

LONG WAY HOME

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. CITY - CONVENTION CENTER - NIGHT

A banner draping the entrance of a building reads,
"PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF STRATEGIC PROBLEM SOLVING."

The doors burst open. A surge of people, dressed in business casual, exit the building like wild animals.

MARA (40s), a haughty woman dressed in professional attire, squeezes her way between the doors and people.

The throng rushes to the street, hailing taxis out front. They push and cut in front of Mara who is jostled around like a pinball. She politely admonishes them.

MARA

Tsssk. Tsssk. Pardon?

A short distance from the crowd, a lone cab sits. Mara spots it and dashes toward it.

EXT./INT. - CITY/TAXI - NIGHT

She opens the curbside door, then hesitates when she notices the driver, SERGIO (50s), is wearing a hoodie that covers his face. He does not acknowledge her.

She looks back at the mob fighting over taxis and decides to jump in.

INT. TAXI - NIGHT

MARA

Thank God.

Sergio speaks in a low, deliberate tone with an unknown foreign accent.

SERGIO

I am not God, but I will take you home.

Mara sniffs inside the cab.

MARA

I smell smoke. Did you smoke in here?

SERGIO

I do not smoke.

Sergio slightly turns his head. The yellow street light illuminates his one eye staring at her chest.

MARA

(points to her face)
Hey taxi man, up here.

SERGIO

I have a question for you, Mara.

MARA

How do you know my na--

She looks down to see her name on a badge from the convention. She rips it off her jacket.

SERGIO

I still have a question for you,
Mara.

MARA

I don't have time for questions.
What is it?

SERGIO

Where are the both of us going?

MARA

6000 Union Park Circle.

SERGIO

That is a very swanky part of the
city.

Mara appears annoyed. Sergio puts the cab into gear and leaves the maddening scene through the rearview mirror.

SERGIO (CONT'D)

You appear distraught. You were
with a large group of people, now
you are alone. Does that make you
distraught?

MARA

That's a personal question.

SERGIO

Are you depressed?

MARA

Please mind your own business.

SERGIO

I believe you are depressed. Do you want a pill?

MARA

No, I do not want your pill.

SERGIO

You live alone, do you not?

MARA

I don't want to talk, if you don't mind.

SERGIO

Living alone can do irreparable damage to the psyche later in life. Do you know that?

MARA

Will you please just drive, uh--

She searches for his name on his license to see there is no license, only the holder.

MARA (CONT'D)

Where's your license?

SERGIO

I must have forgotten it. I apologize. If you must know, my name is Sergio.

MARA

I really don't care. I've already asked you not to speak to me in a very polite way--

SERGIO

No, you said you did not want to talk. They are not the same.

MARA

Then, shut up. I don't want to talk to you and I don't want you to talk to me. Do you understand?

SERGIO

Yes, Mara, I understand. Do you mind if I play the radio.

MARA

As long as you don't talk, hum or sing.

SERGIO

I assure you, I will not talk, hum
or sing.

Sergio turns on the radio to the SOUND OF STATIC. He gets
into it. It drives Mara insane.

MARA

Are you going to listen to that?

SERGIO

It is the creation of John Cage. Do
you know the works of John Cage?

MARA

It's nothing but a bunch of static.

SERGIO

I thought you did not want to talk.

MARA

Turn the fucking radio off!

SERGIO

I will gladly turn off the radio.
Please do not use profanity in my
cab.

He turns off the radio.

MARA

I just want to go home.

INT./EXT. - TAXI/CITY - NIGHT

The darkness outside the taxi begins to visibly brighten.

SERGIO

Do your MOTHER and FATHER know?

His question shocks Mara.

MARA

You don't know anything about me.
What do you think you know? Do you
know who I am?

SERGIO

You are Mara.

Mara notices the surreal colors beginning to stir and
becoming brighter.

MARA
This isn't the way home.

SERGIO
I am taking a shortcut.

The cab passes a building with a huge crowd gathered in front of it.

Mara realizes that it's an abortion clinic. She witnesses protesters harassing women entering the clinic.

MARA
Now I get it. You're one of those crazy anti-abortionists, aren't you?

SERGIO
No.

MARA
You're pro-choicer?

SERGIO
I am neither.

MARA
Then what are you?

SERGIO
I am trying to get you home.

The light outside the cab transforms into a faint swirling mix of yellow and red.

MARA
Then turn around or take the long way, I don't care, this place looks dangerous.

SERGIO
It is true that this is not a friendly neighborhood.
(then)
Did GERARD leave you when he heard?

Mara's stunned.

MARA
How... ?

She grabs her things, turns to Sergio, forgets about the intensifying surge of colors outside the cab.

MARA (CONT'D)

Let me off here! I want out!

Sergio stops the cab as the gyrating mix of red and yellow form into a wall of fire.

SERGIO

That will be one dollar.

MARA

You only want one dollar?

SERGIO

You aborted the trip.

Mara hastily snatches a dollar from her purse, hands it to Sergio. He looks at the dollar.

SERGIO (CONT'D)

No tip?

She angrily searches through dollars to find a quarter. She gives the quarter to Sergio.

When Sergio turns to take the quarter, he reveals his severely burned face, skin melting, dripping down. The brilliant colors reflect off his disfigured features.

Mara holds her mouth, eyes widening.

MARA

Oh my God.

