

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 and happy eyes 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.

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 the feeling.

EXT. RIVER DAM - NIGHT

Liana holds her arms around Dayton's 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. I swear no man has ever felt for her what I did. And still do.

EXT. LIANA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Liana hugs Dayton, but backs away from his kiss.

LIANA

I can't love you the way you want me to.

DAYTON

Why?

LIANA

How do I explain a feeling, except it's mine?

Liana steps back and waves good night at him. He barely contains 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. CATHOLIC CHURCH - DAY

Liana beckons Dayton towards the door. He puts his hands up to decline.

LATER

Dayton argues with Liana, pointing angrily at the church.

She stops. Looks at him. Looks at the church. She runs away.

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

Why would you do this?

LIANA

You attacked my faith. You tried to take God from me.

FATHER SALVATORE ROBLES, gaunt with thinning dark hair, enters. Liana beams. He takes her hand.

They look at Dayton, expectant, hopeful that he will leave.

He takes the hint.

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 photography.
What did you want, Dayton?

Dayton pulls her into the darkroom.

INT. DARKROOM - DAY

Red light illuminates.

Dayton opens the tiny case of an engagement ring.

DAYTON

Liana, I love you. Whatever
challenges we face-

Liana looks at it, coldly horrified, paralyzed...

LIANA

How dare you...

She walks out of the darkroom.

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.

MIRNA, a vivacious sexy Latina, rides Dayton.

Mirna climbs off him.

MIRNA

Ooh, that is some grade-A dick
game!

DAYTON (V.O.)

(continuing)

I don't get far, but I get by.

LATER:

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

MIRNA
Dios le pague!

DAYTON
Spare me the God horseshit.

MIRNA
Father Salvatore said you were a
blasphemer.

DAYTON
You wouldn't care what Salvatore
said if you didn't want to fight
me.

MIRNA
You just 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 the hell are you talking about?

DAYTON

Salvatore 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.

Mirna gets out of bed and starts putting her clothes on.

MIRNA (CONT'D)

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, and she ain't you.

MIRNA

I hear what girls say behind your back, asshole. And I know Liana is fucking that Lane guy.

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 been fucking 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.

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.

He hangs up the phone. Smirks. Makes a new call.

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, dummy. Call me when you're horny.

MIRNA

Fu-

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.

The front door opens. LIANA, in robe and slippers, 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-
(subtly inhales as she talks)
-you still smell like another woman!

DAYTON
She's irrelevant, and so is that worthless beta brown-noser in your bed, Lane.

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

DAYTON
Liana, nobody could love you like I do.

LIANA
I don't want what you have to offer.

He takes her hand. She turns her wrist upwards, displaying a slash mark, and pushes it in his face.

LIANA (CONT'D)
You tried to take God away from me. You made me deaf to everything good.

DAYTON
You were deaf to the good already in you. Know what it is? 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
little angel on a pedestal, some
ethereal creature who mortals dare
not look upon! You still can't look
at me! Me! Liana Vanderwall, not
Venus in a shell! You only love
yourself!

DAYTON

(incredulous)
I love myself?

LIANA

Not God.

DAYTON

You've just been taught to
disregard your inner power and
place it in the hands of men who
use God, like Father Salvatore
fuckface.

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, a man's man, thirty-eight and built like an ex-boxer with long chops and short black hair.

He 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, hands him his drink.

EVAN

In shorthand.

DAYTON

Things going okay for you, Evan?

EVAN

Sure, six more weeks of counseling and I get to see my daughter.

DAYTON

Nice! How'd ya do that?

EVAN

My anger will be officially diagnosed as managed.

DAYTON

Didn't know that about you, man.

EVAN

I let my temper go one day 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 homie on his left, LUIS.

DAYTON (CONT'D)

Hi, Luis.

LUIS

Mirna says "Hi, motherfucker."

DAYTON

Mr. Wood, shots for all of us.

LUIS

Bartender, make'em 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, what are you aggravated about? Nobody loves 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 HOMIE #3, kicks HOMIE #4 in the throat, then head butts Homie #3 in the nose, dropping both.

Francisco and Luis charge in. Dayton knows he's gonna get hit but puts everything into punching Francisco right on the jaw button. Francisco drops out cold, falls backwards onto his folding legs as they get 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

I don't mind eating your shit,
Luis, but process this,
motherfucker: The promise of Dayton
Wald is that you never, ever need
to worry that it'll turn into love,
because I've already given up.
Mirna knew that.

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, except Homie #3 is knocked out. All aggression seems drained.

EXT. DAYTON'S HOUSE - NIGHT

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

DAYTON

Fuckers!

LUIS

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

DAYTON

Fair trade for all the brown
muffin, 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. They know that shit,
bro.

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, peels off clothes, falls, and gets 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 VINTAGE CLIP." Dayton grabs a bottle of lotion, turns, and double clicks on the mouse.

The porn begins.

DREAM - EXT. FIELD - DAY

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.

END DREAM

INT. DAYTON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dayton awakes in his computer chair, pants around his ankles, lotion nearby, the video still looping.

His eyes squint shut, he paws blindly for tissues and cleans himself then pulls up his pants. His eyes open into slits.

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 double-takes, eyes wide. He turns around and goes back to the computer. He turns the monitor on. It's just bodies having sex, but he backs up the video until it briefly pans up to the woman's face.

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

Her gaudy exaggerated features appear contorted 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.

Dayton slumps in his seat and stares at the screen until the tears come, when he looks down.

Dayton slides over, reaches under his bed and pulls out a lock-box. He flips the latch and opens it.

Dayton pulls out a picture of Gabrielle, who in the picture is caught unawares and distracted. She sits at the kitchen table, feeding the infant Dayton.

Dayton closes the box, sets it under his bed, then lays his head on his pillow.

Dayton sets Gabrielle's picture on his night table, her eyes staring at him.

Dayton stares back. His eyelids flutter, then close.

DREAM - EXT. GLASSWATER CREEK - DAY

Dayton, holding a saw, descends the rocky hill to the widest length of Glasswater Creek, nearly a river.

An old tire hangs from a tree, dangles over the creek.