

MARTHA SIDES

# Gloryhole

*a cocksure new play*

*by*

Christian Victor Levatino

Fri 6/6 @ 6:30pm (Preview)

Sat 6/14 @ 10pm

Thu 6/19 @ 10:30pm

Wed 6/25 @ 6:30pm

Sun 6/29 @ 7:30pm

***"Desire is structure. Grief is pattern. The hole is the truth."***



## **SCENE 9: The Gloryhole (26 Minutes Later)**

The stage is dark, silent except for the faint sound of heavy breathing and muffled voices. A single spotlight snaps on, illuminating Todd as he stands at the edge of the “arena,” hesitant. The opening drums of “*Everybody Wants Some*” by Van Halen kicks in, filling the space with raw energy.

### **STAGING W/ MUSIC TIMING:**

**0:42** - Another spotlight bursts on, revealing the Gloryhole - a stark industrial-looking structure with an ominous presence. Todd takes his first tentative step toward it.

**0:49** - A second light reveals the back wall. Dimly glowing with graffiti and hints of shadowy movement. Todd stops, unsure, his breathing audible now.

**0:55** - Lights flicker around the edges of the stage, pulsing in rhythm with the drumbeat, giving the scene an electric, almost dreamlike quality. Todd steps closer, drawn in.

**1:02** - The Gloryhole itself is fully lit, a harsh, fluorescent spotlight framing the jagged opening. The music crescendos as Todd reaches out, almost touching the wall but pulling back at the last second.

**1:09** - A burst of color floods the stage as Todd steps closer, his face framed by the hole’s eerie glow. The stage lights pulse with the beat, and the music roars as the moment crescendos into chaos.

### **FINAL CUE:**

At **1:16**, the music peak as Todd places his hand on the wall beside the hole, his face illuminated by the harsh spotlight. The stage freezes in tableau for a moment before the lights fade sharply, leaving only the sound of the fading guitar riff echoing in the darkness.

### **LIGHTS SLOWLY FADE**

### **LIGHTS SLOWLY FADE UP ON:**

## **SCENE 10: The Gloryhole (9 Minutes Later)**

The lighting is dim, soft blues and ambers casting long shadows. The faint buzz of an overhead fluorescent hums like a distant heartbeat. The room feels cold, claustrophobic - a world in limbo. Todd sits on his side of the Gloryhole, zipping up his pants. He's frozen for a moment, staring blankly at the hole, breathing heavy. Silence settles.

A click of metal on metal pierces the quiet - once, then again - followed by a muffled curse:

MARTHA (O.S.)

*(under her breath, frustrated)* Son of a bitch...come on...

Another beat of strained silence, a third click that fails to spark. She exhales in exasperation.

MARTHA (O.S.)

*(hushed, but clearly)* Hey, you got a light?

Todd flinches, startled, the voice catching him off guard. Low, gravelly, unmistakably female.

MARTHA (O.S.)

*(calmly, with a hint of amusement)* You heard me, sweetheart. You got a lighter or not?

Todd clears his throat, fumbling in his pocket.

TODD

Uh...yeah. Yeah, I do.

He pulls out his Bic lighter. For a beat, nothing happens. Then, a cigarette appears through the Gloryhole - a delicate gesture against the harsh backdrop. Todd kneels, flicks the lighter, and guides the flame. The cigarette crackles, the tip glowing red in the dim light.

MARTHA (O.S.)

*(exhaling, smoke curling through the hole)* There we go. You're a gentleman.

Todd sits back against the wall, still unsure if he should leave or stay. Martha inhales again, the pause hanging heavy.

MARTHA (O.S.)

You want a drag?

TODD

Sure...why not?

MARTHA (O.S.)

Good boy.

The cigarette pokes back through the hole toward Todd. He hesitates, but eventually reaches out, takes it, and brings it to his lips. He inhales and immediately coughs.

MARTHA (O.S.)

Amateur.

TODD

*(through coughing)* Yeah, no shit.

He takes another drag, steadier this time. Smoke curls upwards, catching the dim light. There's a silence as they share this strange, intimate ritual. Suddenly, there's a faint crinkle of plastic. Todd glances at the hole, confused.

TODD

What are you doing?

MARTHA (O.S.)

*(deadpan)* Maintenance.

Through the hole, a Clorox wipe appears, and Martha starts scrubbing around the duct tape framing the opening. Her movements are meticulous, almost meditative.

MARTHA (O.S.)

