

THE VEIL

FADE UP

INT. HOSPITAL HOSPICE ROOM - DAY

Close on hands: one old and frail, one young and tense.

Granddaughter CHRISTINA (32) is sitting on the edge of the hospital bed holding her grandmother's hands. Grandmother RUTH (79) has shallow breaths.

Ruth's eyes flutter open.

CHRISTINA
Hey. You're back.

RUTH
Water.

Christina pours. Nurse Benjamin enters.

BENJAMIN
Morning shift says you've been
touring the halls again.

Christina shoots Ruth a look.

CHRISTINA
You can't even stand.

RUTH
Apparently I can.

Benjamin checks her vitals and adjusts her IV, amused.

BENJAMIN
No one's helping her. That's the
interesting part.

He winks and leaves. Christina watches Ruth, suspicious.

CHRISTINA
You're going to tell me where your
slipper went.

Ruth smiles faintly.

RUTH
The Prince will come. I'm sure of
it.

Christina gives her some water.

RUTH (CONT'D)
It doesn't matter. He probably
can't swim.

CHRISTINA
What do you mean?

Ruth's gaze drifts somewhere far away.

RUTH
I went under and it was nice there.
I wanted to stay.

CHRISTINA
Under where?

RUTH
The lake.

Christina waits, curious and confused.

RUTH (CONT'D)
I sat at the bottom. It was quiet.
Like a village. Fish everywhere.
(pauses)
Then hands pulled me up. Everyone
screamed like I'd done something
wrong.

CHRISTINA
You were drowning!

RUTH
No. I was just... somewhere else.

Christina grips Ruth's hand tighter.

CHRISTINA
Dola, I've never heard that story.

Ruth studies her.

RUTH
That's when I started knowing,
knowing things before they
happened. I'd think of someone—call
them—and the phone would already be
ringing.

Christina's expression shifts. She remembers.

CHRISTINA
The park. When I fell.

Ruth nods, eyes half-closed.

RUTH

I knew.

Christina watches her grandmother patiently until her eyes open again. Despite her strong attitude she is pale and weak. She doesn't have much longer.

RUTH (CONT'D)

I promise, it's not me.

CHRISTINA

I believe that. For now. But one day you're going to explain to me how you lost your slipper. Or maybe how your gown got torn.

Ruth is barely conscious but nods before slipping out of consciousness.

Out of the window Christina watches a couple embrace.

DOCTOR ADAMIAN enters. Behind, NURSE MARY follows. The Doctor looks at Ruth and heads to the chart. Christina turns and they face each other.

DOCTOR ADAMIAN

Her blood pressure is dropping. Her heartbeat's irregular and faint.

The doctor trails off and looks knowingly at Christina.

CHRISTINA

I keep thinking she'll recover this time. That she'll get up and ask me for a sundae.

Nurse Mary steps beside the bed and checks Ruth's pulse, touching her forehead gently. For moment Ruth's eyes flit open, and Mary and Ruth look at each other before Ruth drifts off again.

DOCTOR ADAMIAN

It's never easy.

CHRISTINA

I don't know how you do it. You must see this all the time. Death and grief, and all the suffering in between.

DOCTOR ADAMIAN
It's my job and I do what I can to
ease the pain for everyone.

Christina nods and looks at the doctor and nurse in
bewilderment.

CHRISTINA
Is it true, what the nurses are
saying? Is she sleepwalking? She
swears she's not roaming around.

DOCTOR ADAMIAN
Physically I don't see how that's
even remotely possible. Maybe you
can figure out the mystery. In the
meantime, it's good that you're
here. For both of you.

The doctor walks out. Nurse Mary lingers and looks kindly at
Christina.

NURSE MARY
Your grandmother must have had a
very good life. Her face is
peaceful. You can always see it in
the face, the life they've had.

CHRISTINA
You can see that? I wonder what my
face says.

NURSE MARY
It says that you have a whole new
world in front of you.

Christina turns away back toward the window. When she turns
back Nurse Mary is gone. She sits beside her grandmother and
reaches out to move some of her silvery hair.

INT. HOSPITAL HOSPICE ROOM - NIGHT - LATER

Christina comes out of the bathroom. She looks over at her
still-sleeping grandmother and stretches.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Christina steps out, restless, pacing the hall. City lights
shimmer outside the window.

A swish of gown.

A woman with long white hair turns down a corridor.

Christina turns and follows.

CHRISTINA
 (urgent whisper)
 Dola-

The woman disappears behind a door, the trail of a nightgown disappears. Christina heads toward the door and steps inside.

INT. STORAGE CLOSET - NIGHT

In the large storage closet the door suddenly shuts behind her.

INT. STORAGE CLOSET - CONTINUOUS

Christina slaps madly against the wall to find a switch. A ghostly white fog appears around her and she stops, watching it in horror and fascination.

She steps back, heart racing. Shapes form—two translucent women. The VISIONARY GHOST steps forward, entranced.

VISIONARY GHOST
 The veil isn't a wall. Look—see how
 it ripples. It's stitched from
 memory and ideas and love and...

A second form emerges, DISMISSIVE GHOST.

DISMISSIVE GHOST
 Please. It's just fog with an ego.
 They're too loud to hear anything
 but themselves.

VISIONARY GHOST
 And still, some nights they breathe
 our names into the dark, and the
 veil trembles like a door left
 unlatched.

As they move closer she clasps the door knob behind her. It opens suddenly and Nurse Mary looks at Christina questioningly.

NURSE MARY
 Are you looking for something or
 are you lost?

