

Love Thy Neighbor

by

Niccolo E. Sohn

FADE IN.

1 INT. CLARISSA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

1

LIKE A GHOST, THE CAMERA FLOATS GRADUALLY THROUGH CLARISSA'S "LIVING ROOM".

The crickets chirp outside and moonlight gently filters in through the windows of the tiny but quaint studio apartment. MARIAH (20's, scantily clad plus a big jacket, wearing high-heeled boots) and RICKY (20's, Edgar-type whose mood dictates how low his pants sag down) stumble by outside the windows of the apartment.

RICKY

Mariah!

MARIAH

Just get the hell outta here!

Ricky reaches for her arm. She whips it away and slaps him with the other hand. She continues walking. He pursues.

RICKY

Why are you being such a bitch!

MARIAH

You left me stranded for an hour,
you dumb shit!

As Mariah and Ricky keep walking, they disappear behind the far side of the window, leaving us to float through the rest of the apartment's interior.

Behind a curtain separating the "bedroom" from the "living room", CLARISSA sits, on her bed, hunched over beneath a thick blanket.

BUMP-BUMP, BUMP-BUMP...

The faint sound of footsteps can be heard climbing up stairs outside.

In a stupor, Clarissa's saucer-sized eyes are glued to a laptop screen in front of her. The laptop sits on a mountain of textbooks surrounded by an endless expanse of papers.

Suddenly, LOUD, muffled Soundcloud rap music starts vibrating and resonating through the ceiling. Clarissa's eyes shift slowly to the ceiling above her.

A heavy, steady THUNK, THUNK, THUNK comes from above.

Like an undead corpse, Clarissa raises herself from her tiny bed and stands on it. She grabs a broom that's sits right next to her bed. She takes a deep breath and sighs, getting the broom in position to commence a common ritual.

With a heave, she hits the ceiling with the hard end of the broom.

BUNK. BUNK. BUNK.

She stops thrusting the broom up. The MUSIC and THUNKING continue for a beat and then stop.

Silence.

thuUUNK. THUNK. THUNK...

2

INT. CLARISSA'S KITCHEN - DAY

2

A microwave oven BEEPS incessantly. Clarissa rushes by, carrying off the oven's contents - a MUG of steaming water. She paces across the room, past a crucifix competing with a bulletin board full of dozens of flyers and a calendar that has more scribbles than white spaces, hanging on the wall. She haphazardly throws breakfast together while she speaks to someone on the phone.

CLARISSA

I can't take it anymore, mom. She's completely crazy. The other day she passed out in the laundry room! The laundry-!

Clarissa puts the steaming hot mug on the counter. On the other end of the line, Clarissa's mom, DOLORES responds.

DOLORES (V.O.)

Calmate, niña! Mira, you have to talk to the building manager about this. It's-

Clarissa throws a loaf of bread on the counter.

CLARISSA

I did, mom! A bunch of times. He just chats her up and nothing happens! She's a skank and he's a lazy piece of sh-

DOLORES (V.O.)

-Clarissa...

Clarissa rifles through one of her cabinets. She takes out the peanut butter.

CLARISSA

Mom, I'm an adult. I just...I can't study, I can't sleep, I can't have people over. She blasts her music night and day.

DOLORES

It can not be that-

CLARISSA

Mom. I've never worked this hard for something so terrible.

Clarissa pouts at a mini deflated instant coffee packet she pulls from the cabinet.

DOLORES (V.O)

I tried, m'ija. I really did. I'm sorry I couldn't help you with the apartment-

Clarissa is tiny in her near-bare kitchen.

CLARISSA

Mom, please. It's ok. Just- don't worry about it.

A beat.

DOLORES (V.O.)

You're so strong, niñita.

Clarissa rolls her eyes ever so subtly and sighs.

DOLORES (V.O./CONT.)

Pray to God, mija. Put it in his hands.

Clarissa spreads peanut butter and jelly over the bread with a butter knife.

CLARISSA

M-hm.

DOLORES (V.O.)

Como que, "m-hm".

