

Frustration

by

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FADE IN:

PHOTO: GABRIELLE WALD, 30s, cropped from a family photo, a husband's chin/ear visible on the right, a son's combed hair below. She is beautiful, but there is an emptiness in her expression, like the depressed person pretending to be a normal member of society, a woman who doesn't belong anywhere yet plays the role of wife and mother.

DAYTON (V.O.)

My mother disappeared into the wind
ten years ago. I was thirteen. I
was told nothing.

INT. RANDOM DOORWAY - NIGHT

DAYTON WALD, twenty, holds a pleasant young beauty, NICOLE, and slowly, sensually kisses her.

DAYTON (V.O.)

I tried unsuccessfully channeling
my grief into finding love.
Sometimes it worked until I dumped
them for liking me.

Nicole forces her breath in and out of her nostrils as her temperature rises. Dayton's eyes reflect boredom.

INT. LIBRARY COMPUTER LAB - DAY

Dayton, at twenty-one, looks over to his left, and sees LIANA VANDERWALL at the computer next to him. She chuckles to herself as she chats online.

DAYTON (V.O.)

The problem was talking to them.
If I had to talk too long, I'd get
romantic and soft, and they would
hate me for it. Except for Liana
Vanderwall.

We look at Liana's lips as she smiles to herself. She is a truly original beauty, not so much in her features but in how fluidly and sensually they are animated.

LIANA

(turning her head to face
Dayton)

Am I bothering you, I'm sorry,
sweetie...

Dayton stares at her, helplessly.

DAYTON (V.O.)
 She was always too nice to me.

INT. LIANA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Liana holds Dayton's head in her arms, stroking his forehead. His eyes are red and swollen.

DAYTON
 I can't stop it. I can't stop
 loving you.

EXT. LIANA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Dayton stands at the door, receiving his good night kiss, a tortuously full one.

LIANA
 I suppose I should stop being nice
 to you. I like you, Dayton. But I
 can't love you back, not the way
 you love me.

Liana steps back and waves good night at him. He's barely containing his profound, crushing sorrow.

Dayton walks away from Liana's front door as it closes, runs behind a bush and falls to his knees, grabbing his head and moaning in agony.

EXT. RIVER DAM - NIGHT

Dayton looks at Liana, shocked. She holds her arms around his neck and smiles at him warmly.

DAYTON (V.O.)
 Liana never slept with me, but her
 smile, her warmth, her very flesh
 intoxicated me. I never believed
 in the soul but...

Liana reaches up and presses her lips into Dayton's. His face pinches shut in anguish, then loosens in elation.

DAYTON (V.O.)
 (continuing)
 She was an angel vibrating with an
 electrical hum, unable to be
 contained by her flesh, charging
 whoever touched her ...yet I swear no
 man has felt for her what I did.
 And still do.

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Dayton stands in the doorway of Liana's room. Her wrists are bandaged. Her face is slack. He looks at her with the kind of love you only feel once in your life.

DAYTON (V.O.)

Even when that spiritual power failed her, I never stopped hoping that some combination of words and actions could bring her back. And yet, I could still not fathom who she was.

LIANA

Hi, sugar.

DAYTON

How could you do this?

LIANA

If you don't know then I can't tell you.

INT. WALD PHOTO SHOP - DAY

Liana walks in the photo shop where Dayton works with his dad, THADDEUS WALD, a somewhat unkempt but wiry and bearded elder geekish type. They both wear t-shirts saying WALD PHOTO.

LIANA

Hello, Wald men of photo.

Dayton grabs her and pulls her into the darkroom.

INT. DARKROOM - DAY

Red light illuminates.

Dayton opens the tiny case of an engagement ring. Liana looks at it, coldly horrified, paralyzed... until she walks away into the light.

LIANA

How dare you...

Dayton hides the ring away and holds his head low, the final verdict tearing through every muscle in his face. His body heaves but he clamps down hard. He is able to gain control except for his eyes. They are dead, destined to only ever play the part of a living man.

INT. DAYTON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dayton, twenty-four, lies in his bed, arms tucked behind his head, body half covered with a sheet, staring at the ceiling.

DAYTON (V.O.)
 Love, even unrequited, had been a fine, excellent luxury. No such cartilage exists in my joints anymore.

The door of the bathroom opens, and out pads MIRNA, a vivacious sexy Latina with a beautiful brown and supple body.

CUT TO:

Mirna rides Dayton.

MIRNA
 Oh, that is some grade-A dick game!

DAYTON (V.O.)
 (continuing)
 I don't get far, but I get by.