Trust me, sweetheart, this ain't The Spa at Four Seasons.

TODD

*(laughing nervously)* How often do you have to replace the duct tape?

MARTHA (O.S.)

Once a week. Twice if business is booming.

She tosses the wipe into a small trash bag on her side. The faint snap of the plastic closing breaks the silence.

MARTHA (O.S.)

*(patting the wall)* Good as new.

Todd shakes his head, laughing softly despite himself. He takes a deep breath, exhaling like he's loosening something coiled up inside.

TODD

How long you been doing this?

MARTHA (O.S.)

Too long. Not long enough. Depends on the day.

TODD

How'd you...end up here?

MARTHA (O.S.)

Same way everyone ends up anywhere. A little luck, a lot of bad decisions, and a touch of stubbornness.

Todd chuckles, the first genuine sound he's made. Martha inhales again and exhales slow.

MARTHA (O.S.)

And you? What brings you to the world's loneliest conversation booth?

TODD

*(quietly)* Grief, I guess.

MARTHA (O.S.)

*(soft, reflective)* Heavy word.

TODD

*(after a beat)* Feels heavier than it sounds.

MARTHA (O.S.)

So what's her name?

TODD

Colleen.

MARTHA (O.S.)

*(after a pause)* Solid name. Solid woman, too, I bet.

TODD

Yeah. She was. Solid. The kind of person who kept everything together.

MARTHA (O.S.)

And now you're falling apart.

Todd doesn't respond. He blinks, then swallows. The words land hard.

MARTHA (O.S.)

*(softer now)* You know, kid, grief's funny. It doesn't go away. You just learn to make room for it. Let it sit next to you instead of on top of you. Some days it behaves. Some days it's a bastard.

Todd listens, quietly taking it in.

TODD

How'd you get so wise?

MARTHA (O.S.)

*(laughing)* Oh, I'm not. I'm just old. When you've been around long enough, you figure out some of life's bullshit. And when you don't? You just make it up.

TODD

*(smiles)* You're not so bad, you know.

MARTHA (O.S.)

Careful, kid, flattery might get you a second blowjob.

Todd chuckles, takes one last drag, and then passes the cigarette back through the hole. Martha takes it, finishing it off with a long, steady inhale.

MARTHA (O.S.)

You're not the first lost soul to come through here, you know. Won't be the last. But let me tell you something -- *(she takes a long drag)* -- Whatever you think you're looking for, you won't find it in a hole in the wall.

Todd stares at the hole, her words settling into him. For the first time, he seems like he's on the verge of opening up more, of saying something deeper, when three sharp knocks echo on the other side of the wall. Todd startles, his thoughts shattered. Martha sighs, her voice turning practical again.

MARTHA (O.S.)

Breaks over. *(she stubs out her cigarette)* Take care of yourself, kid.

Her footsteps retreat, leaving Todd sitting alone in the booth. He stares at the wall, torn between staying and leaving, his mind racing. Finally, he stands, brushes himself off, and exits the room. The sound of the door closing echoes as the lights dim, leaving just the faint curl of smoke lingering in the air.

**LIGHTS FADE**

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**MUSIC: NEED YOU TONIGHT**  
(MENDELSON MIX) // INXS

**LIGHTS UP ON:**

**SCENE 12: The Gloryhole (Second Encounter: One Week Later)**

The room remains unchanged - dim, sterile, humming with the same overhead fluorescent buzz.



But this time, the Gloryhole is angled slightly, revealing the faint silhouette of Martha behind a this curtain. Todd stands on his side, more composed than before, though the nerves still flicker beneath the surface. A long, charged silence. Then -

MARTHA (O.S.)

Back again, huh?

Her voice cuts through the stillness, low and knowing. Tod startles but quickly recovers.

TODD

Yeah...how did you...

MARTHA (O.S.)

Gotta say, kid, didn't peg you for a repeat customer.

TODD

*(quietly)* Didn't think I'd be one.

MARTHA (O.S.)

So what brings you back? The Ambiance? The duct tape?

TODD

*(chuckles nervously)* It's the Clorox wipes, really. Hard to resist.

MARTHA (O.S.)

*(laughing)* Good answer. You learn fast.

A pause.

TODD

I just...I needed to talk to you again.

MARTHA (O.S.)

Talk? You sure you're in the right place for that?

TODD

*(with a small smile)* I think I am.

Another pause. Martha seems to sense the weight in the words. Her voice softens.

MARTHA (O.S.)

What's on your mind, kid?

