

TELOMERX

Written by

Zachary Fleming

INT. DARK BASEMENT - MORNING

Year - 1979

Sunlight barely illuminates a large industrial basement through narrow windows.

Shadows expose a large work area and thick metal table that leads to a gothic furnace.

The bass of a sad organ rattles from a room above.

Heavy breathing emanates from a closet near cabinets and a sanitation counter.

It gets louder and louder, until -

A door up the staircase opens, and a light flips on.

The panting stops.

MALE VOICE (O.C)
(searching)
Vincent?

A set of feet step down the stairs, closer to the sound.

With every creak, the panting returns, sounding more and more like weeping.

Feet stop next to the closet.

MALE VOICE (CONT'D)
(softly)
My son.

A hand moves to open the closet - the weeping gets louder.

The door gently opens, and out spills - VINCENT BURKHARDT (8, male), a young boy in hysterics.

He falls into the arms of the source of the voice - his young father, MERIL BURKHARDT (25-35, male).

Meril's tough, but loving arms wrap around Vincent.

MERIL
Son. It's-

Vincent's grasp gets stronger, tearing into Meril's stoic demeanor.

MERIL (CONT'D)
It's time to say goodbye.

Vincent looks up, red faced and puffy.

VINCENT
I can't do it.

MERIL
I know your pain. I have it too. We will for some time. But we must remember that Death has been kind to us. Now it is our turn to pay its due. We must say goodbye to her.

Meril guides Vincent gently towards the stairs. Vincent pulls out of his grasp.

VINCENT
Not yet. Please.

MERIL
Vincent, everyone is waiting upstairs for us.

VINCENT
They can keep waiting.

MERIL
Son, this basement will not help our sorrows.

Meril holds out his hand.

MERIL (CONT'D)
Time down here will not make this easier. We can heal once it's done.

Vincent hesitantly submits, drudging his feet while being led upstairs.

INT. FOYER - BURKHARDT FUNERAL HOME - MORNING

Meril opens the door to a rustic foyer with a modern decor, for the 70's.

THERESA BURKHARDT (60's, female), Meril's grizzled and conservative mother, has been practically inhaling cigarettes waiting.

THERESA
We found him. Good.
(to Vincent)
We were worried about you Vincent.

Vincent shies behind his father.

MERIL

He just needed a moment.

Vincent nods weakly.

Theresa approaches and hugs him gently. It's not warm.

With Vincent distracted, Theresa motions Meril towards the Great Room, where people are waiting.

Meril acknowledges sadly.

MERIL (CONT'D)

I must prepare the ceremony.

THERESA

Vincent and I will take our seats shortly.

VINCENT

Wait! Don't go!

Vincent spins in his grandmother's hold.

Each word hurts Meril.

MERIL

I will be with you from the altar.

Meril makes his way to the Great Room, hiding his shattering demeanor.

Vincent struggles from his grandmother's grasp.

THERESA

Calm now, child.

Vincent runs to the entrance of the Great Room and peaks in.

Vincent has a narrow view between the benches filled with sad townsfolk. All quietly in sorrow.

At the head of the room, Meril hovers above a closed casket with his hand on its hood.

Next to the casket - a portrait of a beautiful young woman.

Vincent begins panting again, on the verge of a panic attack. Theresa monitors from behind.

THERESA (CONT'D)

Let us take our seats.

She gently pushes him forward, but he makes a run for it in the opposite direction.

THERESA (CONT'D)
(discretely shouting)
Vincent!

Vincent runs for the main door, and out to -

EXT. ITHACA, NY - BURKHARDT FUNERAL HOME - MORNING

A frigid and snowy morning in Upstate New York.

Vincent breathes in the cold air, condensing rapidly in front of him as he runs from the home.

He's well lost in the midst of parked cars by the time Theresa gets outside.

THERESA
(louder now)
Vincent! Please! Vincent!

Vincent hides behind a car crying.

THERESA (CONT'D)
Vincent! Come back this instant!

A different female voice starts echoing the call.

FEMALE VOICE (PRELAP)
Vincent! Vincent-

INT. NOOK - BURKHARDT FUNERAL HOME - DAY

Year - 2022

Now an older man, Vincent swirls a whiskey waiting in a small green room / nook space behind the Great Room.

FEMALE VOICE
Vincent.

Vincent turns to the voice, his loving wife GINGER BURKHARDT (40-50, female), a driven and put together woman despite hippy roots.

She steps in from outside -

GINGER
It's time.

Vincent turns, nods, and approaches Ginger.

She smiles softly. He hugs her, and kisses her forehead.

VINCENT
How's the crowd?

GINGER
Angry, confused, upset.

VINCENT
The kids?

GINGER
Beth's sitting with friends,
there's a lot of 'em. Lucas is
saintly in the front.

VINCENT
My father?

GINGER
Motionless next to the sill,
creeping people out.

Vincent sighs deeply.

VINCENT
This is getting tough, Ginge.

GINGER
I know honey. It's a phase, it'll
pass.

VINCENT
Not for this place.

Ginger hushes Vincent. A deep breath, and he walks out to -

INT. GREAT ROOM - BURKHARDT FUNERAL HOME - DAY

The main assembly room of the funeral home, now from the vantage of the altar.

The aesthetic hasn't been updated, and in its years its taken on a vintage, antiquated look.

Another closed casket. The portrait now depicts a young man.

In the front row - LINDA LANG (40's, female) vacantly stares into the abyss, while her husband MARK LANG (40's, male) suppresses his tears.

The crowd is a mix of middle aged adults and high schoolers. Sad parents, townsfolk, and students banding together.

BETH BURKHARDT (16, female), a fiery, emotionally driven student, sits with a group of friends in mourning.

Ginger takes her seat in the front row, next to - LUCAS BURKHARDT (5, male), a deeply reserved child, patiently awaiting the ceremony.

Across from the row, is Meril. Now old, and immobile. He silently stares out the window, grizzled and still as death.

Vincent takes his paces with care as he approaches the podium. He takes a moment paying respects to the casket, then turns towards the crowd.

Ginger holds Lucas tightly as Vincent begins.

VINCENT

On behalf of Mark and Linda Lang, I
welcome and thank everyone for
their presence today as we
celebrate the life of Dylan Lang.

The commencement of the ceremony causes some involuntary reactions throughout the speech.

Vincent takes a deep breath.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

I've noticed an uptick in both
miracles and tragedies as of late.
We've solved aging, but not death,
and this new development gives easy
comfort and false security.

(Segue)

Let us not reflect on the cause of
his demise, but of the impact he
had on us all. Dylan, taken too
soon, was a beacon of love and
warmth for all who knew him, as
evidenced by this wonderful
collective honoring his life. Our
community is a better place because
of him, and his loss will be felt
forever. He was a friend of my
daughter's. I happened to have
conversed with the boy on occasion,
and can attest to his reputation. A
great kid. He will be missed but
lived on through us all.

(segue)

(MORE)

VINCENT (CONT'D)

As for the rest of the proceedings,
You are all welcome to pay your
final respects. I am here if you
need anything. Thank you and bless
you.

Vincent steps from the podium and pays his personal respects
to the casket.

As a line starts to form, HEATHER (15-17, female), the
deceased boy's girlfriend, steps to the podium impromptu.

Her head's in the right place, but she lacks maturity and
awareness of the situation.

Teary eyed, she has the crowd's attention, including the
Lang's disbelief. Vincent, caught off guard, appraises the
situation before acting.

HEATHER

Hi everyone. My name is Heather.
Dylan and I were in love.

LINDA

(breaking her silence)
Heather, not now.

HEATHER

Mister and Misses Lang, I feel
every ounce of your suffering.

LINDA

Heather, this is not the time-

Mark holds his wife and tries to console her, despite his own
distaste.

HEATHER

(breaking apart)
Just days ago, Dylan and I were
planning our eternities together.
How long we would stay 18... 21...

Linda snaps and breaks free from her Husband's hold. Vincent
steps in to stop Heather... But too late.

