



SANTA

A FILM TREATMENT BY RODRIGO GARCÍA

A man with dark hair and glasses, wearing a white button-down shirt, is seated at a desk in a dimly lit room. He is smiling and talking on a black telephone. The room has large windows in the background, and the desk is cluttered with various items including a laptop, a bottle, and papers. The text "SERIES BACKGROUND" is overlaid in the center of the image.

SERIES BACKGROUND

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Maria Jose Cano, nicknamed SANTA or Santita since she was little due to her (former) obedient and docile nature, was born and raised in Tijuana, the daughter of a father who worked in real estate and a stay-at-home mother. She has two older brothers. They were a conservative family. Santa's father was a functioning alcoholic who liked to play and carouse with his children when he was drunk. The children enjoyed him very much, but as the boys grew into adolescence they became increasingly embarrassed by his antics. Only Santa, wanting to please, joined him in the fun, and looked after him. She was not an alcoholic but she did drink with him, and socially with friends, though seldom in excess.

In her second-to-last year of high-school Santa met a first-year university student, ESTEBAN. They had known each other as kids but not well, crossing paths at birthday parties and or at the beach, since the professional class that they belong to in Tijuana is not so big that people haven't at least heard of each other's families. Santa got a lot of attention from boys, but she finally fell in love with Esteban and they started dating. Her interest in the attention and flattery of other boys started to wane (though never totally), and after two years she and Esteban were engaged. She wanted to stay a virgin until marriage and although they had a couple of close calls on heated occasions, they managed to abstain.



SERIES BACKGROUND

One night, a month before the wedding, Santa, age 20, was driving home late one night when she collided with another car at an intersection. She suffered a back injury that left her paralyzed below the waist. The prospects of recovery were always a long shot. Initially the wedding date was postponed a few months. On the wedding day, as the church doors opened for her and Santa faced the journey down the aisle to the altar in her wheelchair, she turned away, left and never looked back.

When challenged, she told Esteban that she no longer loved him. He begged but she never yielded. Eventually he walked away, studied abroad, married, divorced once and was eventually to CECILIA. He worked for a transnational company and was back in Tijuana once every year or two. Santa and he barely ever spoke again. When they saw each other, it was mostly from afar or briefly, politely, at the weddings of friends in common, or at the funeral of one of their parents.

This is what Santa would never admit, perhaps not even to herself: that Esteban was the love of her life and that she is still looking to find that spark elsewhere. She didn't marry him because she was afraid he was marrying her out of pity after the accident.



SERIES BACKGROUND

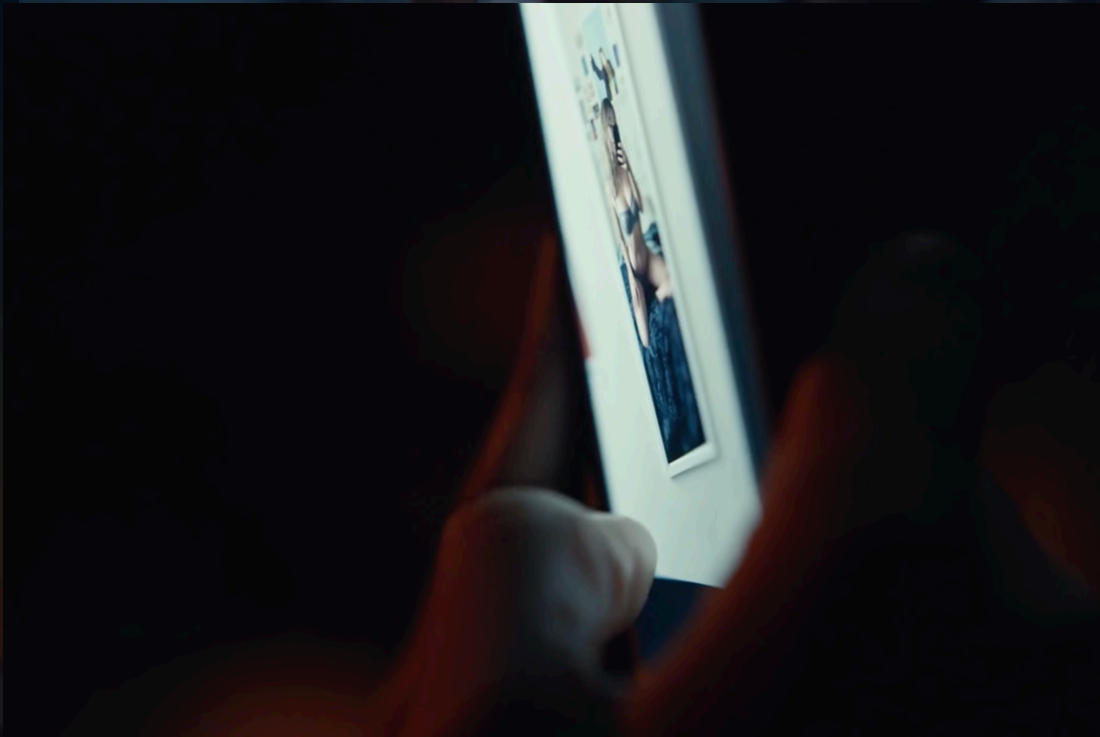
But there is also another factor in her decision to cancel the wedding: that the night of the accident she had gone to a party with high school friends and with a few drinks in her had intercourse with another guy. Hence, after two years of waiting till marriage to have sex, she had betrayed Esteban with a guy whose only attribute were his looks. Also, the accident had been her fault, but since the other car fled the scene, that was never known. The shame of the evening is something she has never confessed to. And she has never been able to admit to herself why she did it, why she risked everything for sex with someone she didn't care for. The fact is her independent spirit, repressed by her upbringing, had started to reveal itself to her, and the idea of marrying a virgin at 20 and primarily making a life as a wife and mother became increasingly unacceptable. Unable to just step away from that life, she had blown it up.

Santa enrolled in medical school and got her degree as an outstanding student, obliterating anyone along the way who challenged her ability as a woman or a disabled person to succeed.

SERIES BACKGROUND

She never married but has had numerous flings and affairs, and she is very liberal in her choice of men: young and old, any race and religion, married or single. She'll sleep with them for their brain, their beauty, or for their sense of humor, regardless of their social station -- or because she is in the mood and a man is nearby. Her rule is simple: three encounters (if you pass the first), and then it's over. She cuts off even men that she has liked and admired and cuts them off ruthlessly if she has to. Some are pleased with the contract, some have begged to stay, professing their love for her. She has never yielded.