TODD

I don't know. I just...I can't stop thinking about what you said last time. About grief. About making space for it.

MARTHA (O.S.)

Ah, the pearls of wisdom from the gloryhole philosopher.

TODD

*(chuckling softly)* You should write a book.

MARTHA (O.S.)

Yeah, sure. *"Life Lessons behind the Duct Tape"*. Bestseller for sure.

They share a laugh, the tension easing slightly.

TODD

*(earnest)* It's just...I don't talk to people about this stuff. Not my brother-in-law, not my friends. Nobody really gets it. But with you...I don't know. It's different.

MARTHA (O.S.)

Different how?

TODD

You're...honest. No bullshit.

MARTHA (O.S.)

You say that like it's a good thing.

TODD

It is.

Another pause. Martha exhales slowly, her tone shifting.

MARTHA (O.S.)

You know, honesty's easy when you've got nothing left to lose.

TODD

You really believe that?

MARTHA (O.S.)

*(beat)* Sometimes. Sometimes I think it's just easier to be honest when you're already in the muck. Can't fall any lower, so why not call it like it is?

Todd absorbs this, staring at the wall like he can see her through it. He hesitates, then speaks.

TODD

I want to see you.

The words hang in the air, heavy and raw. Martha doesn't respond right away. When she does, her voice is laced with a mix of humor and caution.

MARTHA (O.S.)

Let a girl get a little gussied up first, will you?

TODD

*(smiling faintly)* Sorry, I didn't mean to -

MARTHA (O.S.)

Relax, sweetheart. I get it.

A pause. She inhales, then exhales slowly.

MARTHA (O.S.)

One of the perks of this job? Doesn't matter how I look. Nobody cares what's on the other side of the wall. It's freeing, in a way.

TODD

I care.

This stops her. For a moment, there's only silence. Then, her tone softens.

MARTHA (O.S.)

*(softly)* Nobody's said that in a long time.

TODD

With other people, I feel like grief is a show I can't take on the road.

MARTHA (O.S.)

Yeah...I get that.

TODD

I came here to disappear, and instead i found...you. That's messed up, right?

MARTHA (O.S.)

Maybe. Or maybe it's exactly what you needed.

TODD

So...what now?

MARTHA (O.S.)

Let me think about it. *(takes a drag off her cigarette)* You don't want to meet me in some back alley or the parking lot of a Taco Bell, do you? Let me figure something out. We'll do it right.

TODD

Okay.

MARTHA (O.S.)

Okay.

A beat. Todd leans forward slightly, his voice dropping.

TODD

Thank you.

MARTHA (O.S.)

Don't thank me yet, kid. You might regret it.

Her tone is light, but there's something deeper beneath it. Todd smiles faintly. Martha inhales again, the sound of her cigarette filling the silence.

MARTHA (O.S.)

Alright, Todd. If you want your cock sucked, you better pull it out now...time's a tickin'.

Todd freezes, caught completely off guard. Martha starts laughing on the other side of the wall - low, smoky, and infectious. Todd can't help but laugh, too, shaking his head as he stands to leave.

TODD

You're something else, you know that?

MARTHA (O.S.)

Don't forget it.

Todd exits, and the sound of the door closing echoes as the lights dim. Martha leans back against the wall on her side, exhaling smoke one last time before flicking her cigarette into the ashtray.

**FADE TO BLACK**

**AUDIO CUE: MAYBE // HARRY NILSSON**

**LIGHTS UP:**

**SCENE 13: Republic of Pie on Magnolia**

Todd sits at a small table, fidgeting with his coffee cup. He looks out of place, nervous but determined. Martha enters, her presence commanding yet warm. She wears an elegant scarf, her confidence radiating. Todd stands as she approaches.

TODD

Hi. Uh...Martha?

MARTHA

*(smiling)* That's me. Surprised?

TODD

*(awkwardly)* No...I mean, yeah. I mean -

MARTHA

*(laughing)* Let me guess. You were expecting someone younger.

TODD

*(lying)* No.

MARTHA

*(smirking)* Sure you weren't. The pause gave you away, honey. But don't worry - I'm not offended. It's not every day you meet a seventy-nine-year-old who can still rock a pair of heels, let alone, well, you know.

TODD

*(nervously)* Right. Yeah. You look...great.

MARTHA

*(smirking)* Relax, Todd. I'm not gonna bite. Not unless you ask nicely.