LINDA

ENOUGH! I will not listen to your
naive plans, while I am still
deciding IF I want to spend
eternity without him.

(blowing up)

You kids have become insufferable
because of this fucking pill.

(MORE)

LINDA (CONT'D)
 Young forever! Young forever! Blah
 blah blah. Let's drink and have MY
 BOY DRIVE TO HIS DEATH! He's dead
 now Heather!

HEATHER
 (eyes welling)
 I'm sorr-

Linda collapses sobbing. Her husband also breaks down for all to see.

Vincent watches with a heavy heart. He spots his wife, kids, and father through the mortified sorrowful crowd.

A calm ceremony turned nightmare.

INT. KITCHEN - BURKHARDT FUNERAL HOME - NIGHT

A surprisingly modern kitchen, in case the dining option is purchased by a client.

It rarely is. However, Vincent makes use of it often.

Tonight, he's cooking up steaks. He grills them proficiently and in plenty.

He has relaxed, mostly. Noticeably dressed down.

GINGER (O.S.)
 There's my private chef.

Ginger walks in and wraps her arms around his waist as he keeps grilling.

GINGER (CONT'D)
 (sniffing in)
 Oh my god.

VINCENT
 I have to remind your stomach why
 you're still with me now that
 you're this big shot Cornell Grad
 student.

She kisses him.

GINGER
 Oh please, applying was a mistake.

VINCENT
 Stop that.

GINGER

I just wanted to see if I'd get in.
I don't think it's the time to go
back to school.

VINCENT

Hush. It's the perfect time. I'm so
proud of you.

GINGER

I am proud too, but I can't help
but feel selfish. It's going to
take up so much time, and it's a
long way until it pays off...

Vincent grabs her face.

VINCENT

Stop. This is your purpose. You put
it aside and stood with me when I
had to fulfill mine. It doesn't
need to pay off a thing. Even
though you'll be making me your
stay-at-home husband soon enough.

GINGER

That sounds lovely.

VINCENT

I wouldn't complain.

Ginger grinds into him. Vincent is into it.

Until smoke from the steaks interrupts them.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

Shit.

Ginger laughs as he saves the steaks.

GINGER

Bad timing.

Vincent grunts.

GINGER (CONT'D)

Where is everyone?

VINCENT

My father and the kids are in the
lounge. I'm sure watching coverage
on Marland.

GINGER

I'll have them turn it off.

VINCENT

I just can't think about it tonight. It's not even that I'm even disinterested.

GINGER

Honey, it's okay.
(kisses his neck)
And we'll finish this up later.

INT. LOUNGE - BURKHARDT FUNERAL HOME - NIGHT

The lounge is designed for distraction. There's a pinball machine, a pool table, and a big TV.

It's on. Beth watches a newscast, enraptured by the details of the coverage.

Lucas plays pinball, also watching in his peripherals. Not fully understanding, but picking up on the importance.

Even Meril seems hooked, watching the TV from a distance.

NEWS TICKER:

BREAKING - MARLAND VERDICT EXPECTED IN MINUTES: HIS LAST DAY?

ANCHOR

To those just tuning in, we have received word that the Supreme Court is moments away from announcing their verdict on the highly controversial Eric Marland case.

(segue)

After months of court battles and debates on ethics and morality, Eric Marland may have found a viable loophole in an ironic and equally troubled place, Mortuaries.

FOOTAGE - A MOROSE LAWYER (60's), addresses a presser from a podium, alongside a GRIM MAN (50's) in a suit.

MOROSE LAWYER

(nodding to the Grim Man)

We are proud to stand in solidarity with the American Board of Funeral Science in our attempt to provide my client, Eric Marland, with the compassion and choice that he, and every terminally ill patient deserves.

Back to the studio -

ANCHOR

It isn't without controversy, critics of the ABFS call it a "morbid cash grab", while supporters call it "an evolution of their industry."

A MARLAND CRITIC being interviewed -

MARLAND CRITIC

Funeral homes as killin' homes now? God bless us all.

A MARLAND SUPPORTER being interviewed -

MARLAND SUPPORTER

Name one industry more equipped to do it. AND this way, doctor's can still keep their Hippocratic oath.

Back to the studio -

ANCHOR

If passed, it could very well lead to legalization of euthanasia.

FOOTAGE - ERIC MARLAND (50's) a contoured man in a wheelchair speaks at a news presser.

Reporters call for his attention, while he musters the energy to address the world.

ERIC

I am pleased that my request will be heard promptly and at highest level. I genuinely hope all of you people blessed with good health can stay healthy, and enjoy this wonderful new drug. As for me, my illness has progressed too far. I do not want to endure the pain any longer.

(MORE)

ERIC (CONT'D)

There are many people in a comparable circumstance. I will not spend indefinite years in this pain hoping for a cure that may never come. Please let me go with dignity. Thank you.

Back in the room - Ginger opens the door, and immediately notices the footage.

GINGER

Hey, dinner's ready. Turn that off and that topic is OFF LIMITS tonight. Okay?

The kids nod. Meril doesn't. But then again, Meril doesn't do much of anything anymore.

INT. DINING HALL - BURKHARDT FUNERAL HOME - NIGHT

What would typically be a dining room stretches abnormally long with the business and guests in mind. The massive table is old and solid oak, and must have been quite a feat getting it in place.

Vincent, Ginger, and little Lucas sit close for the meal. Beth spaces out down the table, and Meril further so.

Despite his ordinary lack of activity, Meril is feeding himself steadily albeit slowly.

The family eats in silence.

Then - headlights from the neighbor's car manage to sneak through the windows.

GINGER

I still haven't met them yet.

VINCENT

Neither have I. But I saw a boy, probably Beth's age, and what looked to be his father. We should be good neighbors and introduce ourselves. Welcome them.

(speaking of which)

By the way. Bethany and Lucas, you both made me very proud today.

Lucas smiles. Beth doesn't.

BETH

Why?

VINCENT
You were great at the service.

BETH
I sat there.

Bethany is failing at stealthily using her phone.

Ginger notices.

GINGER
Bethany, no texting at the dinner
table.

BETH
I'm not texting, I swear.

GINGER
Let me rephrase, no phone at the
table.

Beth cringes, knowing the battle she's about to get into.

BETH
Look, I promise to not say a word,
but the ruling is about to go
public, and this is history we are
talking about.

Ginger glances over to Vincent, holding it together.

GINGER
(warning)
Bethany.

BETH
Do I need to be excused?

Ginger looks to escalate but Vincent nudges her.

VINCENT
(sotto)
It's fine.

Ginger and Vincent exchange a stare.

Beth gasps audibly.

BETH
It passed!

Ginger drops her fork. Lucas looks worried.

BETH
 (sincere)
 I'm sorry Dad... I really am.

VINCENT
 It's okay.

BETH
 Can I be excused?

Vincent and Ginger share a glance.

VINCENT
 You may.

Vincent deflates a bit.

GINGER
 Beth. Come here.

Ginger and Beth patch things up over a hug, then Beth moves to her father.

BETH
 (whispering)
 Love you Dad.

Vincent hugs tight.

VINCENT
 Love you more.

Beth goes to her room.

There's sadness still in the air.

MERIL
 (raspy)
 She's right you know.

His rare words remind the room that he's still there.

MERIL (CONT'D)
 In all of my years... Eternal life
 for the terminally ill?

Meril has a genuine laugh.

MERIL (CONT'D)
 (bitter)
 I'm with Marland.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - BURKHARDT FUNERAL HOME - NIGHT

Vincent and Ginger's room. It has a grandiose, old-world feel to it. Gothic, but comfy.

Ginger reads a Child Developmental studies book with heavy eyes in bed.

Vincent steps in from outside the room, exhausted from the day and in bed attire.

VINCENT

Lucas is sound asleep.

Lucas drudges over and into bed in one motion.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

This day was...

GINGER

Tough.

VINCENT

Yeah.

Beat.

GINGER

I worry about Beth. I haven't seen her so fiery.

VINCENT

She's a teenage girl in troubled times Ginge.