The three-times-only rule is tied to one of Santa's most important missions: her quest to achieve orgasms again. She studied early on that some (though not many) paraplegic women are able to achieve orgasm if they work especially hard on the mental side of it, and if they practice on different techniques of stimulation. In her 20 years of trying there has been little success. A handful of times she felt like things were moving in the right direction but it hadn't happened. But she is far from giving up.





THE SETTING

THE SETTING

Tijuana, Mexico, the present.

A medium-sized provincial city full of contradictions, an extreme version of Mexico the country itself. The rich and the poor, the saint and the sinners, the upstanding and the corrupt, artists and mercenaries, fine cuisine and sex trade. A city that has always struggled to define itself beyond the border, the American tourists, illegal immigration, the drug trade, crime, etc... We will not be dealing with those identities in any extended ways (though we will cross them sometimes as they are part and parcel of Tijuana life), but with the lives of people who live middle-class dramas in the context of this very particular place. Why Tijuana? Because we seldom see such Mexican cities as they are, not as they appear in the news. And because it's a particularly tough place for women, a northern state with a deeply rooted patriarchal culture, and where women are often the targets of sexual violence and homicide, and because this show is about a very complicated, sensitive, and powerful woman. An independent person, vulnerable, but indestructible: SANTA. Don't get in her way.





THE SETTING



A woman with long dark hair, wearing a white short-sleeved dress, stands in a doorway. She is looking slightly to her left. The room to her left has a dark wood-paneled wall with a thermostat and a digital display. The room to her right is bright and modern, with large windows and a brown leather bag on the floor. The text "CHARACTER / SANTA" is overlaid in the center.

CHARACTER / SANTA



DOLORES FONZI





PILOT EPISODE

ROLLER SKATING DREAM SEQUENCE

A dream:

Late afternoon. A woman of 40, dancing along to disco music while on roller skates, down an avenue empty of moving cars or pedestrians. She's dancing to a "banda" version of Abba's "Dancing Queen". Something makes her stop: in the distance she sees a man walking slowly across an intersection. He's too far to make out, but she seems to recognize him.

The woman starts to skate quickly towards him, calling out, desperate to get his attention. At one point he stops, looks in her direction, then walks on. One of the wheels on her skates comes off, but she manages to stay up, skating on as fast as she can. The rest of the wheels begins to break off, as the man disappears into the cross street.

We cut to a bedroom, where the same woman, SANTA, wakes up from the dream, teary eyed. She mumbles to herself as she wipes her eyes: "Ya, pendeja!". She closes her eyes again, committed to going back to sleep. She's unable to.

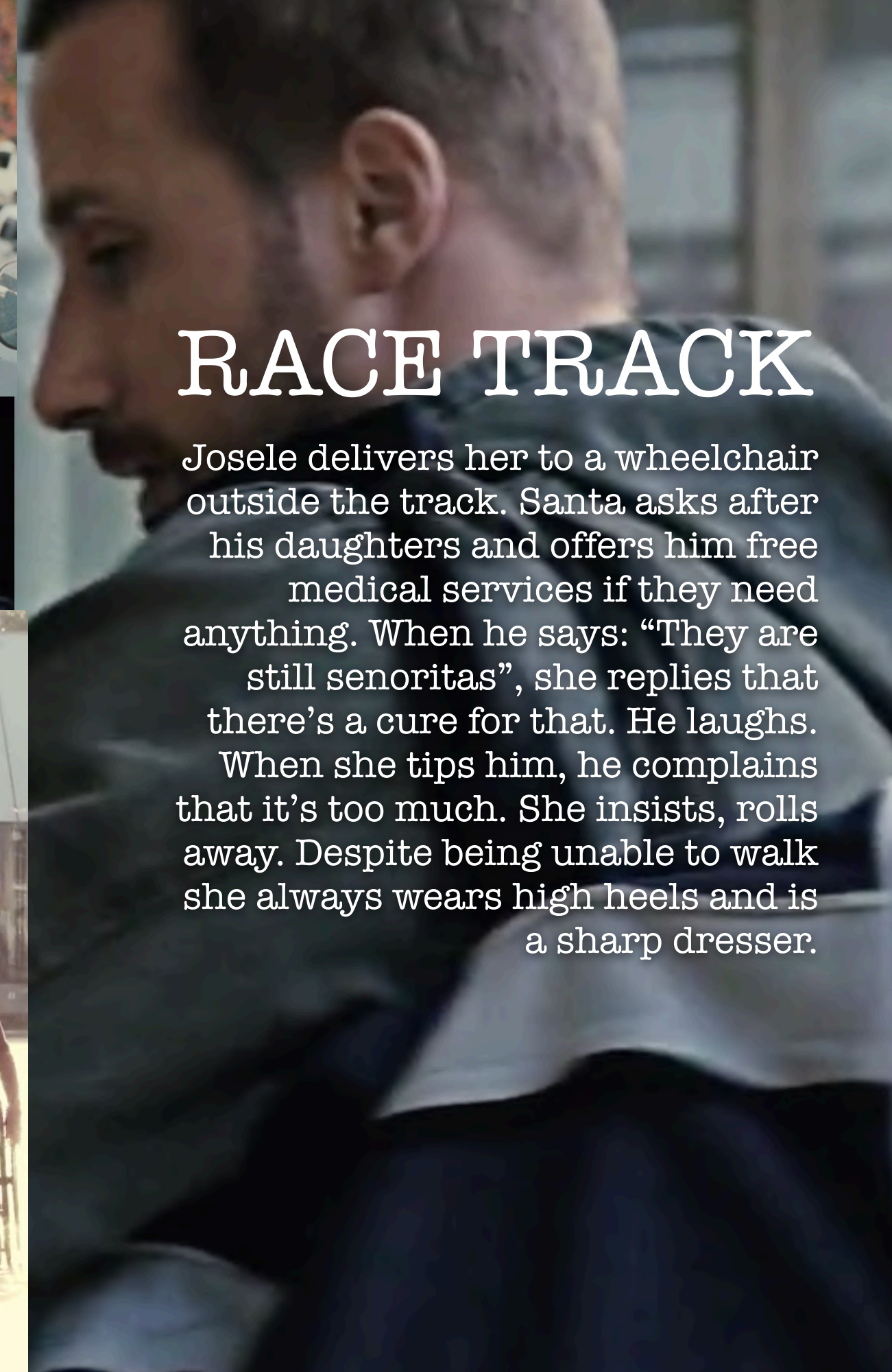




RACE TRACK

A dog-track in Tijuana. Santa watches a greyhound race, yelling encouragement to her chosen contender. The race ends in disappointment for her, and she rips up her betting slips, lights a cigarette.

