

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

CASSANDRA and LANE stand over their father's grave, looking down at it. The headstone reads "MARK PAULSON 1965-2025 MAY HE REST IN PEACE."

Cassandra spits on the grave.

CASSANDRA
I hope you burn in hell.

LANE
That feel good?

CASSANDRA
Not as good as it would have if he were alive.

LANE
How are you holding up?

Cassandra pauses. She looks at the sky.

CASSANDRA
Well, he's gone. He can't hurt me anymore. Technically, he hasn't been able to hurt me for like a decade, but this one is different. This one is real.

She looks back down to the grave.

CASSANDRA
How's mom?

LANE
I don't think she understands yet.

Lane looks back at their MOTHER. She sits on a bench overlooking all of the headstones, a blank expression written on her face. She talks to herself.

CASSANDRA
How long has she been like that?

LANE
A few days. I think she misses him.

Cassandra watches her. She sees her deceased father sitting next to her mother, talking back to her. Cassandra blinks; he's gone.

CASSANDRA
Misses him? He was horrible.

LANE
Yeah, but she saw something different.

CASSANDRA
Like an angrier man?

LANE
Like a man that she loved.

A man comes and sits next to their mother on the bench. She doesn't look at him. She continues talking to the air.

LANE
Who's that?

CASSANDRA
My boyfriend: Quinn.

LANE
He looks like dad.

CASSANDRA
(groans)
Please, don't say that.

LANE
What? He does. Hey, it doesn't mean he acts like dad.

CASSANDRA
God, I hope not. I can only take so much.

They reach their mother.

LANE
Mom, are you ready to go?

She gives a slow nod, and Lane helps her to her feet. Cassandra hugs her mother.

CASSANDRA
Hi, Mommy, it's good to see you.

MOTHER

You too, baby.

Mother looks back at QUINN.

MOTHER

Mark, are you coming?

CASSANDRA

Oh, gosh, I'm so sorry.

QUINN

No. No. It's fine. I understand.

LANE

Come on, Mom. The family is waiting for us.

Lane guides Mother away from the bench. Cassandra and Quinn trail behind them. Cassandra looks back to see her father waving goodbye, before disappearing again.

INT. PAULSON FAMILY HOME - EVENING

As the wake dies down, a few family members linger in the house. Mother, Lane, Cassandra, Quinn, and HEATHER, Mark's sister, sit around the living room table. The energy is low as they share their final memories of Mark.

HEATHER

Mark was always a... strong force. I remember him with Dad. He was the only one to face him head on.

MOTHER

He hated your father.

HEATHER

Of course, he did. Dad destroyed everything he touched. Mom. Me. Him. But Mark was a fighter.

CASSANDRA

In more ways than one.

HEATHER

Now is not the time to dwell on the past.

CASSANDRA

The past didn't end until a few months ago. As far as I'm concerned, the wounds are still pretty fresh.

HEATHER

You always have to bring up people's mistakes.

CASSANDRA

Mistakes?

Cassandra stands, getting in Heather's face. Mother can only see a vision of her and Mark.

The remaining family stares at the scene. Quinn grabs her hand.

MOTHER

Mark, please. It's a lovely day. Don't do this.

Cassandra looks at her mother, her features softening. Lane puts a hand on her shoulder.

CASSANDRA

Sorry. To you too, Aunt Heather.

Heather only raises a brow.

HEATHER

Hmph. It's fine. I should've expected it from you.

CASSANDRA

Excuse me?

LANE

Cass. Stop.

Cassandra and her father stand side by side, same stance. They are both staring Heather down.

HEATHER

I should go anyway. I brought this for you all.

Heather holds out three picture frames, all of the same family photo.

Mother takes it and runs a hand over it.

MOTHER

Don't we look beautiful, Mark?

INT. CASSANDRA AND QUINN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Cassandra hangs the photo of her family on the wall. She stares at it. Quinn comes up behind her.

QUINN

It looks nice.

CASSANDRA

We almost look like a happy family.

She looks at the photo again.

CASSANDRA

Almost.

She walks away from the photo and sits on the couch.

QUINN

A lot of people at the wake were saying that I look a lot like him.

CASSANDRA

Not you, too. I really don't want to think about dating my dad.

QUINN

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. It's just your mom called me "Mark." Maybe it's a sign.

Cassandra rolls her eyes at Quinn. For a split second, she sees her father standing over Quinn's shoulder shaking his head. She blinks, and he's gone.

CASSANDRA

You don't want to be like my dad.

QUINN

You never talk about him.

Quinn sits next to Cassandra.

QUINN

Do you want to talk about it? Might
make the grieving easier.

CASSANDRA

No, I'm okay.

QUINN

Are you sure? It looked like it helped
your aunt.

CASSANDRA

We're not the same person. It's fine.

Quinn grabs her hand.

QUINN

Cass, I really want to-

CASSANDRA

STOP!

Cassandra jerks her hand away.

CASSANDRA

Stop

She takes a deep breath.

CASSANDRA

Stop pushing. I don't want to talk
about him.

QUINN

Okay, I'm sorry. I just want to help.

MARK (V.O.)

He doesn't want to help you.

Cassandra looks around. There's no one there. She looks at the
picture. Her father's smile mocks her. She stares in the
distance.

QUINN

The service was nice.

CASSANDRA

He didn't deserve it.

QUINN

Everyone deserves a good funeral, even your dad.

MARK (V.O.)

Do you hear this guy? He's defending me.

Cassandra looks beside her. There's no one.

CASSANDRA

Especially not my dad.

QUINN

Cass, what is the-

CASSANDRA

(yelling)

Would you stop?

QUINN

I just want to help you.

CASSANDRA

Well, I don't want to talk about it.

QUINN

Maybe, you should. You're holding back, and I can tell it's hurting you.

MARK (V.O.)

He wants to hurt you.

CASSANDRA

There is nothing hurting me. Nothing can hurt me. My father especially is not hurting me. Let it go.

MARK (V.O.)

Sweetie, have I taught you nothing? You don't tell people to do things. You have to make them.

Quinn stands up. He turns around.

QUINN

I don't want to let it go. I want to help you.

MARK (V.O.)

Make.

CASSANDRA

I don't want your help.

MARK (V.O.)

Him.

QUINN

All you're going to do is hold on to this. It's not good for you.

MARK (V.O.)

Stop.

Cassandra grabs the vase of flowers that was sitting on the center table. She throws it at his head. Quinn ducks. The vase misses but hits the family portrait she just hung up. It shatters on the ground.

CASSANDRA

You don't know what's good for me.

Mark finally appears, putting a hand on Cass's shoulders.

MARK (V.O.)

Atta girl. Just like me.

QUINN

Cass...

CASSANDRA

Get out.

QUINN

No. I know you didn't mean it. I know-

CASSANDRA

(yelling)

OUT!

Quinn puts his hands up in defeat. He carefully walks to the door.

QUINN

I'll call you tomorrow.

Cassandra says nothing. Quinn leaves.

As the door closes, she crumbles to the ground. She heaves a heavy sob from her chest. Mark sits down next to her.

MARK

It's okay, kid. It gets easier. You learn how to apologize. You learn how to fix things. You can make it better. It's just a moment of weakness.

Mark pulls her to his chest.

MARK

You're a smart girl, a strong force. Things are going to be fine.

CASSANDRA

(sniffles)

How long will I be like this?

MARK

Until you're safe, kiddo.

Mark looks next to him. His father sits next to him, a beer bottle in his hand and a cigarette in his mouth.

MARK

Until you're safe.

END.