GINGER

I know... But she is so intense about everything going on.

Vincent thinks.

VINCENT

We're just older. The youth see the pill as a miracle and they want to defend it at all costs. But they haven't lived long enough to know it comes with consequences. Those weathered by their years understand that it takes as much as it gives.

Ginger runs her hand through Vincent's hair lovingly.

GINGER

Spoken like a philosopher.

VINCENT

I'm afraid I'll wind up just as
obsolete.

(defeated)

What are we gonna do, Ginge?

He buries his head into her. She embraces him warmly.

GINGER

We're going to take it day by day.

They rock back and forth in each other's arms.

VINCENT (PRELAP)

You guys want more?

INT. KITCHEN - BURKHARDT FUNERAL HOME - MORNING

Sometime later.

Vincent is wrapping up breakfast in the kitchen.

This time, it was pancakes, eggs, and waffles.

The kids are standing and scarfing their food down with their
backpacks on.

They shake their heads. Stuffed.

Ginger comes in, still getting dressed anxiously.

VINCENT

There's our grad student.

GINGER

Oof, running so late.

VINCENT

I figured, I threw your breakfast
in tupperware.

Ginger kisses him.

GINGER

What would I do without you?

VINCENT

Starve.

BETH

Hey ma, can I take your car today?

GINGER
What's wrong with Dad's?

Ginger's brain whirs, understanding a hidden delicacy to the situation.

GINGER (CONT'D)
I'll take Dad's. Probably not a
good idea for you to drive around
in that today.

Vincent droops a bit hearing that.

Ginger checks her watch.

GINGER (CONT'D)
Crap, gotta go.
(to Vincent)
You okay getting Lucas on the bus?

VINCENT
Yep. Piece of cake.

GINGER
I don't deserve you. Enjoy your day
off. I'll see you later.

Vincent nods and kisses her farewell.

Beth clears her plate and pretty much throws it at her dad.

BETH
I'm out too, thanks for breakfast.
(oh)
And the car!

Beth practically sprints out the door.

Out the window, Vincent watches Ginger pull out of the driveway in his car - a Hearse, followed by Beth in a less eye-catching, old Prius.

Shortly after - A yellow school bus arrives.

Vincent spots it.

VINCENT
Lucas, your bus is here.

Lucas nods, and brings his clear plate to his father.

VINCENT (CONT'D)
(animated)
You WERE hungry!
(MORE)

VINCENT (CONT'D)
 We're going to have to start buying
 more food!
 (ruffles his hair)
 You ready to go?!

Lucas nods with very slight reaction.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - BURKHARDT FUNERAL HOME - MORNING

Vincent walks little Lucas to his bus.

As they near the door -

VINCENT
 (kneels down)
 Okay, have a good da-

Lucas launches himself into his father, a big hug.

VINCENT (CONT'D)
 Have a good day pal. I love ya.

LUCAS
 (softly)
 Bye Dad.

Vincent watches Lucas take off with a full heart.

After a beat, he notices his flagged mailbox.

He shuffles through the mail.

On top - a newspaper with the large headline -

Farewell Eric Marland - accompanied by a picture of Eric's
 "Farewell Ceremony", and the man who provided the "Fatal
 Assistance".

That Grim Man. At a funeral home.

Vincent scoffs and flips through the rest of the mail. A
 bill, a magazine...

The last envelope stands out -

From: **Bank of Ithaca - Urgent Action Required.** Last warning.

Vincent opens the letter with concerned eyes.

Then, a red minivan rolls up.

Inside - KEVIN REEVES (40-50's, male), a tired man, and ED REEVES (70-80's, male), his elderly father with late stage Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), contorted in the passenger seat.

ED
Mornin' Vincent.

INT. CAR - MORNING

Ginger pulls the hearse up to the entrance of Cornell University.

It's a strange sight of welcome banners besieged by angry protesters.

The protesters strategically wall off access to the parking lot. Ginger groans, this is worse than what she was expecting.

A car in front of her inches into the crowd and is swallowed whole.

With no one ahead and plenty of cars behind, it's Ginger's turn.

The hearse draws out the more passionate protesters as she approaches the rowdy crowd.

PROTESTER 1
(yelling through the
window glass)
This a sick joke, you bitch?

Protester 1 hits the window, scaring Ginger.

A second protester slams a bible on the passenger side window.

PROTESTER 2
Fatal Assistance is not God's will!

Cops intervene to create space for the car.

POLICE-MAN
Everyone BACK from the car!

It works, but barely. Protesters are pushed back, packed shoulder to shoulder.

A big protestor gets pushed into a cop.

The officer panics and sprays him with mace, also collaterally hitting others.

Ginger manages to sneak the car through the ensuing chaos.

She pulls into a parking spot and takes a deep breath to calm down.

She rummages around her purse to find - a bottle of pills. The label reads **TelomeRX**.

She downs a pill, and emotions well on her face.

She starts to cry, while a man in a suit catches the scene from an adjacent spot.

They exchange glances, and Ginger abruptly swallows her emotions.

INT. LECTURE HALL - DAY

Ginger steps into a half empty lecture hall, and anxiously takes a seat in the back corner away from the younger students.

She isn't the only one in turmoil. The few present are timid, scared, or just beaten up from what's going on in the world.

She can already tell this is going to be a strange class.

There are whispers and rumors rumbling quietly around the room. Ginger strains to hear two students talking.

STUDENT 1

Last minute professor change. Did you hear?

STUDENT 2

What happened to Professor Marks?

STUDENT 1

Some say retirement, others say mental break. I hear we have someone who actually worked on TelomeRX.

STUDENT 2

No shit-

The suited man from the parking lot enters the room with purpose, in the way only a professor can.

His presence garners the attention of everyone immediately. Naturally charismatic.

He writes his name on the board - MICHAEL DAVIS (40's), and his contact information.

Student 1 nudges Student 2 hard.

STUDENT 1
Fuck, it IS him.

Kevin turns to the class.

MICHAEL
Well, I can't say I expected a full room today, but we'll make it work. Welcome to Developmental Psych 4050. I am very excited to be here, as I hope you are too.

Kevin claps for everyone. Few join in.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
I know these are strange times, but I applaud you for pursuing a higher education amid the turmoil.
(that being said)
I am totally available to you as a resource. My information is on the board. Now, before we get started, does anyone have any questions?

No hands jolt up automatically.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Bueller?

TARA (20's) a quiet student, braves raising her hand in the middle of the room.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
You.

TARA
Uh, well, I have a question but I'm worried it's off-topic.

MICHAEL
Shoot.

TARA
With all that's going on -

Michael shifts, hoping this doesn't go into controversial territory.

MICHAEL

Hold on, I have to put a disclaimer out there - if this is about Eric Marland-

TARA

No no, not about him.

MICHAEL

Oh.

TARA

It's about the pill.

Michael shifts again.

MICHAEL

(remaining patient)

Okay. How many of you are familiar my work?

Hands start going up across the room.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I'm afraid I have to set this ground rule. We will not be addressing TelomeRX or CRISPR in this classroom.

(sighs and moans from the class)
But, since that rule wasn't laid out until now, I will allow this one question.

Gasps from the crowd.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I don't know if this is a good idea, but go ahead.

TARA

(shy)

Thank you Professor and I'm sorry if it's...

(shakes it off)

I take it. I know the recommended age for the prescription is 21, but on my way in, someone had a sign stating that it stunts brain development before 25.

(segue)

(MORE)

TARA (CONT'D)

I know there's a lot of
misinformation out there. I was
just wondering your take on it.

Michael exhales deeply before answering.

MICHAEL

Well. I have to admit, this IS
related to Developmental
Psychology, but will not be covered
in this class. I have been hearing
this bit of information echoed more
and more.

(puts on his explaining
cap)

TelomeRX "halts" aging by mapping
your current cells, then acts as a
filter when they replicate,
flushing out the imperfect copies.
There was a lot of talk about the
recommended age being 25, then 18,
but they chose 21. Why?