She motions to a large muscular man JOSELE, (whom she sometimes uses as a strongman, if need be), who comes over and lifts her out of her seat. As she is carried up the stands she exchanges comments with other spectators who clearly know her and are not surprised by her being carried out. She also touches up her make up with a small compact as she is carried.



RACE TRACK

Josele delivers her to a wheelchair outside the track. Santa asks after his daughters and offers him free medical services if they need anything. When he says: “They are still senoritas”, she replies that there’s a cure for that. He laughs. When she tips him, he complains that it’s too much. She insists, rolls away. Despite being unable to walk she always wears high heels and is a sharp dresser.

POKER NIGHT

Later that same night, Santa is playing poker with a group of friends. They are: DINORAH, a woman in her 50's, who is a judge. GENARO, a dentist in his 40s. SIMON, 40s, owner of a jewelry store (and cantor at a local synagogue), and IGNACIO, 50's, who is a police captain. There is a lot of sexual innuendo, playful mockery and roasting (albureando), and the women hold their own. Politics, sex, machismo, religion, nothing is out of bounds. Everyone drinks alcohol liberally, and some share a little cocaine. Santa is trying to make back the money she lost at the racetrack but is losing heavily. Much of the banter tonight is about a case before Dinorah where parents want to prevent their son of 18 from pursuing sex re-assignment surgery, by claiming he is insane and must be under their supervision. The subject reveals a lot about the individuals in the group, with Santa still able to surprise her friends with radical but brilliant and funny comments. "If he wants his dick removed, I'll take it. A good dick is so hard to find."

Genaro mentions to Santa that he saw Santa's ex, ESTEBAN, at a local restaurant. Simon says that he heard that Esteban has moved back to town. Dinorah is unfamiliar with Santa's past and the other players fill her in about Santa's former engagement to Esteban which ended when she left him at the altar. Santa seems unperturbed by all of this, but she clarifies that "It was bad form, but it was the right thing to do." She is good at hiding her feelings, so no one can see what we see: the subject of Esteban is sensitive for her.

After Santa drops the last of her money on what she thought was a big hand, she asks to borrow money to keep playing, but is affably rebuffed because she already owes too much.



POKER NIGHT

Santa is sitting into her car and folding her wheelchair, when Genaro asks her if she wants to meet up later, implying some kind of prior physical relationship. Santa reminds him that their agreement was for a three-time-only encounter (her rule, always, with lovers). He persists in trying to convince her, but eventually accepts his fate. Genaro refers to her “project” (the search for orgasm) and tries to convince her that he’s the guy to help her with it, but Santa doesn’t seem so sure. She drives off.



SANTA DRIVING AT NIGHT

On the drive home, still buzzed from drinking, Santa sees a commotion on the street: a pregnant Haitian woman, ROSELINE, seems to be in distress. She is doubled over, leaning on a lamp post. Her husband, PASCAL, and a few others are trying to wave a car down. They seem to be coming from a ramshackle immigrant camp in the background.

Santa drives by. She stops the car, curses, puts the car in reverse and goes back. She rolls down her window and asks how far along Roseline is in her pregnancy. She is told 8 months, but the water broke and the baby is coming out feet first.





PASCAL AND ROSELINE

Santa transfers out of the car into her wheelchair, takes a medical case out of her trunk and puts on latex gloves, examines Roseline and determines that it is indeed a breech birth. Santa uses her phone to call an ambulance. She climbs out of her wheelchair to the asphalt to assist in the delivery. The baby emerges with help from Santa. Santa talks calmly to Rosaline, explaining what is happening at every moment, as she performs the necessary maneuvers to deliver the baby.

A small crowd of mostly other Haitian immigrants has gathered to watch. In the final complicated stage of the breech delivery, Santa tells Rosaline to bear down. She lies to Rosaline and tells her that “Today has been my lucky day.” Throughout the birth, Santa struggles to communicate with the couple as their fluency in Spanish is rudimentary. As the baby is born the Haitians break into singing happy birthday.

The ambulance arrives. Santa directs the paramedics to a specific hospital because, “they know me there.” She asks them for help getting back in her wheelchair.



SANTA'S APARTMENT

Santa finally makes it home to her large apartment in a high rise, just before dawn, running into her housekeeper who tells her she is leaving, quitting. When Santa asks how come she is never able to keep a housekeeper for more than six months, the woman lists the many ways Santa is impossible.

Later we see Santa finishing brushing her teeth, then jumping onto bed still dressed and falling asleep.





SWIMMING AT CLUB

Early the next morning. Santa swims fast laps in a club pool. Other than a small floating device attached to her legs to keep them from sinking or drifting, she looks like any other swimmer. Except better and faster.

THERAPY WORKOUT

Later in another club area, Santa is on a work table as a physical therapist works her legs, fighting atrophy. Santa is watching something on her phone, at an angle that the therapist cannot see. Close on her phone: home porn. A man going down on a woman.



SANTA MEETS CECILIA

Santa arrives at her gynecological practice where ALMA, her office manager and best friend, informs her that their finances are in dire straits and that they are in peril of losing their ability to make payroll and pay rent.

She blames Santa for taking out personal loans from the business and points out that she knows Santa has been taking cash from the safe. Alma tries to discuss options that will help keep the business going. She also suggests that Santa might pursue richer clients, who would be more likely to actually pay their bills.

Santa meets with CECILIA, a new patient, in the examination room. Cecilia is in her late thirties, married, and she thinks she is unexpectedly pregnant. After Santa confirms the pregnancy, Cecilia obliquely suggests that she wants an abortion, having heard that Santa might be able to help. Santa, suspicious of her, tells her that she heard wrong. Santa asks who recommended her, but Cecilia doesn't name names.



SANTA MEETS CECILIA

Santa reminds Cecilia what the punishments are for doctors who perform illegal abortions. Cecilia challenges her: “So, is that what’s stopping you, or are you against it?” Santa is reluctant to be sucked in, but the women do end up talking and getting along. Cecilia charms Santa, but Santa doesn’t yield on the abortion. Santa suggests having it across the border in California but Cecilia says her visa is expired and she won’t be able to get a new one in time. After Cecilia leaves, Santa confides to Alma that Cecilia wanted “special services”. This worries Alma, but she is reluctant to dismiss the idea because it would bring in some much-needed cash. Santa shoots it down as a viable option. Alma says that they have performed abortions before, but Santa reminds her that this is only on special occasions: a raped teenager, a married close friend in trouble.





