting away from an abusive relationship with another.

MATEO

I'm very sorry. I guess empathy beyond your years comes at a price.

He raises his wine glass. Whatever happens, she's a gift.

MATEO (CONT'D)

Whatever we are to each other, there's a skill exchange I'm getting the best of. Since the garden walk, I feel like living again. I'll find something to bring to the table here.

Betty looks down, running a finger along the rim of her wine glass, smiling suggestively.

BETTY

You're doing just fine. You could charm a story right out of a gnarly old desert tree, I do declare.

He laughs. Her glance rises to him.

BETTY (CONT'D)

I could use a little refill. And mind hitting the dark switch?

FADE OUT