(of course)

Politics. Which I won't get into.
But this is the accepted take on
it: a 23 year old brain on TelomeRX
stays 23. Upon cessation, the brain
will continue and finish it's
remaining maturation. Take that as
you may.

Another student pipes up - Megan (20's, female).

MEGAN

So it's safe?-

Michael abruptly ends the conversation.

MICHAEL

Class, this topic is now off-
limits. If you are looking to talk
about that facet of TelomeRX, I
suggest taking Ethics in Medicine.
My adept TA, Brad, will now hand
out syllabi.

Michael motions to his TA - BRAD KERN (30's).

The class begins to talk amongst themselves, but new noise
rises over.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL COURTYARD - DAY

A smaller, but equally intense protest at Ithaca High School.

What started as a light group of hoodlums "protesting" to get out of class, grew exponentially to the point of school closure.

Students of all beliefs shout their opinions and grievances. Most are there due to their passionate beliefs, others are there just to incite.

This particular situation is deceptively fragile - school security and select teachers thinly supervise the situation without police backup.

And it's getting out of hand.

Beth is in the thick of it, and from the looks of it, for hours.

She holds a sign - **TELOMERX IS A HUMAN-RIGHT.**

BETH
 (shouting)
 Free of charge and over the
 counter! Free of charge and over
 the counter!
 (part 2)
 Stand up to Big Pharma!

A kid wearing a MAGA hat gets in Beth's way. She tries to side step him, but he's doing it to antagonize her.

BETH (CONT'D)
 Move.

RED HAT
 Make me.

BEN (17, male), a charismatic classmate nearby, intervenes.

BEN
 Leave her alone dude.

RED HAT
 Oh look, this little cuck wants to
 defend the pussy he can't get.

BETH
 You're disgusting.

Ben remains calm.

BEN
You're making a fool of yourself,
man. Take the hat off, and go home.

Red Hat gets up in Ben's face.

The situation escalates. The few security in the vicinity are tied up in other situations, but a TEACHER spots the potential scuffle.

RED HAT
I'm not the one fuckin' up school
for everyone, outside spouting
about his "feelings" all day.

BEN
You're doing exactly that right
now.

RED HAT
Fuck you.

Red Hat throws a punch.

Ben deflects it, unfortunately into Beth, hard and in the face.

The Teacher moves into action and pulls the Red Hat away.

In the ensuing chaos, Beth holds her eye in pain. Ben immediately tends to her.

BEN
Fuck. I'm so sorry, are you okay?

BETH
(tough)
I'm fine. Just ow.

BEN
Here, come with me.

Ben escorts Beth out of the crowd.

EXT. ITHACA HIGH PARKING LOT - LATER

Beth relaxes with her back on Ben's car.

She holds an ice pack to her eye while Ben leans inside and rummages around.

BETH
(re: ice pack)
Pretty nifty that you have these
just lying around.
(beat)
Almost like, you planned this.

Ben pops out from the car, holding a joint and a vape pen.

BEN
Analog or digital?

BETH
Both have their benefits.

BEN
Both it is.

Ben hands Beth the vape pen, and lights up the joint.

BETH
Are you sure it's cool to smoke
here?

Ben nods as he's taking a hit.

BEN
They have enough to worry about
over there.

BETH
True.

She takes a hit, then they trade.

BETH (CONT'D)
(motions to the weed)
Thanks for this.

BEN
Please. I'm sorry about your eye. I
can't believe that happened.

BETH
Well yeah, I wasn't expecting the
judo-karate ricochet punch... It's
alright, thank you for sticking up
for me.
(takes a hit)
Ya know, I know you're new around
here, but I pegged you as a
misogynist.

Ben laughs.

BEN

Oh that's me, wearing a bright red cap and giving girls a hard time.

(beat)

I know it's shitty circumstance, but I'm kinda glad this happened. Been meaning to introduce myself.

BETH

Yeah, I am too. Next time, just punch me yourself.

Ben laughs awkwardly.

BETH (CONT'D)

(dull)

That was a joke. Welp, I'm high, and that didn't land.

(ba dum chh)

I'm sorry, I don't even know how to joke about anything anymore. Not even in the PC way, it's like, everything's so serious.

BEN

I think it will mellow out. People are just scared and have to adjust.

BETH

God, I hope so.

BEN

It's officially the future, that takes some getting used to.

BETH

(relaxes)

Legal weed and Immortality... You'd think life would be perfect. Maybe it will be when I finally leave town.

BEN

(sensing)

Parent's against the pill?

BETH

Yeah. My mom doesn't want me taking it until 21. "21 is the recommendation!". She's scared. Wants more studies. I won't lie, I see her side. Scares me too. But then I think about Prions, and I could be getting those right now.

BEN
(laughs)
What are prions?

BETH
When the proteins in your brain
don't fold right and you die a
terrible death.

BEN
Fuck.

BETH
Yeah.

BEN
What's your father think?

BETH
I actually don't know. He won't
talk about it.
(long story gesture)
He's a mortician.

BEN
Oh no shit.

BETH
Yeah. It's been a thing in my
family for generations.

BEN
(epiphany)
Wait, do you live in that Funeral
Home?

BETH
(shy)
Yep.

BEN
I'm your neighbor.

BETH
Get out. Really?

BEN
I just put it together.

BETH
That's crazy.

BETH (CONT'D)

I was going to come to that kid Dylan's funeral yesterday, but I didn't know him well and I'm still kinda new here.

BETH (CONT'D)

Yeah, funerals aren't the best place to mingle. Be glad you didn't. It was awful. I went and... Let's just say it wasn't fun.

BEN

Never is. There's no "good" death anymore.

BETH

(laughs)

Good death was ever a thing?

BEN

No, I mean... With the pill, there's just no reason for death in society unless you're unhappy, unhealthy, or a victim of a tragedy. And if you're in that group, it's hell for everyone around you.

BETH

I haven't thought of it like that.

(sad)

I think our business is dying.

BEN

(welp)

There's always Fatal Assistance.

BETH

Oh god, my Dad couldn't do that.

BEN

It's apparently really good money with the new subsidies.

Beth looks at Ben, his line of thinking so cut and dry, rationalizing her father's hand in ending someone's life.

BETH

I'm all for Marland's law, and somebody has to do it. I just... Can't see my Dad being the one.

(changes topic)

What do your parents do?

BEN
Massage Therapy.

BETH
Oh. Cool.

BEN
Nah. My Mom died, Dad "retired" and
moved here.

BETH
Oh. For real?

BEN
(vulnerable)
Yeah. It happened a little over a
year ago. Ironically, My Mom and
Dad worked on TelomeRX in the city.
Her death wasn't a "good" one.
(big hit)
My Dad took a job at Cornell to get
"us out city and slow down". He
thought it would be good for us.
So, I'm here now.

BETH
Damn.

Beat.

BEN
Sorry if that's a lot.

Beth nudges Ben.

BETH
You just totally killed the vibe.
(loudly whispers)
I live in a funeral home. I get it.
You're cool, it's good to meet ya,
neighbor.

BEN
Yeah, you too.
(by the way)
Oh, I can get you TelomeRX if you
want it.

BETH
Oh?

BEN

Yeah. But you'll have to wait for that black eye to clear up or it won't go away.

INT. DINING ROOM - BURKHARDT FUNERAL HOME - NIGHT

Dinner is set, but Beth and Ginger are noticeably absent.

Meril eats. Vincent stares ahead of his full plate in thought. Lucas kicks his legs anxiously.

Ginger comes in frantically.

GINGER

I'm sorry everyone. Those protests were relentless.

(to Vincent)

Hi Honey.

Ginger kisses him, he returns it but is clearly distracted.

GINGER (CONT'D)

(to Lucas)

Baby, don't wait. Dig in.

She walks over to hug him, but he slightly recoils.

GINGER (CONT'D)

What's wrong honey?

Beth finally comes home.

BETH

Sorry I'm late.

Her bloodshot eyes would be noticeable if it wasn't for the black eye.