SANTA VISITS NEW BORN BABY

Santa goes to the hospital to check in on Rosaline and her baby, whom the couple have decided to name SANTITA, and ask her to be the godmother. Santa says a godmother should

be a spiritual guide to a child and that she is a first-rate sinner, but says she'll think about it. Santa holds the baby anyway and seems delighted to. "You have no idea where you've landed", she says to the baby, "There's enough shit here for everyone to drown in. But we'll help you make the best of it".

Pascal, the father, offers to return the favor any way he can. Work, errands, driver. Santa says it's not necessary, but before she leaves she asks if he has a driver's license. He does. (From Haiti, but he doesn't clarify that.)

MAURICIO, the hospital administrator, comes to the door of the room, asks Santa to come to his office to talk about all of the charity cases she brings to the hospital.



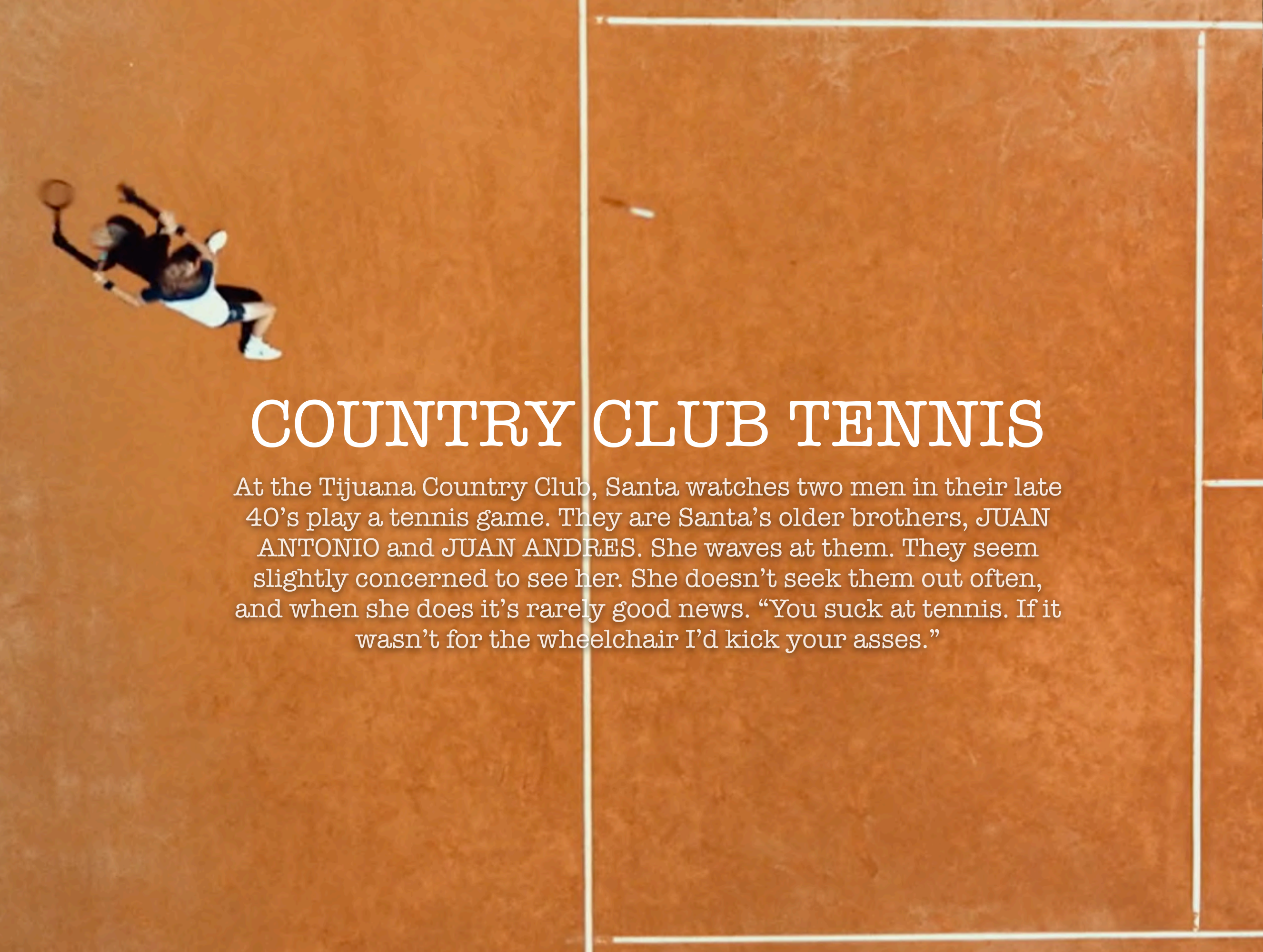


MAURICIOS OFFICE

In Mauricio's office, he goes on about his duties to the hospital's finances, but Santa has other things on her mind. She reaches out and fondles him. He stops talking, locks the door, carries her to the couch and uses pillows to position her body - it's obvious they have done this before. They have intercourse. Santa closes her eyes and tries to concentrate on the sensations she is still capable of feeling. But soon she becomes frustrated. Santa asks him to go down on her instead, but eventually she gives up, pushing Mauricio off of her, and telling him that today is not the day.

Mauricio mentions that he saw Esteban at the hospital, and that he knows that Esteban is having health problems but doesn't know the specifics. Mauricio has known both of them since the engagement fracas. Mauricio was there, and remembers the ensuing drama very clearly. Mauricio tells Santa that he heard Esteban's wife is gorgeous. Santa replies, "And also, she can walk."

It's clear from Mauricio's attitude that he is in love with Santa. He even offers: "Your goals of sexual pleasure are only going to succeed with someone who loves you and that you love. The rest is just running around in desperation." She replies: "That sounds nice, but let's not forget that you're a proctologist, not a psychiatrist." And she puts forth one of her usual arguments: love is a lie.



COUNTRY CLUB TENNIS

At the Tijuana Country Club, Santa watches two men in their late 40's play a tennis game. They are Santa's older brothers, JUAN ANTONIO and JUAN ANDRES. She waves at them. They seem slightly concerned to see her. She doesn't seek them out often, and when she does it's rarely good news. "You suck at tennis. If it wasn't for the wheelchair I'd kick your asses."