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - NIGHT

Christina steps out, takes a look inside and sees nothing but some shelves.

CHRISTINA

No, no. I thought I saw my
grandmother come down here.

Before Nurse Mary closes the door she glances back inside.

NURSE MARY

No grandma here.

Nurse Mary pulls Christina's arm into hers as they walk down the hall toward Ruth's room.

NURSE MARY (CONT'D)

You remind me of her. She sees a
lot. For her, the veil is thin
between what's here and what's from
another place.

CHRISTINA

The veil. I've heard that before.

NURSE MARY

Sometimes we only need to listen. I
imagine that you see a lot as well.

As they turn the last corner, Mary points down the hall.

NURSE MARY (CONT'D)

Straight down and to the right.
Just past the nurse's desk. You go
on back and get some rest. She'll
need you in the morning.

Christina starts to walk and looks back.

CHRISTINA

Thank you, ummm...

NURSE MARY

Mary.

INT. HOSPITAL HOSPICE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Christina leans in close. She grabs Ruth's hands and checks to see if they're clean or dirty, then pulls back the sheets at the bottom of the bed to check her feet. The bottom of the nightgown is dirty and she fingers it gently.

She then lays down on the couch and pulls a blanket over her. She peeks with one eye, trying to catch her grandmother in action. Finally she falls asleep.

INT. HOSPITAL HOSPICE ROOM - DAY

Benjamin pulls open the room curtains and sets up a food tray. He checks Ruth's pulse and her IV. Ruth moves her head groggily.

BENJAMIN

(to Ruth)

Good morning princess. It's time for some food.

Christina sits up slowly and moves to pull a chair next to her grandmother. They rouse Ruth and prop her up, Benjamin firmly places a crown of tin foil onto Ruth's head.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

So, did you catch her red-handed?

CHRISTINA

No, I thought I saw her, but it must have been someone else.

Benjamin looks warily at Christina.

BENJAMIN

I'm gonna check in later. Troublemaker.

He pats Ruth's hand and leaves.

CHRISTINA

How did you sleep?

RUTH

Slept like the dead.

Ruth chuckles and gestures for water. Christina tries to feed her but Ruth brushes it away.

CHRISTINA

Did you have good dreams?

RUTH

I always dream.

CHRISTINA

You always say that, that dreams are real. But mine aren't.

RUTH

Of course they are. Dreams don't wait for darkness. They cross the veil even in the sun.

(sighs)

There are other worlds out there. Pick one, or a few.

Christina picks up a muffin and nibbles.

RUTH (CONT'D)

I saw some angels once. I was in a weird room, a closet, and they floated around above me like translucent clouds. So strange...

Christina choked on the muffin and put it down.

RUTH (CONT'D)

A kind of dark that wasn't dark. And something like clouds... floating.

Ruth's gaze floats away as she looks around at the imaginary underwater village and her fish friends. She gestures again, as if underwater.

RUTH (CONT'D)

It was nice there. So nice.

Suddenly she is back in the present.

RUTH (CONT'D)

That's enough. I can't eat anymore. You eat it.

CHRISTINA

No Dola, that's fine. We can wait for lunch.

Nurse Mary enters as Christina pushes the tray back. Outside the dark cloudy sky looks ready to break open.

RUTH

Oh, no more. No more.

Nurse Mary moves to stand next to Ruth, holds her hand.

NURSE MARY

(gently, somberly)
Storm's coming.

RUTH
Go to the window, baby. I love a
good storm. Share it with me, what
do you see.

Christina gets up and stands at the window.

RUTH (CONT'D)
(tired voice)
What's out there? What's going on?

CHRISTINA
The trees are moving. They're
waving at us. Cars. People rushing
like they're late for something.

Ruth smiles, satisfied.

RUTH
And the water?

Christina peers past buildings.

CHRISTINA
The ocean.

A long silence.

Christina turns.

Ruth is slipping away.

Christina crosses quickly, clasps her hand, leans close.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)
Dola... it's okay. You can go. I'll
be alright.

Ruth's breath catches--then softens.

Christina's tears fall.

Ruth is gone.

Christina reaches over to push a lock of silver hair out of
Ruth's face. She is still wearing Benjamin's crown.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - DAY - LATER

The hospital room door shuts behind her and Christina walks
slowly toward the elevators. The DESK NURSE approaches for a
hug.

DESK NURSE
We loved her.

Christina nods, barely holding it together.

CHRISTINA
Can you tell Mary... the nurse... thank
you?

The Desk Nurse blinks.

DESK NURSE
Mary?

Christina nods.

CHRISTINA
Short hair. Nice eyes.

The Desk Nurse shakes her head.

DESK NURSE
Honey... we don't have a Mary.

Christina's face stills. Not shocked. Just... confirmed.

She keeps walking.

INT. HOSPITAL LOBBY - DAY - OUTSIDE THE ELEVATOR

Stepping out of the elevator Christina sees the couple she has seen earlier. The WIFE is in a wheelchair and in her arms is a newborn baby. The HUSBAND looks down at the baby and squeezes his wife's hand.

HUSBAND
She made it, babe. It's all okay.

Nurse Benjamin rolls her out the door and looks kindly at Christina, who pauses in her grief to appreciate the moment. She steps out into the sunshine.

EXT. HOSPITAL PARKING LOT - CAR INTERIOR

Christina's hand turns on the radio. As the song plays, she looks back at the hospital. From the window, Nurse Mary steps away as Christina drives away.

FADE OUT