Todd chuckles nervously, clearly out of his depth. Martha studies him, amused.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

So? What's the verdict? Do I match the picture you had in your head?

TODD

*(blurting out)* I didn't think you'd be...I mean, you don't look -

MARTHA

*(playfully leaning in)* Like someone who should be knitting sweaters and yelling at kids to get off my lawn?

TODD

*(laughing)* Something like that.

MARTHA

Well, I hate to disappoint, but the only thing I've ever knitted is a web of bad decisions. Now, why don't you stop sweating and tell me what's on your mind?

TODD

I just...I don't get it. You're - you're...you. And the gloryhole is -

MARTHA

*(smiling knowingly)* A filthy little hole in the wall?

TODD

*(laughs nervously)* Yeah.

MARTHA

*(shrugs)* It's not about the place, Todd. It's the people. The connection. Even if it's just for a moment.

She pauses, studying him closely, her tone softening.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

But enough about me. What about you, sugar? Why'd you walk into that filthy little hole in the wall?

TODD

*(avoiding her eyes)* I don't know.

MARTHA

Oh, come on. A handsome guy like you? The gloryhole doesn't exactly scream "first option."

TODD

*(sighing, after a beat)* I've been on dates. Since...since my wife passed. People keep telling me it's time to move on, you know. That I should "put myself out there." So I did. A lot of them were nice. Pretty. Smart.

MARTHA

But?

TODD

*(shrugging)* I don't feel anything. It's like there's this wall.

MARTHA

And you think the gloryhole's the solution?

TODD

*(laughing awkwardly)* I don't know. It's not like I planned it. It came up when me and my brother in law were talking and I thought. "Why not?" I figured, no strings, no pressure, no expectations.

MARTHA

But not exactly satisfying either, is it?

TODD

*(looking down)* No.

MARTHA

*(after a beat, gently)* You've got a good heart, Todd. Most men wouldn't even think twice about using someone to scratch an itch. The fact that you're sitting here, worried about feeling something, tells me you're still holding on to her.

TODD

*(surprised)* Her?

MARTHA

Your wife.

Todd looks at her, startled by her perception.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

*(with a warm, knowing smile)* You don't have to say it. It's written all over you.

Todd nods slowly, letting that sink in.

TODD

*(after a beat, choosing his words)* You see through people, Martha. It's like...you've been on every side of life, and you just get it. *(he sets his coffee down, breathes in)* I can't help asking...how'd you end up here? Or maybe, how did you *become* who you are?

MARTHA

*(quiet laugh)* You sure you want that story?

TODD

*(leans forward, sincere)* Please. I can't shake the feeling you have all the answers I didn't know I needed.

Martha eyes him for a moment, deciding.

MARTHA

*(lifting her coffee cup, her tone lightening)* Alright, sugar. Since you asked - properly. *(she leans back, playful demeanor slipping on like a well-worn coat)* You know, you're not the first man to be curious about me. But most of them aren't interested in the real story. They're interested in the fantasy. The idea. But you? You look like someone who actually wants to understand. So, here it is. *(sips her coffee, eyes flickering with memory)* I was born in 1945, right after the war. My mama called me her victory baby - until I was about six. By then, she started calling me her little curse. I had a knack for trouble. Breaking things, sticking my nose where it didn't belong. By sixteen, I wasn't just finding trouble - I was making it. I had a gift for sneaking into places, outrunning the cops, dating men I shouldn't...*(let's out a wry chuckle)*

TODD

*(absorbed in her words)* That...can't have been easy.

MARTHA

*(eyes twinkling)* Easy? Hell, no. But it taught me how to navigate. And I guess...it taught me how to see right through men who posture but never really *feel*.



That's why when I see you...(she taps his arm gently)...I know you're different. (she smiles, touches his hand) By twenty, I was bartending, grifting, dancing. First job was waitressing at a diner off Route 66. Poring coffee for truckers who thought a pat on the ass was a tip. I smiled, I ducked, I survived.

Then I met Debbs. Safecracker. Smooth as jazz on vinyl. He made me feel like I was someone. For a while, I was. He'd crack the safe, I'd stand lookout, and we'd vanish before anyone knew we were there. I even tried cracking once - turns out, my hands weren't steady enough. But Debbs? He was a maestro.

Until he wasn't.

One night, the cops showed up. I ran. Debbs didn't. That was the last time I saw him - standing in a bank vault, hands up, grinning like the whole thing was a joke. I heard later he got ten years. Me? I hitched my way to California and decided to reinvent myself.