VINCENT

(jumps out of his seat)
What happened!

THERESA

Your eye!

BETH

(goofy)

It was an accident, I'm fine.

VINCENT

Explain yourself.

BETH

An idiot Red-Hat took a swing at a friend today and hit me.

VINCENT

What!?

Ginger tends to the eye.

BETH

Dad, listen. A friend, OUR NEIGHBOR, stood up for me. The idiot got frustrated and threw a punch. I was standing in the wrong place.

(beat)

The kid got in trouble. I went to the nurse, then back to class with Ben.

VINCENT

We would have been notified by the school, and even then, you should not be waltzing home late without letting us know yourself. You're hurt!

BETH

Okay, I'm sorry! It's not like I'm happy about this.

VINCENT

Are we supposed to be?

BETH

No! But I'm telling you it's not a big deal.

Lucas shows signs of a panic attack. Ginger tends to him.

GINGER

Shh... It's okay, it's okay.

VINCENT

NO PROTESTING TOMORROW. You will sit in class and STAY OUT OF IT.

BETH

That's literally against the first amendment.

Wrong thing to say.

VINCENT

(boiling)

Want to play that game? Fine. No Car. If you live in this home, you will do as I say!

BETH
Yeah, let's talk about this home.
This FUNERAL home.

VINCENT
(big warning)
Don't go there.

GINGER
Guys!

Lucas cries, even Meril looks frightened.

Ginger intervenes and gently pushes Beth towards her room.

GINGER (CONT'D)
To your room.

BETH
Things are looking pretty bleak for
the business these days, ya know,
with the lack of NATURAL DEATH
these days.

Each word is a dagger, but Vincent stays silent.

Ginger intervenes.

GINGER
(direct)
To your room!

BETH
(persistent)
Is this going to be a Marland Home
Dad?

Now Ginger's intervention is forceful.

BETH (CONT'D)
(almost out of the room)
I wouldn't even be angry! I just
want to know! I'm not a child, this
effects us all!

Ginger forcibly exiles Beth to her room.

Lucas cries. Meril is recoiled from the group.

Vincent clenches his hands tight with frustration.

INT. HALLWAY - BURKHARDT FUNERAL HOME - LATER

Vincent's hand hovers by Beth's door.

He looks remorseful. His hand shakes.

He can't bring himself to knock.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - BURKHARDT FUNERAL HOME - NIGHT

Ginger sits up in bed, lit by a lamp on the night-stand.

Vincent drudges into the room, a tired man.

Ginger nods knowingly.

GINGER

It'll be fine in the morning.

Vincent collapses in bed.

VINCENT

Never would I have thought a teenager could so thoroughly dismantle me.

GINGER

Honey, quit that. Come here.

Vincent curls up into her.

VINCENT

You all deserve better.

GINGER

(stern)

Hey, I won't tolerate that, you hear?

Vincent buries his head into her.

VINCENT

I don't say that for pity. I say that because I've become useless.

Ginger kisses his forehead.

GINGER

No. You're perfect, and you're adapting. We all are. She's just rebelling, and you're far more understanding than my father was.

VINCENT

She's reminds me so much of you,
when we were younger.

(beat)

That's the thing, she's not in the
wrong.

GINGER

She isn't allowed to take that type
of line of questioning why you.

VINCENT

She deserves answers.

GINGER

In time, but not when coming home
with a black eye after playing
hookey all day.

VINCENT

I don't want to push her away, I
just want her safe.

GINGER

I'm sure she will be fine in the
morning. Lucas on the other hand,
did he seem okay to you?

VINCENT

He didn't speak a word since
getting off the bus.

GINGER

He worried me tonight.

Beat.

VINCENT

Ed Reeves stopped by today.

Ginger gives a glance and contemplates a reply -

VINCENT (CONT'D)

I think she's right, Ginge.

GINGER

Who? Beth?

VINCENT

(breaking up)

Yeah.

Ginger embraces Vincent.

GINGER

Honey...

INT. KITCHEN - BURKHARDT FUNERAL HOME - MORNING

Vincent's back at it again, cooking up breakfast.

Beth quietly enters.

BETH

Hi.

VINCENT

(flat)

Good-morning Bethany.

BETH

Dad, I...

Vincent takes a deep breath, and opens his arms.

Beth steps in, a familiar place.

BETH (CONT'D)

(breaking up)

I'm sorry Daddy, my head was hurting and I said some things-

Vincent hushes her.

VINCENT

I'm sorry too. The black eye had me seeing red. How are you feeling?

Beth tears up.

BETH

I'm okay, it's just so hard lately.

VINCENT

I know.

(here we go)

I wanted to let things settle before this conversation... But it doesn't look like it will anytime soon. You deserve transparency, and a father to talk to about ANYTHING. Including Marland.

BETH

I shouldn't have brought that up.

VINCENT

No, you are absolutely allowed to.
You are right. It pertains to our
home and our family.

BETH

I know you've been thinking about
it.

VINCENT

All the time.

BETH

About... Assistance?

Vincent sighs, inevitably knowing it would come up.

VINCENT

I won't lie to you, the thought has
crossed my mind. Only because the
government deemed my profession
qualified for some bizarre reason.
And as you said, this place has
seen limited use these days.

(deep breath)

But the thought makes me sick to my
stomach.

Beth chooses her words.

BETH

Do you think you could?

VINCENT

I don't know.

Beat.

BETH

You know I support it... right?

Vincent hesitates to respond, perhaps this is going to far.

Thankfully, Beth cuts him off.

BETH (CONT'D)

But, I don't think you could.

(naive)

What will happen to the business?

Vincent holds himself from deflating.

VINCENT

I don't know. Yet. But when I do, I will be sure to be open with you.

Beth hugs her Dad again.

BETH

Thank you. Love you Dad.

VINCENT

You too, sweetheart. More than you can imagine.

Vincent kisses her forehead.

BETH

Does this mean I can have the car today?

VINCENT

Nope. I need it today.

Beth groans.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

Don't worry, I know you're too old for the bus. I can drive ya.

BETH

(the world is ending)
Ugh. FIIIIINE. I'll be in the hall waiting for MY breakfast.

Beth cuts the shit and hugs her father with love.

VINCENT

It'll be ready soon.

Beth drudges out of the room exaggeratedly.

Things are patched up, seemingly.

GINGER (O.C.)

Well handled.

Vincent spots Ginger, popping from around the corner.

VINCENT

You catch that?

GINGER

The whole thing.
(genuine)
Good job.

VINCENT

You think? I don't know... I said too much.

Ginger gives him a big hug.

GINGER

You were perfect.

Vincent somehow finagles a fresh coffee from somewhere, and presents it to Ginger.

She gasps with delight.

GINGER (CONT'D)

Now your Godly.

VINCENT

Hey, I was thinking. It's been a minute since I've gotten a beer with Kyle. You mind if I head to Moon's a bit later?

GINGER

Not at all. So long as you don't keep me up all night waiting.

Ginger starts going after him.

VINCENT

(laughing)

Why do you always get so worked up in here?

EXT. DRIVEWAY - BURKHARDT FUNERAL HOME - MORNING

Vincent, Ginger, Beth, and Lucas all leave the house together, stuffed and with lunches in hand.

VINCENT

(to Ginger)

Hopefully the Prius gives you a bit of respite today.

BETH

Yeah, at the expense of my self esteem!

Ginger and Victor have to laugh.

BETH (CONT'D)
 Seriously, when are you going to trade this miserable, antiquated thing in?

VINCENT
 Why would I? It's reliable and still has plenty of life.

BETH
 It's a relic and a negative image.

Vincent takes the salt in the wounds like a champion.

VINCENT
 (smiles big)
 It's your graduation present.

Beth groans.

BETH
 I'll turn it into the Ghostbusters car.

She spots something next door -

BETH (CONT'D)
 (has an idea)
 Wait a sec.

Beth runs off.

VINCENT
 Wait -
 (spots the neighbors)
 Oh, her friend.

Ginger spots Michael, her teacher.