CUT TO:

Mirna walks out of the bathroom. Dayton lies on the bed and stares at the ceiling.

MIRNA
 Dayton?

DAYTON
 (snarling wearily)
 What?

MIRNA
 Why do you answer me like that?

DAYTON
 Like what?

MIRNA
 With "what!?" instead of "Yes, honey?"

DAYTON
 I say yes to you plenty.

MIRNA
 I say yes to you. You don't say yes.

DAYTON

Yes, I do. See?

Mirna walks over to the bed and slips under the covers.

MIRNA

Don't know why I am with you.

DAYTON

What is this?

MIRNA

Talking.

DAYTON

Your brain was working before you walked into that bathroom. Did it dribble down the drain, Mirna?

MIRNA

I was on the stool thinking about how Father Salvatore said you were a blasphemer.

DAYTON

You wouldn't care what Salvatore said if you didn't already have a problem with me.

MIRNA

You wouldn't dismiss Father Salvatore if you didn't have history with him.

DAYTON

Jesus, don't have me over here to fill your flower pot and then come down on me with what your goddamn priest told you about me, especially a cynical fuck like him. If you think any priest really believes half of what they say, he's not the one.

MIRNA

What are you saying?

DAYTON

The man is a godless priest. Deep down, he thinks people are animals to be controlled.

MIRNA

Oh, who are you to talk? You talk about people like they're animals.

Dayton rolls over and closes his eyes.

DAYTON

I try to avoid people, not control them.

MIRNA

Fine. I'll avoid you too.
(gets out of bed and starts putting her clothes on)
I can get another asshole.
(places hand on crotch)
My girl could do better too.

DAYTON

Oh, your pussy and I had some pretty good times.

MIRNA

I barely remember.

DAYTON

And I memorized them. If you ever get married I'll tell your husband I still remember your taste.

MIRNA

You're sick. I'd kill you.

DAYTON

Ah, didn't take you long to start talking like Mexican trash.

MIRNA

Well you were always a white piece of shit who lost every good woman in his life.

Dayton sits up.

DAYTON

You're fucking cocky today. And there was only ever one good woman, thanks.

MIRNA

Don't think I didn't hear about you.

(MORE)

MIRNA (CONT'D)

I hear everything about you, I've heard shit you don't know about yourself, what girls say behind your back. You're the asshole.

Dayton scoots across the bed and stands up in front of Mirna. Mirna grabs a half-filled thick glass ashtray.

DAYTON

Where the hell-

The ashtray smashes into his eye and sends Dayton to the ground, black ash snowing on him.

Mirna grabs her purse and heads for the door.

MIRNA

Can't believe I fucked a guy who sells cameras. Who the fuck buys cameras anymore? That's why you're a broke-ass. I already have another man lined up and if you call me again he'll fuck you up.

Mirna walks out.

Dayton clutches his bleeding eye, a huge gash across his eyebrow. He struggles to get up, moaning in pain and anger, but slips and hits his head on the floor again.

DAYTON

(shouts)

Those stitches will cancel all the value you had as a cheap date!

Dayton passes out.

CUT TO:

INT. DAYTON'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Dayton, big gauze pad over his eye, tips back a bottle of Jack Daniels.

The phone rings. Dayton snatches it up.

DAYTON

Yello?

LUIS (V.O.)

I see you, you're dead.

DAYTON

Hey, Luis, I even hear you're looking for me and I'll call 911 and start making shit up, I'll yell rape. Now I didn't touch your fucking sister, Luis, but she cracked me in the fucking eye with an ashtray.

LUIS (V.O.)

Just watch your ass, fool. Stay away from her or I'll get mad.

DAYTON

Hey, I understand you guys are close, she says your name when she comes.

Dayton picks up the phone and dials. Mirna answers.

MIRNA (V.O.)

Hello?

DAYTON

Hey, Mirna.

MIRNA (V.O.)

What do you want?

DAYTON

Do you hate me?

MIRNA

I'm thinking about it.

DAYTON

Think harder, cunt.

He hangs up. He looks at the phone, then lies down on the bed and picks it up again. He crawls underneath the blanket. He sighs, then dials again.

LIANA answers.

LIANA (V.O.)

(sleepy)

Hello?

DAYTON

Hey.

LIANA (V.O.)

Dayton?

DAYTON

Yeah.

LIANA (V.O.)

I was sleeping.

DAYTON

Any chance you dreamt of me?

LIANA (V.O.)

Hmm. That's cute, what's up hon?

DAYTON

Well I promised I wouldn't, but I got clobbered in the head. It juxtaposed a few pathways so naturally I was thinking about the expert on clobbering me in the head.