I tried going straight, I really did. Got a job dancing at a club on Sunset. Mickey Cohen came in once, called me "the best thing on two legs," and for a minute, I thought I'd made it. But trouble? Trouble's like a tattoo - it stays with you.

By the time I was twenty-eight, I'd been a magician's assistant, a jazz singer, an exotic dancer. Then one night, a guy hands me a card. Says I've got a "timeless look." I almost didn't call, but rent was due. So, I did. That's how Cheri Velvet was born.

"*Honeypie*." That was my first film. Classy, right? But when the camera rolled, something clicked. It wasn't just about taking my clothes off - it was about becoming someone else. Someone bold, untouchable, larger than life. For the first time, I felt seen. And I was good. Damn good. By the mid-70's, I was a star. Not the kind of star you see on Hollywood Boulevard, but a star nonetheless. I could hold an audience. I could make them want more.

But stars fade. By the 80s, the industry was changing. I wasn't the hot young thing anymore, so I pivoted - escort work, private parties. It kept the lights on. Until it didn't. By my 50's, the calls stopped. And by my 60s, I was living out of my car. And that's when Dario found me.

Dario's dad - Debbs, of all people - had passed away by then, but Dario? He had his own empire. A little darker, a little more ruthless. He slid into the diner booth like he owned the world and said, "*Cheri Velvet. Thought you were dead.*"

And for a minute, I thought maybe I was. He offered me a roof, a gig - no illusions attached. Yes, the gloryhole is a filthy hole in the wall, but it's better than freezing alone in a Buick with a busted heater. And that's how I landed here, Todd.

Not by choice, exactly, but by necessity. And once you've fallen that far, you hold tight to anything that keeps you afloat. *(voice softens, taking on a hint of vulnerability)* Dario might be a bastard, but he's a bastard who threw me a lifeline. And you don't forget that, no matter how much you might want to. *(looks at Todd, her voice sharpening)* But don't pity me, Todd. I've earned every damn inch of this life. If you're asking me to just leave, you'd better have a damned good reason. Because men like Dario don't let go easy. And women like me? We don't run unless we see something real on the other side.

A long silence. Todd is visibly moved.

TODD

*(murmuring)* I'm not asking you to run. I'm asking you to consider something...gentler. A life that doesn't ask you to survive every damn second.

MARTHA

*(small smile)* That's a sweet thought. But peace is a foreign language to some of us. I'm not sure I'd know how to live with it.

TODD

*(softly, taking her hand)* Then let me help you learn.

MARTHA

*(quiet)* You really don't know what you're offering.

TODD

No. But I'm still offering it.

They hold each other's gaze. For once,  
Martha has no clever retort. Just a slow,  
genuine breath.

MARTHA

*(soft, unsure)* Maybe...maybe it's time I stopped drifting. Maybe you're not just a lost kid in a booth. *(hold his gaze)* All right, sugar. If I'm gonna run, maybe I'll start running toward something for a change. You might be that something...or at least a push in the right direction.

Martha lifts her coffee, clinks it gently  
against his. A silent toast to the unexpected.

**LIGHTS FADE**

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**BLUE LIGHT**

**SCENE 15: A Back Room At The Gloryhole**

A private “prep” area off a small adult bookstore or peepshow lounge. The walls are scuffed, fluorescent lighting buzzes overhead. A battered chair, a small table with a hand mirror, and scattered tissues or disinfectant wipes. Martha stands at a narrow counter, removing knee pads. She smooths her hair down, looking fatigued but steadfast.

**LIGHTS UP ON:**

Martha sets one knee pad on the table, then the other. She rubs her knees with a small sigh, tucking them away in a bag. She glances in a hand mirror, letting her hair down carefully, wincing as she removes a couple of hairpins.

**MARTHA**

*(soft exhale)* Another day, another...*(trails off quietly)* Enough of this, Cheri. It’s all just...

She pulls out a comb, gives her hair a quick brush.

A dull metal “clank” from Off Stage. Martha tenses, glances up at the battered steel door. After a beat, a curtain swings open, revealing Dario.

**DARIO**

*(sashays in)* Huh. Good timing. Here I thought I’d have to come drag you out of a booth. But you’re already...finishing up.

**MARTHA**

*(straightening, tries to keep composure)* Dario. You want something? Because I’m clocked out. I was just about to...

DARIO

*(interrupting, scanning the room)* Yeah, I heard about your “just about to.” Lacey says you’ve been spouting nonsense about “moving on” or “getting the fuck outta Dodge.” That ring a bell, Grandma?