CLARISSA

I'm not going to wait around for God to fix my problems like you do.

DOLORES (V.O.)
Ojala que Dios te ayuda a buscar la luz.

Clarissa freezes and looks at the phone.

DOLORES (V.O.)
You can't understand me.

Clarissa sits back down.

CLARISSA
Y-yes, I can. You're talking about God again. Look, mom. There's stuff that I haven't even finished for class later. And after that, I have to work for eight hours, because God isn't paying the rent, Mom. I am! I need a *solid solution*.

CUT TO BLACK.

The faint HUM of a refrigerator fills the darkness.

DOLORES (V.O.)
In Mexico, we used to write the names of our bad neighbors on a piece of paper and froze it.

A refrigerator door opens from the inside, letting light in to show Clarissa returning the jelly.

CLARISSA
Ay, mom, "FREEZE", "FREEZE it"!

Clarissa closes the refrigerator, plunging the screen into darkness once more.

CLARISSA (CONT.) (CONT'D)
Did it work?

DOLORES (V.O.)
Your Tia Alma thought so.

CUT TO CLARISSA BACK IN THE KITCHEN.

CLARISSA
I didn't know Tia Alma was a bruja.

DOLORES (V.O.)
Don't call her that. She was not a witch. Escuchame, Clarissa, you have to be careful.

(MORE)

DOLORES (V.O.) (CONT'D)
It starts with little games but
then bad things happen,
unexpectedly.

Clarissa spreads peanut butter and jelly over the bread with
a butter knife.

CLARISSA
UnEXpectedly. Unexpectedly, mom.

Clarissa spots the steaming coffee she forgot on the counter.

DOLORES (V.O.)
Si! Unexpectedly.

Clarissa rolls her eyes as she gets up to get the mug.

DOLORES (CONT./V.O.) (CONT'D)
At least tell me you wear your
amuleto.

Not too far beneath the cross on the pinboard hangs an old
amulet.

DOLORES (V.O.)
Si? O no?

Clarissa sits back down, setting the mug down at the edge of
the table.

CLARISSA
Yeah.

DOLORES (V.O.)
What's this girl's name?

CLARISSA
Ay, Mom! This is medieval, it won't-

Clarissa reaches for a folder on the table, but gets up too
fast, sending the mug spilling over her and the rest of the
table, releasing a HISS of steam.

DOLORES (V.O.)
You're right. It-

CLARISSA
Ahh! Mom, I gotta go. I'll talk to
you later.

DOLORES
Jus be safe, mija! Te amo.

CLARISSA
Yeah. Ok, mom. Bye.

Clarissa hangs up and sits back down. She looks down at her plate - a lumpy mush of bread, peanut butter and jelly, moist from some of the spilled water. She pushes it aside.

Clarissa pulls her laptop forward to check her email. She opens a message from -

PROFESSOR MARKS

The message is marked URGENT. She sits up straighter.

CLARISSA (CONT'D)
Oh fuck.

Flashes of words whip by as she skims the message-

- "hope everything's all right"

- "quality of work has diminished"

CLARISSA (CONT'D)
Please, God, no! No, no, no!

- "no choice"

- "remove you from lab"

- "best"

Clarissa can do nothing but stare at the word - "best".

3 INT. CLARISSA'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

3

Soft, warm candle light reflects on the surface of an inky liquid in a large bowl.

Scattered wildly on the floor around the table, like disemboweled animal bodies, are torn paper packages.

Crouched against the wall, Clarissa clutches her laptop.

ON LAPTOP SCREEN: A window with about thirty open tabs. The current tab shows an old, 2000's-era website outlining steps in italics. Next to the text, a picture of a thick, brown book.

Clarissa sets her laptop aside to her left. She grabs something to her right.

It is the old book from the site. She raises the book to her face. She grimaces as she tries to read the Spanish on the page. She gives up and types the words into a translation app on her phone. She looks away from her phone to check on one of the words in the book.

Away from Clarissa's gaze, her phone slowly fades to darkness and back to light. She looks back to the phone.

She looks away, her phone flutters to darkness and back to light again, quicker this time. Clarissa catches it.