LIANA (V.O.)

I've got company.

DAYTON

You're wasting your time.

LIANA (V.O.)

No, Dayton. You are.

The phone goes dead. Dayton rubs his swollen eye, then hurls his blanket off and gets up.

EXT. SPRINGWEATHER STREET - NIGHT

Dayton looks up and behind him at a particular bedroom window. The emotion on his face turns to fear, reverence, and insecurity at the thought of the woman who would not have him.

The light turns on.

Dayton slides deeper into the shadows, but it's too late. LIANA in robe and slippers, locked in, makes a beeline for him.

LIANA

I've had it with you.

DAYTON

Liana-

LIANA

You know, if this were at least an honest obsession-

(MORE)

LIANA (CONT'D)
 (subtly inhales as she
 talks)
 -you still smell like Mirna!

DAYTON
 Are you kidding, do you think she
 matters to me? She's irrelevant,
 and so is that worthless beta suck-
 up in your bed, Lane.

LIANA
 Lane's far from worthless, you
 could learn-

DAYTON
 You think what we had was so easily
 replicable?

LIANA
 No, replaceable and very much
 improvable. I don't want what you
 have to offer.

DAYTON
 Yet I lacked for nothing when I had
 you. Do you think you're so much
 better than me?

He takes her hand. She turns her wrist upwards, displaying a
 slash mark.

LIANA
 You tried to take God away from me.
 You made me deaf to everything
 good.

DAYTON
 You're wrong about that, Liana.
 You were deaf to the good already
 in you. I loved you and you hated
 me for contradicting your self-
 loathing.

LIANA
 Curious how your expressions of
 love always contain criticism.

DAYTON
 I want to spend the rest of my life
 telling you how amazing you are.

LIANA

Dayton, the only thing about me you're able to see is your perfect angel on a pedestal, some ethereal creature who mortals dare not look upon! You still can't look at me! Me! Liana Vanderwall, not some goddamn Venus in a shell! You only love yourself!

DAYTON

(incredulous)
I love myself?

LIANA

Not God.

DAYTON

You've just been taught to disregard yourself and place your power in the hands of men who use God.

LIANA

You want to be the one who controls me, of course.

DAYTON

I want to help you.

LIANA

That doesn't mean you can. Go away, Dayton. You're not good for me.

The door opens. LANE, a middling neck-bearded softie who looks like he just got pried away from writing computer code, peers out quietly, asserting only through his interfering presence. Liana walks past him and disappears into the building, pulling Lane with her. The door closes.

INT. WOOD TAVERN - NIGHT

Dayton saunters into the Wood Tavern and glances around. Nobody he wants to talk to.

He goes to a stool and signals the bartender, EVAN WOOD. Wood, a man's man, thirty-eight and built like an ex-boxer with long chops and short black hair sees Dayton and nods to say he knows what drink to prepare.

Dayton looks at his reflection in the bar's mirror. His face is dour, worn, beaten.

EVAN

Don't drive away the clientele
tonight.

DAYTON

Is it written on my face?

EVAN

(points at Dayton's
bandage, handing him his
drink)

In shorthand.

DAYTON

Things going okay for you, Evan?

EVAN

Sure, six more weeks of counseling
and I get to see my daughter. My
anger will be officially diagnosed
as managed. I let my temper go one
day in my entire life, sixty weeks
ago.

DAYTON

You found yourself along the way?

EVAN

That's how it's done.

DAYTON

But what if that's not true. How
do you know you hadn't found
yourself before, and you weren't
forced to change because you ended
up in a pair of cuffs?

EVAN

(eyes narrowing)

If I didn't like the cuffs, they
must not have been for me.

DAYTON

Mr. Evan, I salute.
(raises drink)

Dayton smiles and looks to his right, then his left. It
becomes apparent that he is not sitting alone anymore. There
are two Latin HOMIES on each side of him.

Dayton gets his beer and raises it to the male on his left,
LUIS.

DAYTON (CONT'D)

Hi, Luis. It's your sister I'm talking about.

LUIS

Mirna says "Hi, motherfucker."

DAYTON

Mr. Wood, shots for all of us.

LUIS

Bartender, make them all doubles while Dayton's buying.

EXT. WOOD TAVERN - NIGHT

Dayton stumbles out with Luis and the homies. FRANCISCO hands him a paper bag.

FRANCISCO

Hey, we got you a burrito.

LUIS

Sober you up, Dayton. Take a bite.

Dayton grabs the bag and drunkenly pulls out a wrapped burrito. He tosses the bag away and unwraps the burrito.