Martha stiffens. She places the knee pads on the table carefully, refusing to look away.

MARTHA

*(quiet but firm)* First off, watch your mouth. Second, if Lacey’s chirping, that’s her problem. I told her we all have a right to think about the future, that’s all.

DARIO

*(scoff, stepping in closer)* The “future,” huh? Big word. Funny coming from an eighty year old sex worker sucking cocks behind a wall for rent money. You think the future’s lookin’ bright? *(flashes a grin)*

MARTHA

*(tenses her jaw)* Maybe brighter than you think.

DARIO

*(laughs sharply)* Oh, sure. I’m thrilled to see. You fantasize about prancing off into the sunset. But let’s be real: if you had that option, you’d have taken it decades ago. You’re here because you’ve got nowhere else.

He paces, letting the overhead flicker cast harsh shadows across his face.

DARIO

*(eyes trailing over Martha’s hair)* Letting her hair down, that’s cute. Trying to recapture old Cheri Velvet glam? Newsflash: that star burned out.

MARTHA

*(grips the edge of the table)* I’m done letting you talk to me like I’m garbage.

DARIO

*(mock-pout)* Aw, you don’t like my tone? Then maybe you should be more communicative. You know, communication - that little courtesy we apparently forgot. Because I sure as hell shouldn’t hear from Lacey...*Lacey* of all people, that my biggest “asset” is thinking of flying the coop.

MARTHA

*(biting back)* Biggest asset? You really think I’m your best earner? You exploit me for scraps while you rake in the bigger cut. And you wonder why I’d want out?

DARIO

*(grinning predatorily)* Yes, because you're the best earner, ironically. Nostalgia sells, grandma. There's a niche for "vintage" everything these days. *(steps closer, voice dropping)* But let's be crystal clear: if you bolt, you lose the roof, the paper, and any shred of dignity you pretend is left. Because out there? No one invests in washed-up legends.

MARTHA

*(eyes flashing)* I've survived a lot worse than you, Dario. Don't think I'm scared to be on my own.

DARIO

Oh, I know your big story - you used to be a star. You sucked Warren Beatty's dick on a dingy in Avalon. So fucking what? That was half a century ago. Now you're scrounging for tips in a sticky booth. You can't afford to get on my bad side.

A tense silence. Martha exhales through her nose, refusing to break eye contact.

MARTHA

Tell me something...Why do you get off humiliating me? Is it because your daddy once had a thing for me?

Dario's eyes flare dangerously.

DARIO

Don't you fucking talk about my dad you dumb old bitch. You don't get to bandy his name around. He's the one who gave you an in, and I'm the one who keeps you afloat. So show gratitude, not attitude.

MARTHA

*(heat in her voice)* "Gratitude"? I've been on my knees doing your dirty job for years. I've paid that debt ten times over! And you know it.

DARIO

*(deceptively calm, a sneer forming)* You think that covers everything? You got rent, spare change, a little warmth? You think those Keurig cups are free? There's interest, darling, never forget that. It's an endless cycle if *I say so*.

MARTHA

*(tosses her hair brush onto the table, the clatter echoing)* You're disgusting. One day, I won't be here, Dario. And you'll regret it.

DARIO

*(leans forward, menacing)* Let me guess, you found a new sugar daddy? That's what Lacey said. Some do-gooder or "friend" offering you a way out? How precious. *(leans in close to her)* Listen carefully: if that's true, if there's some chump from the outside sniffing around, I'll bury him. I'll bury both of you. Because I don't like my property being fucked with.

MARTHA

*(glaring)* I am not your property.

DARIO

*(smirk widens)* See, that's where you're wrong. As long as you owe me, you're my commodity. *Until* I say otherwise.

Martha's hands tighten into fists. She seems ready to slap him but quells the urge.

MARTHA

*(lower, trembling)* You can threaten me all you want, but I'd rather sleep in a Buick again than degrade myself another day for your cut. So keep talking, Dario. You're only proving how pathetic you are.

DARIO

*(chuckles, a raw, chilling sound)* Pathetic? That's funny coming from a woman hawking blowjobs to any rando who stumbles in a dark booth. At least I get paid wearing clothes. You? On your knees with knee pads - real glamorous, Cheri.

He flicks a finger at the knee pads on the table.

DARIO (CONT'D)

You ever think that's all you're worth now?