GINGER
 Oh! His dad is my professor!

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAVIS RESIDENCE - MORNING

NEXT DOOR - Ben leaves his house to go to school, followed by Michael, curdling a thermos of hot coffee.

The cold seeps into his bones as he sees his son off.

MICHAEL
 Drive slow and be safe, there's ice on the roads.

BEN
I can handle it.

MICHAEL
Wrong attitude Ben-

BETH (O.S.)
Hey there!

Beth is on her way over, with Vincent, Ginger, and Lucas in tow.

BETH (CONT'D)
(calling out)
You driving to school? Can I bum a ride?

BEN
Yeah, sure!

Vincent looks helplessly as the bonding time slips through his fingers.

BETH
Dope!
(turns to her family)
Hey, this saves you the trip!

Beth runs over to the car, greeting Michael quickly.

BETH (CONT'D)
(turns to Michael)
Hi Mr. Davis, I'm your neighbor Beth.
(points to her eye)
Terrible for a first impression, but it's so nice to meet you!

MICHAEL
(caught off guard)
It's nice to meet you too Beth-

Ben motions for Beth to get in, and she skips over. He starts the car.

BEN
Gotta go!

MICHAEL
(distracted)
Drive. Safe. Love. You.

Beth and Ben wave bye and take off.

VINCENT

Well, it seems our children have better manners than we do.

Vincent extends a hand.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

Vincent Burkhardt.

It is met warmly.

MICHAEL

Michael Davis. Nice to meet you sir.

VINCENT

And this is my wife -

Ginger steps out with a hand.

GINGER

Hi, Ginger. I'm actually one of your students.

MICHAEL

I thought you looked familiar. Small world! Are you on your way in today?

GINGER

Yep!

VINCENT

(awkward timing)

Hey, word on the street is that you worked on TelomerX.

Michael puts some guard up.

MICHAEL

Yes, that's true.

VINCENT

Then you must know my buddy, Kyle Potts.

Michael starts laughing.

MICHAEL

Oh boy, that was not the follow up I was expecting. Of course I do. We practically skyped every day while I was workin' in the city.

(jokey)

(MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Now that I'm here, I think I can
say I liked him better from afar.

VINCENT
Then you do know him.

Lucas timidly pulls on his father's coat, Vincent pulls him forward.

VINCENT (CONT'D)
(re: Lucas)
This one is Lucas.

Lucas gently nods.

MICHAEL
(bending down)
Hey there little man. You got
school today?

Lucas nods.

KEVIN
You probably don't want to go
right?

Lucas shakes his head.

MICHAEL
I get it. I hated school. Until I
didn't.
(nudges Lucas)
Stick with it kid.

Lucas laughs playfully, Vincent gives a nod of approval.

VINCENT
Apologies that we didn't introduce
ourselves sooner, but as you can
see, we don't live in a traditional
home.

Michael laughs lightly.

MICHAEL
Yeah, I was starting to think you
guys were strictly business.
(seriously)
It's on me too. I meant to come by
but...

Michael struggles to continue that thought.

Vincent is a good neighbor and deflects conversation.

VINCENT

No need to dwell on time. Right?
 (segue)
 I do suppose I owe you thanks for
 getting Bethany to school today.

MICHAEL

Oh please, don't thank me. It's
 Ben's doing.
 (beat)
 She's in good hands.

VINCENT

He seems like a good kid.

A yellow bus stops nearby and honks -

Lucas motions for it.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

Hey bud, I was going to drive you
 to school -

LUCAS

I want to go on the bus.

GINGER

Why not the car with Dad, sweetie?

Lucas starts to tense up.

Michael takes notice.

Vincent looks at Ginger, she appraises the situation.

GINGER (CONT'D)

(whispers)
 It saves you both trips?

Lucas gets impatient.

Vincent concedes, bending down to Lucas.

VINCENT

Okay. You can go on the bus, but
 it'll cost you.

Lucas stares apprehensively.

LUCAS

What?

VINCENT

One hug.

Lucas hugs his father in a a transactional way, but Vincent embraces him all the same.

He breaks out of his hold to hug Ginger, who also reciprocates.

GINGER

Have a good day sweetheart.

Lucas runs to the bus, and it takes off.

Both Vincent and Ginger take a moment and watch the bus fade into the distance, thinking about their son.

MICHAEL

Hey listen, I gotta get inside and prepare for class, but if there's anything I can do for either of you, please let me know.

GINGER

Same to you.

(nudges Vincent)

We should have you and Ben over for dinner! Vincent here is a master chef.

MICHAEL

Oh is that so?

Vincent smiles.

VINCENT

We've always had a big kitchen and I've always enjoyed cooking in it. Never said I was any good.

Ginger scoffs, Michael laughs.

MICHAEL

Passion without pretension huh. Tell ya what, we'll bring the goods, you cook 'em up.

VINCENT

Sound's good-

Vincent is caught speechless when he eyes a red minivan pulling up the street.

Vincent's dread is felt by all.

Michael senses his cue -

MICHAEL

(checks his watch)

Damn, gotta get moving - very nice meeting you both. Looking forward to Dinner sometime. But please, don't invite Potts.

(to Ginger)

I'll see you in class.

VINCENT

Nice meeting you too, and I'll try not to.

GINGER

See you there!

Michael tip toes through the cold back to his house.

Vincent's attention is still firmly on the minivan.

Ginger pulls in Vincent for a hug.

GINGER (CONT'D)

Hey, you want me with you for that?

Vincent eyes her like there's nothing he'd want more in the world.

VINCENT

It's okay. I'm not going to make you deal with these two before heading into the protesters.

(kisses her forehead)

I got it. You better get goin'.

Ginger kisses Vincent hard, he returns it.

He helps her into the car, closes the door, and places his fingers on the window.

She matches her fingertips to his, and starts the engine.

Vincent hides his inner turmoil as Ginger pulls out of the driveway, and past -

The red minivan. With Kevin Reeves sobbing in the driver seat.

And Ed Reeves, in the handicapped passenger seat.

She struggles with eye contact as she passes by.

Back on Vincent - who takes a deep breath before approaching the car.

VINCENT (CONT'D)
 (on his way up)
 I told you to wait around the
 corner-
 (seeing Kevin's condition)
 Oh.

INT. FOYER - BURKHARDT FUNERAL HOME - MORNING

Vincent enters the house, not all together.
 His father sits by the window, clearly in the know.

MERIL
 Son, we need to talk.

Vincent doesn't have the energy for this.

VINCENT
 There's nothing to talk about.

MERIL
 I know what you're planning.

VINCENT
 I'm not planning anything.

MERIL
 Then what's that cripple doing her-

VINCENT
 (Harsh)
 Dad. Enough. We aren't having this
 conversation.

Meril is taken back by the irregular tone.

Vincent walks past in a long beat, as Meril thinks of what to
 say.

MERIL
 Vincent, I never thought it could
 come to this. I do not envy your
 position, but you can talk to me.
 Out of all people, you can talk to
 me. I know the cost.

Vincent's hands clench the edge of a table so hard it could
 tear in two.

VINCENT
 I don't know what cost you speak
 of.

Vincent walks to his home office.

MERIL
(calling out)
Vincent...

INT. VINCENT'S OFFICE - BURKHARDT FUNERAL HOME - MORNING

He closes the door behind him.

In the corner of the room, is an antique bar cart.

He pours a stiff whiskey neat.

He flips through a manual rolodex to find a number.

He rings it.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)
Go for Kyle.

VINCENT
Kyle, it's Vincent.
(knowing the answer)
Moon's?

INT. MOON'S TAVERN - DAY

An old farmer with 3 teeth at one end of the bar, two college bros at the other.

This is a longtime Ithacan establishment, and it shifts from college bar to townie bar and everything in between on a whim.

There's a reason this place still stands. It's the comfort of the town.

It provides refuge from the cold, cheap drinks, and good company. Too many problems have been fixed or erased here through binge drinking.

A wiry man nurses a scotch at the bar, watching a news report on a TV above.