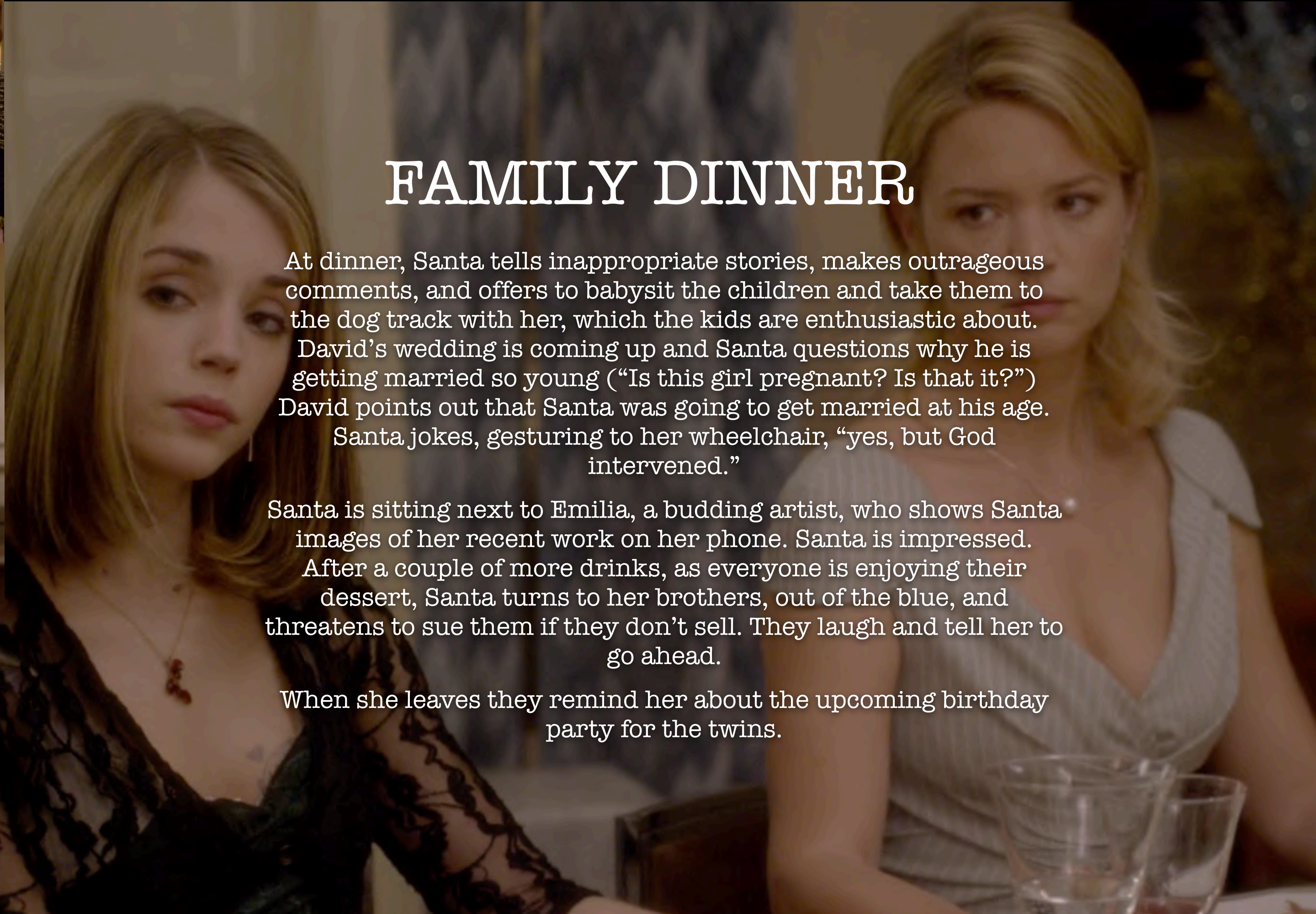
COUNTRY CLUB BAR

At the club's bar, Santa has a drink with her brothers. Santa chides Juan Antonio for drinking alcohol because he is an Evangelical Christian, at the insistence of his American wife, SIERRA. "That's called being Evangelically pussy-whipped." says Santa. He tells her that Jesus made wine from water, so she should shut up.

Santa tells them that she has found an interested buyer for their inherited land and asks that they either agree to sell immediately or buy her out. Her brothers refuse to agree to either proposal. They have investors lined up for a vineyard and eco-hotel development. In her own best interest, they want her to have a stake in the project. They tell her very frankly that they are worried about her gambling habit and they say that they just want to protect her. She says they're the ones that need protection and lists their many shortcomings and hypocrisies (and a couple of their secrets), which surprise, them, appall them, but also amuse them. They enjoy her, despite themselves.

Before the conversation can get more heated, wives and children arrive for their weekly family dinner at the club restaurant. Juan Antonio's wife, SIERRA, is American who is very affectionate with Santa. The fact is Santa likes her, despite everything. She and Juan Antonio have two children DAVID, who is 21, and EMILIA, who is 17.

Juan Andres has a younger wife, MAGDA, 40, and his children are the ten-year-old twin boys JULIAN and JONAS. Julian and Jonas run up to Santa and give her big hugs. There is no better aunt in the world, as far as the nieces and nephews are concerned.