Martha's eyes burn with tears she won't let fall. She picks up the knee pads, hugging them to her chest like a shield.

MARTHA

Enough...Enough.

DARIO

Oh, by all means - if you're done, walk out that door. But don't cry to me when you realize nobody wants a cameo from a wrinkled, washed up has-been. Good luck with your "new boyfriend," if he even exists. You'll learn real quick how fast illusions burn.

He steps back, crossing arms, tilting his head imperiously.

MARTHA

*(quietly, determined)* He's real. And even if he wasn't, I'd still leave. This can't be my tomb.

DARIO

*(stony grin)* Fine. But you and I both know you'll be crawling back or living in a cardboard box. *(points at her)* Next time you have ideas about skipping, come talk to me directly. Or I'll handle it my way. *(exhaling, as if bored)* I'll expect you here tomorrow, same time. Don't be late, and don't run your mouth. Clear?

Martha doesn't answer. The tension sizzles.

DARIO (CONT'D)

*(gives a half-laugh)* That's what I thought. Sleep tight, grandma.

He disappears through the curtain. For a beat, Martha remains frozen, chest heaving, eyes brimming with rage and sorrow. She rubs her forehead, trying to keep it together.

MARTHA

*(breath shaky)* Dammit...

She lifts her gaze at the battered mirror, sees her own reflection, older yet proud. She steels her spine, a flicker of defiance in her eyes.

**LIGHTS SLOWLY FADE OUT**

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**AUDIO: NIGHT // JOHN CARPENTER**

### **SCENE 17: Kevin's Living Room (Same Day)**

Todd enters, anxiety flickering in his eyes.  
Silence - until Dario steps out of the shadows, cool, composed, not theatrical - just a man who knows exactly how the world works.

TODD

*(throws his keys on the counter with agitation)* Martha...Jesus, where are you?

He turns to find Dario leaning casually  
against the wall, arms crossed, a faint lamp  
glowing behind him.

DARIO

*(smooth, calm)* You got a nice place.

TODD

*(heart pounding)* Who the fuck are you?

DARIO

I think you know who I am.

TODD

Where's Martha?

DARIO

*(sits, legs crossed)* Relax. She's fine. But you and me? We need to talk.

TODD

*(icy)* There's nothing to say.

DARIO

*(laughs softly)* Oh, there's plenty. Like how you're screwing a very stable revenue stream. You think this is about love, guilt, redemption? It's not. It's about infrastructure. You're fucking with my overhead, Todd.

TODD

You're exploiting her.

DARIO

I'm employing her. Big difference. You think those booths maintain themselves? There's lighting, camera, editing. VPN. Moderators. Tip processors. You walked into an ecosystem.

TODD

She doesn't owe you her life.

DARIO

She owes me stability. Roof over her head. Heat in winter. You want to rewrite the narrative now, but she came to me. Don't forget that.



*(leans in)* Martha - HoneyPie, Cheri - whatever name you prefer - she's my vintage jackpot. The "Mature Fetish" is hotter than it's ever been. Authenticity sells. Every wrinkle, every moan - guys eat it up. And I own the whole catalog. *(counting on fingers)* Live tips? Entry-level. Booth work, custom clips, deep fakes, I skim 90%. I own the setup - the lights, the mop, the goddamn ambiance. Every session? Recorded. Full audio. Night vision. Multi-angle.

I push it to my premium channel - 5,000 subscribers and climbing. Think it's consensual? That's the fantasy. Her voice? That smoker's rasp? I chop it into domme ASMR, bedtime porn for lonely weirdos. Some guy in Sheboygan jerks off nightly to her whispering, "Good boys don't come without permission."

And the old stuff? I've got every loop. I remaster them, slap on fake commentary. "Cheri Velvet's Lost Director's Cut." They eat that shit with a spoon.

She has no idea. She never will. *(beat, colder now)* I even control her pills. No meds, no knees. No knees, no booth. She stopped showing once - so I stopped her painkillers. Didn't last a week.

*(beat)*

This isn't easy, you know. It's a business. I got five people eating off this. And you? You wanna come in here like your Temu Jon Hamm and blow it all up? *(beat)* Look, I get it. You caught feelings. You want to be the white knight. But here's where that gets tricky - knights don't usually get their dicks filmed without consent.

He pulls out his phone, casual.

DARIO

You ever see your own cumshot in night vision? I have and let me tell you, Peter North would be jealous. *(smiles)* I've got several angels. HD. You're face is blurred - for now. But one click, and your little secret goes viral.