A CHYRON READS - "First Marland's Law grants being permitted"

PUNDIT
In my opinion, it's still murder.

LIBERAL COMMENTATOR

I think you mean "assisted
manslaughter". But even then, I
disagree. I call it compassion.

The wiry man swirls his drink as Vincent walks in.

They make eye contact, and Vincent noticeably eases.

It's his childhood friend - KYLE POTTS (50's, male) a humble
genius that can't solve his own problems.

He's one of the founders of TelomeRX, thriving in a hollow
void of retirement.

They greet each other with an immense and overdue hug.

VINCENT

Thanks for comin' Bud.

KYLE

Please, like I need a reason to day
drink at Moon's.

Kyle motions to the Bartender.

KYLE (CONT'D)

Two fingers of scotch for me, and
whatever this guy's havin', on my
tab, for all eternity.

Vincent laughs.

VINCENT

Only because you own the place.
(shakes his head)
It's gonna be one of those days,
huh?

Kyle slaps Vincent on the back.

KYLE

(to the bartender)
Two more on deck.

INT. MOON'S TAVERN - SOMETIME LATER

Two empty glasses slam down, and are replaced by revolving
glasses. Things are getting tense, in the way brothers would
argue.

KYLE

Look man, I'm giving you a solution, and a pretty damn good one considering your situation.

VINCENT

Don't patronize me Kyle.

KYLE

By what definition?

VINCENT

All definitions you asshole.

KYLE

Jeez, alright fine. Look, you know I would do anything for you.

(struggles)

I just would much rather throw my money away than watch you go down that path.

VINCENT

That doesn't solve the problem Kyle.

(hits the table)

I have lost my purpose.

Kyle lowers his tone a bit.

KYLE

Vince... I can't fathom what you're going through, I truly can't. But please, hear me out. I'm sort of responsible for putting you in this position.

VINCENT

Kyle-

KYLE

(forceful)

Listen.

(beat)

Never in a million years would I have thought that my work could be detrimental to yours. You are owed restitution.

Vincent exhales his frustration.

VINCENT
(pleading)
Look. I've never asked you for anything, right?

KYLE
No, and I wish you WOULD.

VINCENT
I am right now. Please Kyle.

Kyle slams his head on the bar.

KYLE
(muffled)
...Fine.

Kyle lifts his head, it's red from the collision.

KYLE (CONT'D)
I'll do it. But on one condition.
You think about my offer before you do anything.

VINCENT
(stubborn)
I've made up my mind.

Kyle sighs drunkenly.

KYLE
I need another drink.

He whistles to the bartender.

VINCENT
By the way. I think you know my next door neighbor. Michael Davis.

KYLE
That's where Michael moved?! Shit.

VINCENT
What does that mean?

KYLE
He wouldn't tell me his address.
(segue)
Good man, sad story. I knew his wife well.

VINCENT
Knew?

Kyle gives him a stare.

KYLE
That's why I said sad story.

VINCENT
Oh.

Long beat.

KYLE
Everyone keeps saying TelomerX is a miracle.

VINCENT
It is.

KYLE
Yeah. For everyone else but you, your business, and anyone who's sick, old, unlucky, or dead already. Even Michael and I are not exempt from that boat.
(segue)
Death's meaning has changed for us all, but in your case, it can still be a positive. You still have your family. I have the money, let me help.

Vincent takes a second.

VINCENT
I'll say it again. You can't throw money at this, Kyle.

KYLE
Sure you can. Pay off the mortgage, pay off your debt, and go back to school.

VINCENT
For what, an undergraduate degree? To qualify for a job that will be replaced by automation anyway? Even then, I own a struggling, and costly funeral home.

KYLE
Sell it.

VINCENT
I'll get nothing. Lucky to get a quarter of what it's worth.
(MORE)

VINCENT (CONT'D)
 Even then, they'll knock down the
 heritage I was entrusted with.
 (struggles)
 I've thought about your money,
 Kyle. I've thought about asking for
 it every night. But I'm here to ask
 for the recommendation.

EXT. MOON'S TAVERN - NIGHT

It's now nighttime.

Vincent and Kyle stumble out of the bar. Kyle looks far
 drunker than Vincent, barely able to stand.

KYLE
 Fuuuuck me.

VINCENT
 You good to get home?

In an exaggerated motion, Kyle cups his hands over his mouth
 and screams -

KYLE
 BESSY! OL' BESSY, WHERE ARE YOU?

He hits a button, and a crazy upgraded Tesla is summoned
 autonomously to him.

Kyle stumbles, Vincent holds him up.

Vincent laughs.

VINCENT
 Like a trained horse.

The door opens automatically, and the seat is already laid
 out for him like a bed. Vincent gets his friend in.

VINCENT (CONT'D)
 This thing can get you home right?

KYLE
 (to the car)
 Baby, get me home!

The cars lights flash internally to signal - "understood".

Kyle curls up in his seat.

KYLE (CONT'D)
 Wait, what about you?

VINCENT

I'm fine. It's only a couple miles.
I waited long enough after that
last drink.

Kyle eyes are barely open, he's already falling asleep.

KYLE

Alright, I trust you.

VINCENT

Can I count on you, Kyle?

KYLE

Yes, but fuck you. Think about my
offer.

VINCENT

I'll try.

Kyle sighs, and spreads his arms wide for a hug.

Vincent hugs him.

KYLE

Get home safe.

Vincent nods, and closes the door.

Kyle's fancy chauffeur takes him away.

Leaving Vincent standing in parking lot alone, next to his
grim vehicle.

He takes a moment before getting in.

INT. VINCENT'S HEARSE - NIGHT

Vincent looks noticeably drunker now that his mission is
complete. Done holding himself together.

His hand shakes as it lifts the key to the ignition.

He starts up the car, and drives off.

He doesn't get more than a block before getting emotionally
overwhelmed, pulling over to the side of the road for a full
on breakdown.

As he cries, cop lights turn on from behind his car.

Vincent tries pulling himself together, but can't fully.

A cop taps on the side of the car.

COP
Evenin' Vincent.

Vincent stares through red, drunken eyes at Ithaca's Sheriff
WALTER TANDY (40's).

VINCENT
Hello Walt-
(cringes)
Shit. Sorry. Sheriff Tandy.

TANDY
No need to apologize Vince. But,
you don't look so hot.
(takes a moment)
I saw your car parked at Moon's all
day. Is that where you're comin'
from?

Vincent full on cries.

VINCENT
Yeah. I'm sorry Walter.

TANDY
(sotto)
Christ.
(friendly)
Look, I know what's goin' on here.
I know shit's tough, but I can't
have you driving around drunk. Fuck
man.

VINCENT
I don't know what I was thinking.

TANDY
You weren't.
(direct)
Put your hazards on, and drive 25
miles an hour. I'm gonna follow you
home with my lights on. But if you
start swerving or another cop
catches on, I'll have to pull you
off in total and act like I never
met you.

VINCENT
You don't have t-

TANDY
 I don't, and neither did you.
 (beat)
 Put your hazards on and get movin'
 before I change my mind.

Tandy walks back to his car.

Vincent drunkenly absorbs the interaction, appreciates the kindness, and pulls himself together just a bit.

He starts his car and pulls back on the road. Tandy follows.

INT. LOUNGE - BURKHARDT FUNERAL HOME - NIGHT

Ginger cleans uneasily, checking out the window periodically while the rest of the family watches TV.

Finally, Vincent pulls in, with Tandy's lights flashing behind.

GINGER
 Oh no.

She runs outside.

EXT. BURKHARDT FUNERAL HOME - NIGHT

Ginger storms out the door.

Lucas, Beth, and Meril watch from the window.

Vincent is already stumbling out of his car.

GINGER
 What happened?! Are you okay?

Vincent's still very drunk, trying his hardest to stay composed.

VINCENT
 Yeah. I think so.

He swings around and waves in sorrowful gratitude to Tandy.

Tandy flips flashes his lights as a goodbye, and takes off.

Vincent turns around and hugs Ginger hard.