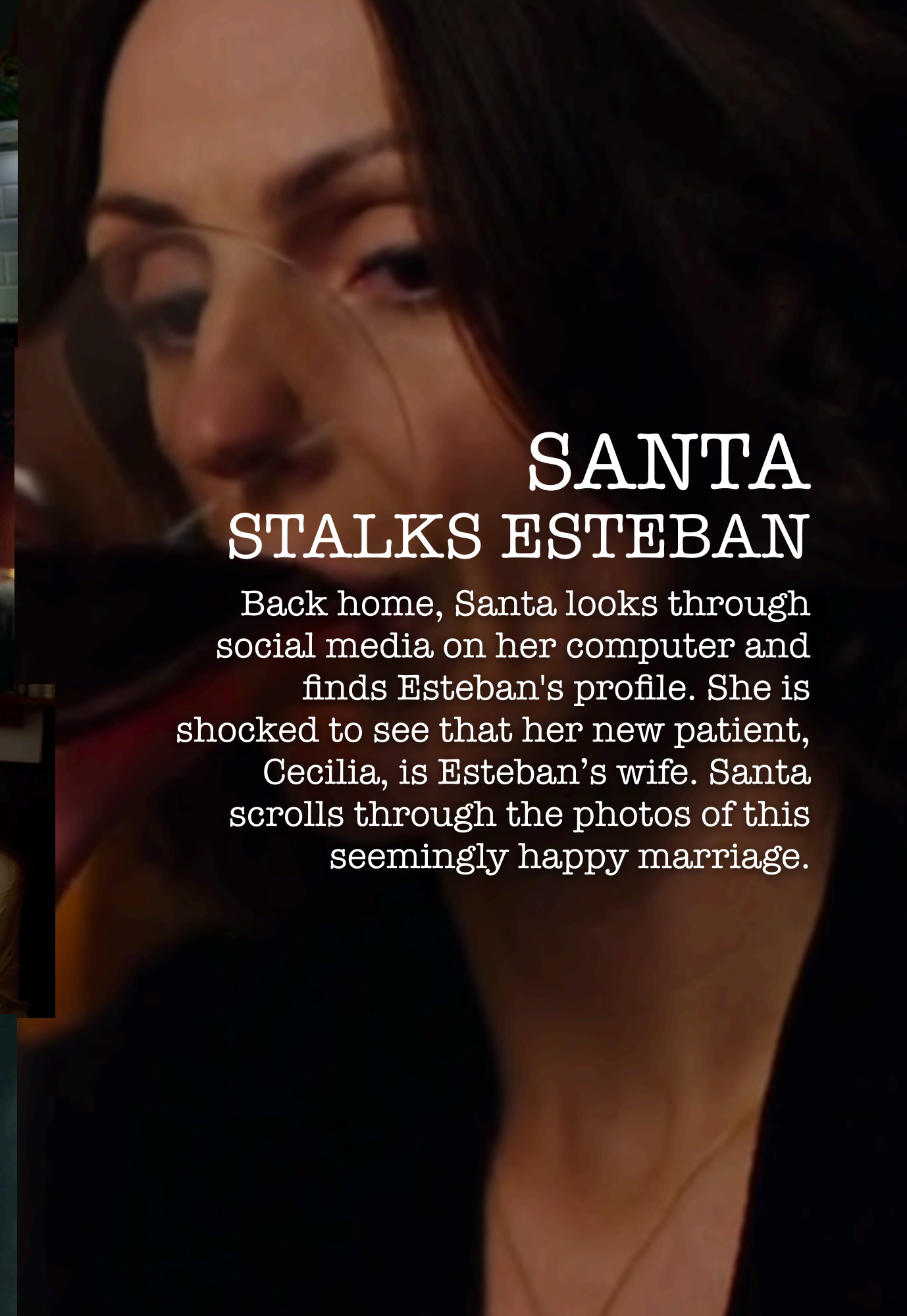
FAMILY DINNER

At dinner, Santa tells inappropriate stories, makes outrageous comments, and offers to babysit the children and take them to the dog track with her, which the kids are enthusiastic about. David's wedding is coming up and Santa questions why he is getting married so young ("Is this girl pregnant? Is that it?") David points out that Santa was going to get married at his age. Santa jokes, gesturing to her wheelchair, "yes, but God intervened."

Santa is sitting next to Emilia, a budding artist, who shows Santa images of her recent work on her phone. Santa is impressed. After a couple of more drinks, as everyone is enjoying their dessert, Santa turns to her brothers, out of the blue, and threatens to sue them if they don't sell. They laugh and tell her to go ahead.

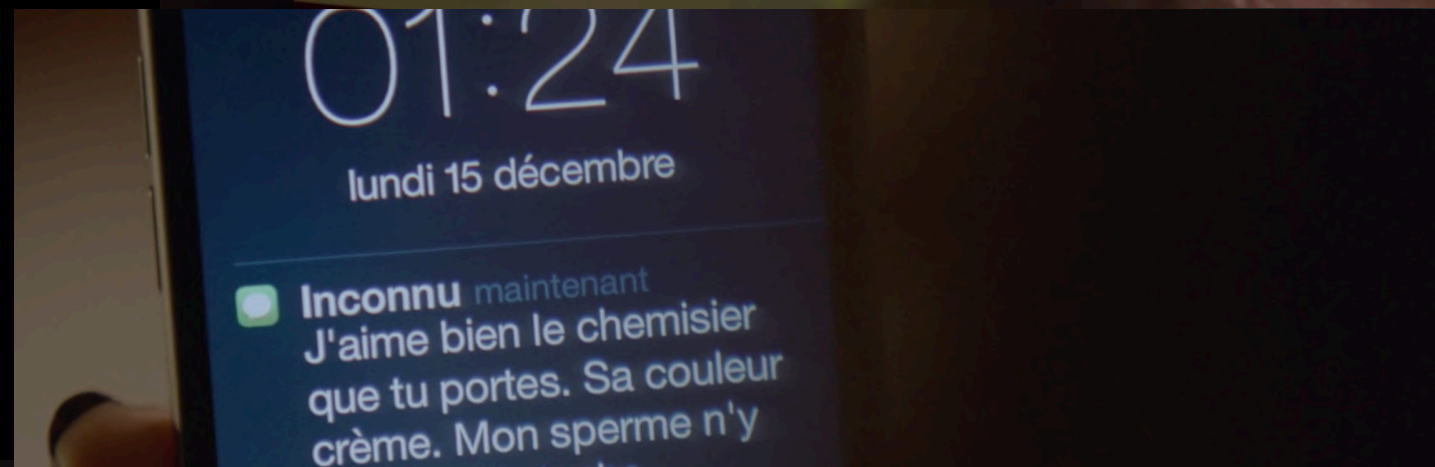
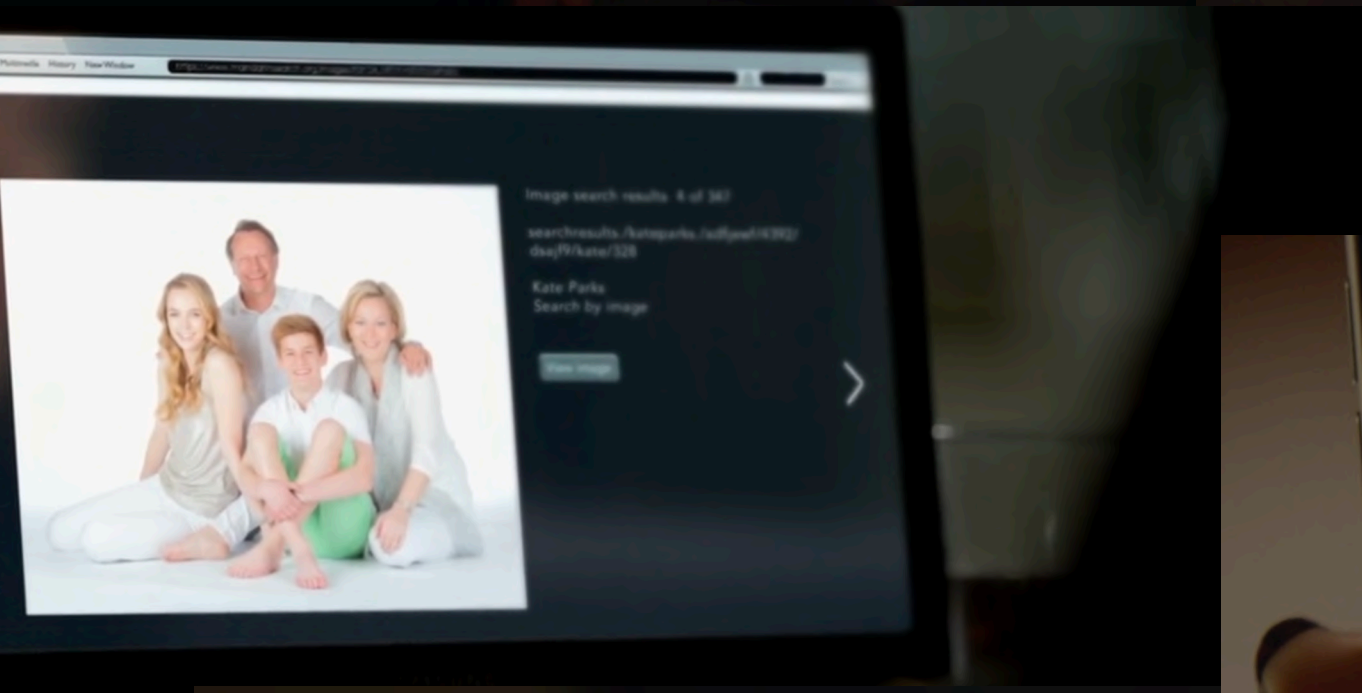
When she leaves they remind her about the upcoming birthday party for the twins.