TODD

*(furious)* You're threatening me?

DARIO

No. I'm offering you perspective. You walk away, nothing gets uploaded. Simple as that. No revenge. No fallout. We all keep moving.

TODD

And Martha?

DARIO

She keeps doing what she does best. That's the part you're not getting, Todd. She's not trapped. She's talented. You think you're rescuing her - but maybe, just maybe, she doesn't need you. *(beat)* I'm not heartless. But this isn't a fairytale. There's no clean exit. You don't save her. You don't even save yourself. You either play smart or you burn.

TODD

*(quiet but firm)* I won't abandon her. Leak what you want.

DARIO

*(grinning)* Adorable. But once those clips drop? You're done. Career. Reputation. Everything.

TODD

If that's the cost - so be it.

Dario turns to go. Notices Colleen's framed photo on the table. Stops. A flicker of something colder in his eye.

DARIO

*(turning back)* Y'know what? Fuck it. You want her so bad? Buy her. *(beat)* Three hundred grand. Cash. You walk away with Martha, and I walk with a payday. No leaks. No drama. Just business. *(tilts head)* I know about the payout, Todd. Teacher widow. Civil settlement, trauma clause. You're sitting on it. Probably sleep with her photo next to the bank statement. Use it. That's the deal. No haggling. No terms. *(steps in, cold whisper)* You want her freedom? Then pay for it. That's what her worth comes down to. That's what everything does.

He lets it hang.

DARIO (CONT'D)

Tick-tock, hero. She's aging by the hour.

Then walks out the door.

**LIGHTS SLOWLY FADE**

**AUDIO: TAINTED LOVE // MILKY  
CHANCE**

**LIGHT FACE UP:**

**SCENE 18: Martha's Apartment**

The room is dim, quiet. A soft jazz record plays in the background - worn but warm. Martha sits at her kitchen table, smoking. Todd stands across from her, tense, mid-conversation.

TODD

*(frustrated)* I confronted him. Dario. He came to my place. Threatened everyone I love, waved blackmail around like a party trick - then offered to *sell* you to me. Three hundred grand. Like you're a product.

MARTHA

*(exhaling smoke, unfazed)* That sounds like him.

TODD

You knew he was filming. You had to.

MARTHA

*(silent beat, then calmly)* I suspected. I saw the wires. Flickering LEDs. It stopped mattering after a while.

TODD

Matter? Jesus, Martha - he's profiting off you. Selling your body, your voice, your *history*. And you're telling me it doesn't matter?

MARTHA

*(steady, with weight)* Of course it matters. But it's not new. Men have been selling my image since before you were born. At least this time, I'm conscious when it happens.

Todd paces, fists clenched.

TODD

He's running an empire off your back. Deepfakes, fake commentary, goddamn ASMR - he's got a whole economy tied to your name. And you just let him in?

MARTHA

*(biting)* Let him? You think I wanted any of this? He owns the roof over my head. The pills that keep my knees working. I make a little noise, and suddenly I'm living in a Buick again.

TODD

Then let me help you out. We'll cut him off. We go public. We rebuild. Something real. Something safer -

MARTHA

*(interrupts, dry)* You think I want out?

A long pause.

TODD

*(softly)* Don't you?

MARTHA

*(smirking faintly)* Todd...I love sex. Always have. Bringing a man to orgasm. That still thrills me. Why the hell would I want to stop?

Todd freezes - rattled. It's not disgust - it's the shame of assumption.

TODD

I thought...I thought he forced you into it.

MARTHA

He forced me to stay. Not to do it. There's a difference. I didn't survive this long by pretending to be someone I'm not. I know what I am. I just want credit. And control.

Todd processes.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

But I'll be damned if he keeps making a fortune off my sweat and doesn't cut me in. You want to help? Help me take it back. My name. My content. My cut. No middleman. No masters. Just Cheri Velvet, uncensored.

TODD

*(reeling, then slowly smiling)* You're serious. You want to go independent.

MARTHA

Dead serious. And I'm not talking about some charity rebrand. I want high end. I want chaos. I want a spotlight. I've got a good ten years left in this body, they're not going to some sleazebag in a tracksuit. They're going to me.

Todd laughs - short, breathless - the tension starting to shift.

TODD

You're incredible.

MARTHA

*(smiling back, lighting another cigarette)* Took you long enough to figure it out.

They sit. A new quiet between them. Not savior and victim - but co-conspirators.

**LIGHTS FADE OUT**