GINGER
 (softly)
 You scared me.

VINCENT
I'm sorry, for everything.

GINGER
Hush. Let's get you inside, okay?

Vincent sobs into her shoulder.

INT. FOYER - BURKHARDT FUNERAL HOME - NIGHT

Vincent and Ginger stumble in, where the rest of the family was waiting.

Vincent composes himself to the best of his abilities.

VINCENT
Everything is going to be okay.

Nothing else is said. Beth and Lucas run and hug him tight.

Vincent's eyes meet his father's. The look says it all.

INT. NOOK - BURKHARDT FUNERAL HOME - MORNING

Still on Vincent's eyes, sober and calm, but lost in a thousand yard stare.

He stares ahead in the mirror as he adorns his funeral attire.

Ginger knocks on the door, and peaks her head in.

GINGER
It's time.

Vincent nods, and takes a deep breath before getting out of his seat.

VINCENT
Okay.

He kisses Ginger's forehead. She grabs his face and stares into his eyes.

GINGER
Hey. I'm with you. All the way.

VINCENT
Are you sure?

Ginger nods repeatedly before saying -

GINGER

Yes.

INT. GREAT ROOM - BURKHARDT FUNERAL HOME - DAY

A full crowd. Much more commotion than the first ceremony. Internally and externally.

Noise from outside bleeds into the hall, rattling an already uneasy group.

A helicopter is heard hovering above.

The blinds are closed for maximum privacy but it doesn't stop a photographer from sneaking a picture from outside.

He is quickly taken down by police officers.

There's only one camera allowed at this event. A government sanctioned videographer set up "discretely" in the corner.

A man in a suit finds his framing with the videographer. Documenting the event, not reporting it.

His subject -

Ed Reeves, looking more frail than ever, in a medical bed, hooked up to machines and an IV drip in the center of the altar.

On one side of him, his son Kevin holds his father's hand tight.

On the other, a doctor monitors Ed's vitals.

Next to the doctor, a sterilized metal tray adorned with one prepared syringe.

Vincent walks in, the whole room stirs.

Everyone is in attendance.

Beth sits in the back with Ben. They are both eerily calm.

Ben's father Michael has a spot too. He sits with Kyle Potts a couple rows from the front. Friends after all.

Meril writhes in his wheelchair near his window. Deeply uncomfortable from the event, but in extreme and grim attention.

Ginger takes a seat in the front with Lucas, kicking his feet anxiously.

Vincent approaches the podium.

He takes in the crowd, then the scene at the altar, nodding to everyone involved.

He takes a deep breath.

VINCENT

Hello, and welcome to our beloved Ed Reeves' Farewell Ceremony, as his request to exercise Marland's Law has been granted.

The crowd isn't off to a great start.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

I am joined by Mr. Edwards, the state representative assigned to document the case.

The suited man, Mr. Edwards, subtly bows.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

And Doctor Remy, of Ithaca Presbyterian.

The doctor does the same.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

Typically, I would begin with a few words on behalf of the individual. In this case, I will let him do the talking. Ed, you have the floor.

Kevin brings a microphone close to his father.

The crowd squirms.

Ed fumbles a piece of paper with shaky hands, reading from it as he begins his speech.

ED

(distracted by the crowd)
Friends and family, I am so glad you are here.

Out of frustration, Ed scraps the written speech, and speaks from the heart.

ED (CONT'D)

Look, I understand none of you are happy to be here. You aren't supposed to be.

(beat)

(MORE)

ED (CONT'D)

Most of you know pain. Physical, mental... You've had bones break, heart break, but as I look around this room, I don't think there is a soul in here that can truly empathize with mine.

Meril takes particular offense to that.

ED (CONT'D)

And that's okay! I don't mean that negatively, and I don't fault you. There is no question you are sympathetic. That is the difference lost here.

(segue)

My existence is suffering. I wouldn't wish this disease on anyone. A couple months ago, I cut my wrists to end it myself, but my frail body wasn't strong enough. Instead, I was found bloodied and in shock by my son, who stands next to me. After receiving medical attention, I was institutionalized to further writhe in pain and embarrassment. Every morning since, I still wish it ended there.

Lucas looks on the verge of a panic attack. Ginger notices and escorts him from the room. Vincent watches.

ED (CONT'D)

Please believe me when I say Marland's law is a blessing. I've lived a long life that I've thoroughly enjoyed despite the circumstances. But each additional day changes that sentiment.

(struggling)

I'm done with it. I WANT to be done with it. That's my choice. Any of you who still disagree, I pray you don't wind up confined in this chair. I promise, you will understand then.

(turns to his son)

Kevin. Son. I watched you grow into a perfect man. Like every parent, I've naively expected to leave this world before you, but I never imagined it this way. The hardest thing about this, is leaving you.

Kevin is in shambles.

ED (CONT'D)

I know where I am in your heart,
and you know where you are in mine.
I'm not leaving you. I'm relieving
you. Relieving myself. Relief that
you will be able to live your life
unencumbered, and that this pill
grants you the time that was
unfairly dedicated to my care. I
want you to live. And I'll be
watching, surely with your mother.
I love you, and will always love
you.

(turns to the room)

And that goes for everyone in this
room. If we share memories,
remember me in those. Not like
this. But if you do, remember that
I was glad that you were here, and
unafraid of what's next.

(to Vincent)

Vincent, I'm ready to go.

The entire room is broken. Including Vincent, who fumbles his
cue.

VINCENT

Mr. Edwards, please do your
diligence.

With those words, Mr. Edwards starts the proceedings.

MR. EDWARDS

By the power imbued by our Federal
Government and vested in me by our
great state, I will now ask Dr.
Remy, responsible for providing the
lethal dose, if he is prepared to
continue.

(to Dr. Remy)

Doctor Remy, are you prepared to
oversee Mr. Burkhardt, as he
provides Fatal Assistance to Edward
Reeves?

The audience does not like this roller coaster and wants off.

DR. REMY

I have fulfilled my
responsibilities. We can proceed.

Mr. Edwards nods a confirmation.

MR. EDWARDS

I will now ask our subject for his final permission.

(to Ed)

Edward Reeves, for the official record, do you authorize Vincent Burkhardt to provide your Fatal Assistance?

ED

I do.

Audible groans, everyone turns to Vincent.

MR. EDWARDS

Mister Burkhardt, you are authorized to proceed.

The world slows down. Vincent's heartbeat rises above everything else.

Through a cacophony of dulled noise and extreme emotions, he looks to Ginger for strength, but her seat is still empty, as is Lucas's.

He meets eyes with everyone else. Beth, Meril, Ben, Michael, Kyle, All with different but equally intense and morose expressions.

He panics internally as he walks to the altar and syringe.

He reaches for the syringe. Hand shaking, sweat condensing on his palm as it hovers above.

Closer and closer, the room gasps when he finally takes hold.

Vincent wipes sweat from his brow, and musters one last question.

VINCENT

Do you have any last words?

Silence.

ED

(turns to his son)

I love you.

(to the crowd)

I love all of you.

(to Vincent)

And you. Thank you. Thank you for doing what no one else would. I'm ready.

Vincent visibly trembles as he removes the sheath from the syringe, exposing the needle.

The room is about to erupt as the syringe moves closer. Vincent looks on the verge of collapsing.

He struggles moving it closer to the IV, each inch harder than the last.

A small, withered arm reaches out and touches Vincent's hand.

ED (CONT'D)

It's okay Vince.

(peaceful)

It's okay.

The withered hand guides the syringe into the IV.

It moves Vincent's hand gently to the plunger.

Vincent stares right into Ed's eyes.

Ed smiles as - his withered hand pushes Vincent's, lowering the plunger.

Slowly but surely, it's pushed down completely.

Ed relaxes into his seat. The room cries out in agony.

Vincent steps back to a sea of shocked faces.

He hopes Ginger is back in her seat. She isn't.

He looks back to Ed, just as his breathing stops and machine flat-lines.

Linger on Vincent's face.

FADE TO BLACK.