SANTA STALKS ESTEBAN

Back home, Santa looks through social media on her computer and finds Esteban's profile. She is shocked to see that her new patient, Cecilia, is Esteban's wife. Santa scrolls through the photos of this seemingly happy marriage.



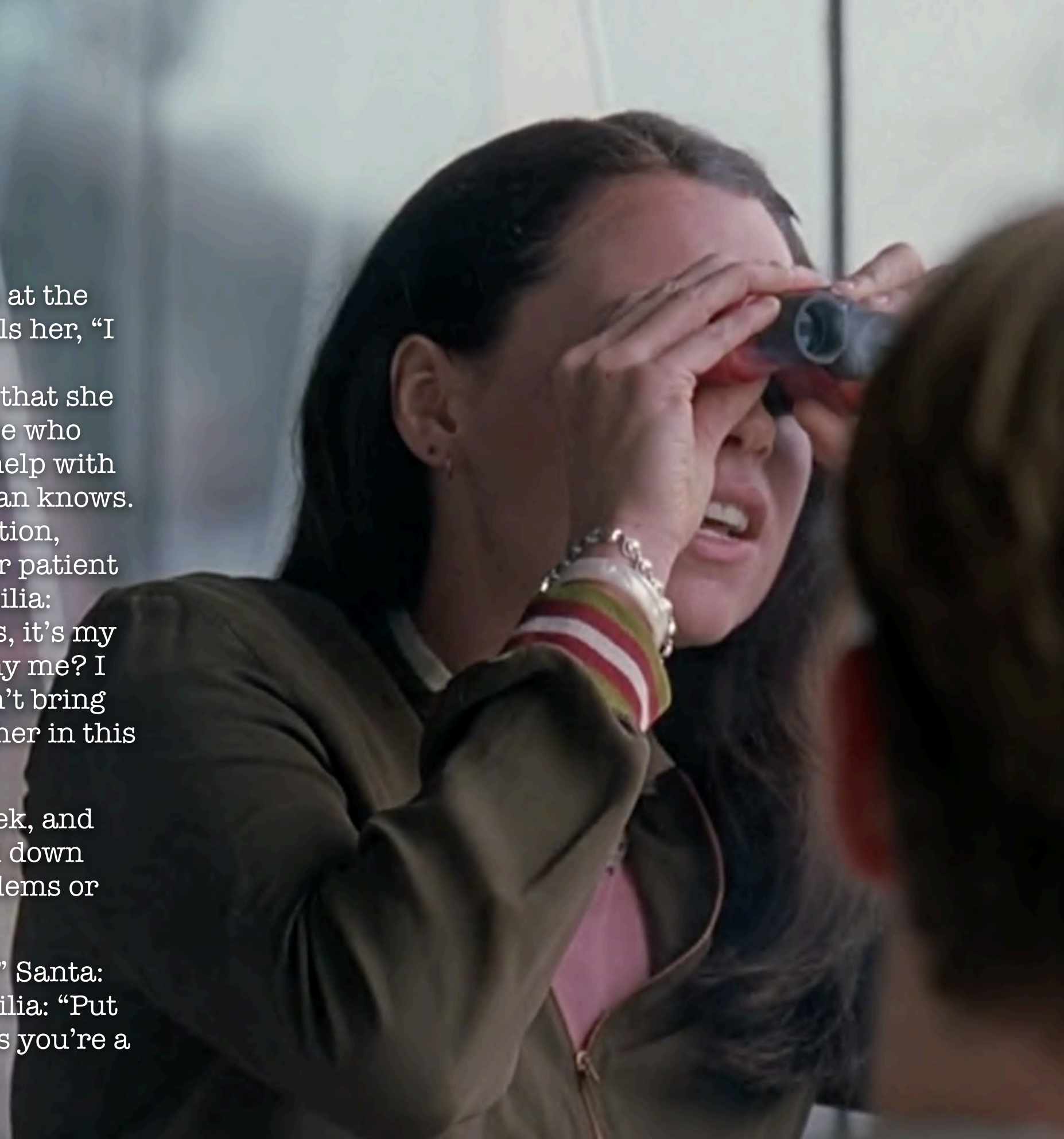
SANTA BACK AT THE RACETRACK

Santa is back at the racetrack, watching the greyhounds. Cecilia arrives at the track and sits next to her. Santa asks, “How did you find me?” Cecilia tells her, “I asked around.”