DAYTON

(dry)

Hey I didn't know you guys liked burritos.

Dayton takes a bite. His face violently contorts and he staggers to his knees and spits out feces.

Luis and the guys scream with laughter. Luis pats him on the back.

LUIS

Hey, just so you know, I made that for you.

FRANCISCO

Hey, Dayton, that's Aztec xocolatl, what do you think?

Dayton vomits on the ground. Luis kicks him in the ass, pushing Dayton onto his vomit.

LUIS

You just used my sister to get laid, didn't you, man?

All the homies jump in and give Dayton a beating for fifteen long brutal seconds. His mouth is bloody, the remnants of the shit burrito mix with the crimson.

DAYTON
She didn't love me.

LUIS
Aw, poor guy!

Dayton takes a kick from Luis but transfers the momentum of it upwards, standing. Rage colors his face as red as the blood smeared across it.

FRANCISCO
Bring it on, dude!

Dayton jams Francisco in the eye with a thumb then kicks him in the balls.

He grabs HOMEY #3, kicks HOMEY #4 in the throat, then head butts Homey #3 in the nose, dropping both.

Francisco and Luis come charging in. Dayton knows he's gonna get hit but puts everything into punching Francisco right on the jaw button. Francisco drops out cold, falling backwards onto his folding legs pinned underneath him.

Luis nails Dayton in the temple. Dayton wobbles but spins into Luis' second punch, yet stays conscious. He grabs Luis by the throat and drives him backwards, slamming him into the wall of the tavern.

DAYTON
You think any woman ever loved me,
man!? She was just fucking bored.
I don't mind eating your shit,
Luis, but process this,
motherfucker: The promise of
Dayton Wald is that you never, ever
need worry that it'll turn into
love, because I've already given
up.

Hands grab Dayton. He roars and swings for the bleachers.

INT. LUIS' CAR - NIGHT

Luis drives. Dayton sits in the passenger seat. Everybody nurses their wounds silently, passing around a bottle of tequila. All aggression seems drained.

EXT. DAYTON'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Dayton gets out of Luis' car. Just as he stands, he gets a knife in his left ass-cheek.

DAYTON
Fuckers!

LUIS
Calm down, we just took a slice of white bread. Keep quiet about tonight and we're even.

DAYTON
Fair trade for all the brown muffin I got, I guess.

LUIS
Word of advice, bro: Women know when you don't respect them.

DAYTON
So they know when you love them, huh?

LUIS
If I really love them, I don't have to tell them.

Luis' car rolls away.

DAYTON
Damn, Luis, you aren't a bad guy.

Dayton limps into his house, sighing in disbelief at how things turned out.

INT. DAYTON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dayton crawls across the floor, peeling off clothes, falling, and getting back up; a repeating process that stops with him sitting in front of his computer naked, blood streaked down the back of his leg.

DAYTON (V.O.)
In every aspect of my life, all I feel is frustration. I am nothing and no one.

Dayton looks at his browser, types and clicks to a porn site.

The screen lists "Candy Classics Volume 8 (SPINOZA PRODUCTIONS)" as "DAILY SHUFFLE CLIP." Dayton turns and double clicks on the mouse. The porn begins.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Dreaming: Dayton walks through wheat fields. He walks for miles and miles, and pushes onwards, dirt clinging to his feet. He stops and turns.

Hundreds follow him. They look to him to lead the way.

DAYTON

If you'd just wait for my mother, I
could show you where to go.

The crowd looks disappointed.

DAYTON (CONT'D)

Listen, there's a chance she's in
this field, just look!

(starts tearing through
the wheat)

Look!

Dayton looks down with shock at what he's doing. He tears at the hair of his mother, Gabrielle. She is half-submerged in the earth, smeared with mud. Wheat grows over her and twists into her hair.

Dayton looks down but there is no mother. His hands churn mud and wheat.

The wind blows with a high-pitched chill. Dayton looks up. He is alone in the wheat field.

INT. DAYTON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dayton awakes in his computer chair, lotion nearby, the video still looping. His eyes are unable to open. He mutes the speakers and shuts off the monitor in two quick moves then barely stands up as he lurches over to his bed.

Dayton stops, then turns around and goes back to the computer. He turns the monitor on. It's mostly sex, but it pans up to the woman's face.

Dayton stares and hits pause. Right at the full-frame close-up of his mother, Gabrielle, looking young and entirely unmatronly.

Her gaudy exaggerated features contort as she laughs and turn into the leer of a ghostly witch, as if giddy with the grand and diabolical stunt she just pulled on her son.

DAYTON

Well, Mom, this changes things
between us.