She turns the screen off and on herself. No problem.

The English translation -

-*"PRESENT YOUR STEWARD."*

-*"SACRIFICE YOUR BLOOD TO THE ABYSS."*

Clarissa sets up a figure on the table. Using a small knife, she makes a tiny incision on her forearm, dripping the blood into the bowl and smearing some of it on the statuette.

-*"OFFER A VISION OF YOUR OBJECT. SUBMERGE THE VESSEL."*

Clarissa places a picture of Mariah on the table. She looks down at her amulet and takes it off. She flings it into the bowl.

-*"MOVE THE LEADER CANDLE. SAY THRICE YOUR COMMAND."*

Clarissa takes the biggest candle and moves it from the statue's right to its left. Clarissa closes her eyes.

CLARISSA

I want Mariah out of my life. I
want Mariah out of my life. I want
Mariah out of my life.

She opens her eyes again.

Nothing. Not a ripple in the bowl or a whisper in the air.

While Clarissa's not looking, on her phone, the Spanish she typed into the translate box gets deleted and replaced with another word, letter by letter:

H-A-B-L-A-M-E

Clarissa turns to type again but she freezes. Her thumb hovers over the translate button. She presses the button -
"Talk to me."

SQUEAL.

The whining of wet skin on glass makes Clarissa jump and turn to look to her window. She squints at a small, orb-like light outside the window. She turns on the light in her room.

FLICK!

The room's light banishes the light on the window. She *FLICKS* the light off again and the orb is back. She *FLICKS* the light on; the orb is gone. She *FLICKS* the light off. the orb stays gone this time. Clarissa breathes again. She *FLICKS* the light switch on again - no lights.

Clarissa looks up at the light bulb in the center of the ceiling. *FLICK. FLICK. FLICK.* No use.

CLARISSA (CONT'D)

Great.

SQUEAL.

The whining sound from the window again. Clarissa stares the window down, transfixed, as she gradually steps towards it.

A reflection sits on the glass where the orb of light was suspended before, but it's faint, barely more than frosty vapor.

She steps closer. The frost-like reflection becomes clearer-it's a face looking straight into the room. She stops in her tracks. The features come together to form a dejected female face.

CLARISSA (CONT'D)

Mom?

DOLORES' APPARITION

Hablame, nina.

Clarissa backs up slowly. She reaches her table again, where there is a new sentence in need of translation-

No me entiendes.

Dolores' Apparition reaches out to Clarissa, fingers stretching out.

DOLORES' APPARITION (CONT'D)

Porque no hablas, hija?

Clarissa snatches her phone from the table. She punches 'translate' once more-

You don't understand me.

She looks up and her mother is gone. She looks to the side.

WHAM! It's her mother in traditional Puebla dress, yelling and seizing in a demonically hysteric episode.

Clarissa screams. She flies back in shock, knocking into the table and sending the bowl of liquid and one of the candles tipping over.

Still seizing, Dolores' apparition thrusts a cross at Clarissa on the floor as she steps closer and closer.

CLARISSA

MOM! MAMA!

Clarissa's phone keeps turning on and off.

CLARISSA (CONT'D)

Stop!

Whoosh! Everything finally stops and the candles are blown out by a wind from nowhere.

Clarissa tries to light one of the candles again. It struggles to stay aflame, but with every attempt, a massive shadow, impossible to be Clarissa's, grows ever bigger on the wall and ceiling behind her. The arms of the shadow extend out with what looks like draping cloth.

CLARISSA (CONT'D)

Come on! Come on, please!

Clarissa finally gets the candle to stay lit. She whips around to look behind her - nothing but her and the flame.

She puts her matches to the side and comes back to guard the flame.

Clarissa's shadow towers on the wall behind her. Clarissa's shadow follows her as she goes to light the other candle. Another stock-still shadow remains where Clarissa's shadow was.

She lights the second candle.

Clarissa returns to her previous spot and falls still, enjoying the flame. On the wall, a shadow splits from Clarissa's. Clarissa remains motionless, as the shadow slinks away to the left. Clarissa sighs.