Santa asks her “Why didn’t you tell me who you were?” Cecilia explains that she didn’t want it to get in the way of their business. “Actually, I didn’t realize who you were until after. But Who cares?”. Santa tells Cecilia that she can’t help with her problem. She explains that it isn’t a moral issue. Santa asks if Esteban knows. Cecilia says no. When Santa asks why Esteban isn’t part of the conversation, Cecilia tells her “I didn’t think you’d be the kind of doctor who thinks her patient needs her husband’s permission.” Santa: “Your husband is a friend.” Cecilia: “Well, you were more than friends, but I am not a jealous person. Besides, it’s my body and my choice and I’m your patient and I’m in trouble.” Santa: “Why me? I can get you other names.” Cecilia: “Are they better than you?” Santa can’t bring herself to say that they are. Cecilia adds: “Plus, everyone knows each other in this fucking city. It’ll get out.”

Cecilia says that the baby is not Esteban’s. Santa tells her to give it a week, and then she’ll do it. Cecilia says she’s not a teenager and doesn’t need a cool down period to think about it. “Are you able to help real women with real problems or are you full of shit?” She adds: I can pay.

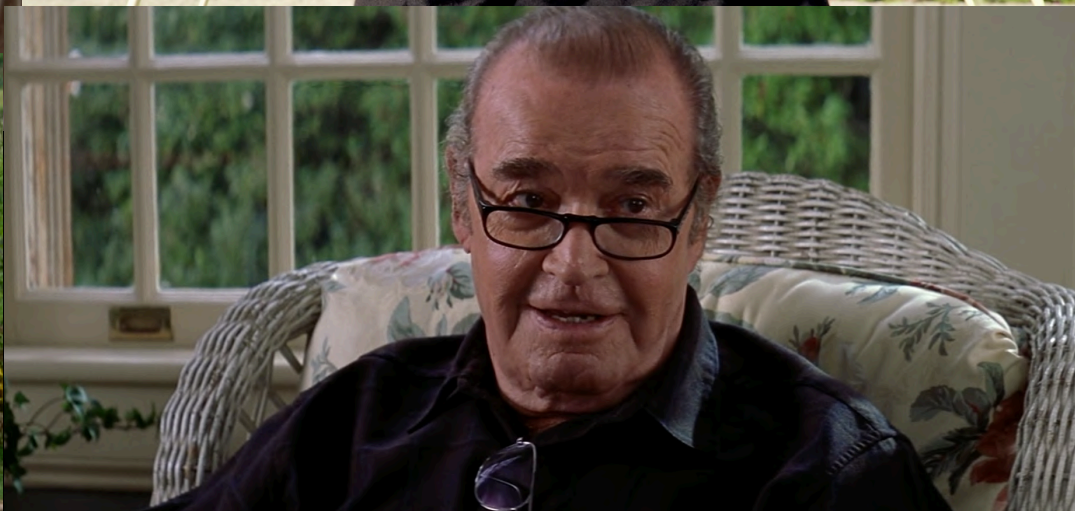
Santa says money doesn’t matter to her. Cecilia: “Five thousand dollars.” Santa: “That’s way too much. Even if I were to do it I wouldn’t charge that.” Cecilia: “Put it towards your patients that can’t pay. You do that right? Everyone says you’re a saint.”





SANTA VISITS LUCAS

Santa visits her father LUCAS, who has been living in an assisted living facility for a few months. He is in his 70's but years of drinking have taken a toll and he appears older. He struggles with all sorts of health issues, but still stays chipper, if clear-eyed, about his state. "You're too young to be living here." He replies: "Time will take care of that."



SANTA VISITS LUCAS

Santa tells him, as she does almost every time she visits him (which is often), that she is unhappy with the place, and doesn't understand why he chooses to live here, after both her and her brothers have offered to take him in. He refuses to take up space in their homes and in their lives. He lists the things he needs help with, and just the list of his meds is daunting. Plus, he says, he gets laid here. Living with his children he'd be condemned to a life of celibacy. He points out a couple of women with whom he's had encounters and retells them in hysterical detail (how ED pills are like gold there, whether it's worth it using a condom, etc... "And by the way, could you prescribe me some Cialis? Viagra gives me headaches." She does.)

Santa enjoys his stories and it's clear she's her dad's daughter.

(While they talk Santa takes his vitals and listens to his chest, to satisfy herself that she's up to date on his condition.)

Lucas also asks Santa about her life and he has great, lucid, perspective on it. When Esteban's return is mentioned, he offers a compelling theory that Santa's night of losing her virginity and getting into an accident may have had unconscious motives. "Why haven't you said this before?", she asks. "I'm into truth telling now," he replies. Santa rejects his theories and hits back reminding him of the ways he sucked as a father, despite being fun. It gets heated for a moment but they move on from it, long ago having accepted each other for who they are.

Santa tries to elicit his help in convincing her brothers to buy her part of the land. He says no. "It's another advantage of getting old: I don't care to take on anyone else's problems."



CECILIA AT THE HOSPITAL

Later, in the hospital. Santa is filling out paperwork at a nurses' station. A buzzer sounds, and a nurse tells her that it's her patient.

Santa walks into the hospital room and Cecilia is in bed, looking a little tired but mostly recovered. She asks what happened and Santa explains. Cecilia asks: "Were you able to finish what we started?". Santa nods yes. At that moment a man in his mid-forties, ESTEBAN walks in. He is Cecilia's husband and Santa's ex-fiance. He walks right in and greets his wife affectionately. It's not till he turns to talk to the doctor that he realizes it's Santa.

When Esteban asks what happened Santa jumps in and explains that Cecilia had called that she was spotting, and when she came in it was clear that she was having a very early miscarriage, the rest was an allergic reaction to the anesthetic. Cecilia adds: "I didn't even know I was pregnant."

Esteban asks: "How did that even happen?", which is a question that goes unanswered and hangs in the air.

When Esteban asks how Cecilia came to be Santa's patient, she says she was recommended everywhere. "Why?", adds Cecilia, "You two know each other?" It's a joke and all three laugh. As much as they can.



A person is swimming in the ocean, seen from above through the railing of a boat. The person is wearing a white shirt and orange pants. The water is a deep blue-green color. The boat's railing is visible in the foreground, and the person's head and arms are visible above the water.

THANK YOU!

RODRIGO GARCÍA