Down a corridor to Clarissa's left, a shadowy figure in a cloak with two, glowing eyes stares her down.

4 INT. CLARISSA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

4

Clarissa walks into the room, sets her bag down on the floor. She looks up and jumps back at the sight of Mariah's body lying on the floor of the room.

CLARISSA

Holy shit!

In her shock, Clarissa kicks the door back towards its frame, shutting it. Clarissa takes the scene in.

CLARISSA (CONT'D)

Ughh, fucking white trash.

Clarissa turns to face the door and tries to turn the knob. It doesn't budge.

CLARISSA (CONT'D)

Great!

Clarissa turns again. Clarissa grabs a nearby broom and taps Mariah with it. Nothing. She nudges the body with her foot.

She checks the neighbor's pulse. She furrows her brow and checks again. Dead silence. She whips her hand back.

CLARISSA (CONT'D)

Holy shit!

She clamber-crawls back with a jolt towards the door. She tries to turn the knob again and again. She kicks it, yanks at it and rams her shoulder into it.

CLARISSA (CONT'D)

Help! We need help here! Please!

She takes another long look at the lifeless body, her vision clearing. She looks at her hands.

She looks up. She turns and pounds on the door again.

CLARISSA (CONT'D)

Help! Help! I didn't-

Clarissa peeks back at Mariah's body.

CLARISSA (CONT'D)

She's trying to hurt me! Help!

She continues to pound on the door, sinking to the floor in desperation.

CLARISSA (CONT'D)

Please!

A gasp emanates from behind Clarissa.

All of a sudden a ghostly copy of Mariah's body begins to rise from it, with hair cascading over its face. The ghost approaches Clarissa, and then drifts behind her and out of sight. Clarissa turns.

There's nothing behind her. Clarissa turns back to the door.

WHAM! MARIAH'S GHOST pops out in a nook right by the door way, reaching towards Clarissa.

Clarissa screams and scrambles back hysterically as the ghost's shadow looms larger over her.

Just as Mariah's ghost reaches Clarissa, it sweeps the hair from its face to reveal beautiful eyes, a freckled face and a giant septum ring.

MARIAH'S GHOST

Will you shut the fuck up? I'm
supposed to be resting in peace.
Peace, for shit's sake. Silence!

Mariah's ghost turns to walk back to the body.

CLARISSA

What?

MARIAH'S GHOST

How clear do I have to make this
shit? Silencio, Senorita!

Clarissa looks around dumbfounded.

MARIAH'S GHOST (CONT'D)

...Looks like you don't understand
Spanish, either.

CLARISSA

Hey! You don't know who I am. I
KNEW you were racist!

Mariah's ghost turns and curtsies.

MARIAH'S GHOST

No, I'm dead. So let a deceased
bitch rest in peace.

CLARISSA

Wait, yeah! What's? I checked your pulse. There-there was nothing.

MARIAH'S GHOST

Congratulations! You know basic anatomy. I thought you were smart. How'd you get into that fancy-ass school of yours, anyway?

Clarissa turns away, grabbing at her hair.

CLARISSA

Oh God. You're dead. Oh, dear God! Please help me.

MARIAH'S GHOST

El big hey-zeus? Yeah, don't bother. Wherever he is, it ain't here. I've been here for an hour and he hasn't shown.

CLARISSA

You've been dead for an hour?

Mariah's Ghost plays with her body's arms and legs letting them flop as she picks them up and drops them.

MARIAH'S GHOST

Yeah...

Light returns to Clarissa's eyes.

CLARISSA

When the cops show up they'll realize you've been dead for an hour. I was in class an hour ago. There's no way your death could be traced back to me.

Mariah's Ghost plays with her body's face, taking it through an array of different expressions.

MARIAH'S GHOST

Ah, welll, it might've been half an hour....Or twenty minutes. Or maybe five. I don't know, dude. I'm in your house Clarissa. So tell me, how DID you kill me?

Mariah's Ghost smiles. Clarissa shakes her head and backs up towards the door.

CUT TO BLACK.