SERGIO

You over tipped. Customers usually only give me twenty percent. Thank you.

Mara is distracted by his face. *What is happening? Is this real?*

MARA

Keep it...

EXT. CITY - NIGHT

Mara bursts out of the cab.

The brilliant barrier of fire engulfs the taxi, obscuring the view of the buildings behind.

She doesn't know which way to go.

The enclosing firewall petrifies Mara.

She rears back when the barrier of flames singe her.

Mara attempts to run away, but a smoking arm reaches out from the flames.

Grabs Mara by her arm.

She cannot move. The arm begins to pull her into the flames.

Faces and human shapes emerge and form against the wall. They reach out toward Mara.

They cry and moan sporadically as she struggles to escape.

She breaks free only to be grasped by several more arms emerging from the flames.

She spins out of their clasp and tries to run.

A cord wraps around her ankle. She falls. It drags her toward the flames. She screams and yells for help.

She rolls and twists until the cord releases her.

Mara sprints to the cab. The cord slithers around the cab. She opens the door, snapping the cord.

INT./EXT. - TAXI/CITY - NIGHT

Mara falls to the floor of the backseat.

MARA

Go! Go! Get me out of here!

Sergio calmly drives away.

One of the human shapes breaks through the barrier. Mara sees the shape DART in front of the cab.

MARA (CONT'D)

Watch out Sergio!

Sergio SLAMS into the shape. It FLIES over the cab and CRASHES to the ground behind.

Mara sees the shape rise to its feet in the rearview mirror.

The cab slows down.

SERGIO

Should I stop?

MARA

No! No!

SERGIO

I could be charged with hit and run. Do you want that on your conscience?

Mara looks perplexed - she doesn't know how to answer the question.

In the rearview mirror, Sergio sees the shape standing on its feet.

He turns to face Mara.

She is startled to see his face has transformed into a normal person, except with scars. *Am I going crazy?*

SERGIO (CONT'D)

He is not hurt, he will be okay.

Mara watches it scamper back into the flames.

He drives away from the wall of fire as it shrinks through the rearview mirror. Mara is exasperated.

MARA

Is it over?

SERGIO

That depends on you, Mara.

MARA

Why me?

SERGIO

You are on a ride that you have chosen. It is your decision.

MARA

Of course I know we're going to my home, but you're the one who drove me through that godforsaken inferno. What the hell was that? What were they? Demons from hell?

SERGIO

Please do not be so harsh, they were humans, like you and me, but they do not live in our world.

MARA

Is this some perverse fantasy, some sadistic game you dreamed up? Are you trying to kill me, you fucking maniac?

SERGIO

I did not step outside my cab.

MARA

Don't play coy with me. I'll call the police right now.

She pulls out her cell and finds it melted into one glop of unusable plastic. She throws it down and SCREAMS.

SERGIO

The police do not want to be bothered by your personal matters.

MARA

How did you do all this - the creatures, the colors, the flames, arms, shapes, faces - the whole damn thing?

SERGIO

They are part of a dimension of grief and regret. They are stuck in this dimension. They will stay in this dimension until they move past regret. Regret can only be destroyed by one thing.

MARA

What is the one thing? A trip on acid? Come on, Sergio, get real. I did not enjoy the joyride.

SERGIO

The joyride is not quite over.

MARA

What the hell are you talking about?

SERGIO

I apologize if I did not express myself clearly, since my English is not very good.

MARA

Why am I seeing these horrible, horrible images?

(MORE)

MARA (CONT'D)

And your face horribly burned, and
ohh, the dripping...

SERGIO

I did not see anything out of the
ordinary.

(then)

I have a question for you, Mara,
have you ever contemplated suicide?

Sergio's question stops Mara in her tracks. Her face falls.

MARA

No, never. Maybe. Not really.

Mara anguishes over the question. She tries to fight the
tears welling up in her eyes.

SERGIO

You have very clearly given me your
answer.

Mara's sadness changes to defensiveness.

MARA

What do you know about me? What
makes you an expert on psychology?
You're a taxi driver.

SERGIO

You are correct, Mara. I am a
simple taxi driver. I am not an
expert on psychology.

MARA

Are you so perfect that you've
never made a mistake in your life?
You have no idea what I've
experienced.

SERGIO

How could I know what you have
experienced?

(then)

Tell me, are you in a serious
relationship?

MARA

No, not a...

(then)

Stop asking me these personal
questions!

SERGIO

Very well, I will not ask you another question.

MARA

Good. Keep it that way.

SERGIO

I believe you are a very defensive woman and I believe something happened to you after Gerard left. You see, I did not ask you another question.

Sergio strikes a nerve. She becomes infuriated.

MARA

You think you're so clever. Day after day you do the same fucking thing, you go pick up people in your stupid fucking cab. What do you know about life outside this cab?

SERGIO

Do you believe I live inside this cab, Mara?

MARA

Okay, Sergio, tell me about your exciting life.

SERGIO

I have a good life. I am content and I love my family.

MARA

On second thought, I don't want to hear about your life.

SERGIO

You asked me a question and I will answer.

Mara is taken aback by Sergio's insistence. However, she is aggravated, exhausted, devoid of energy. She listens.

SERGIO (CONT'D)

But they are not the first family that I loved...

INT. SERGIO'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - (FLASHBACK)

Sergio enters a modest home with sparse furnishings.

Across the room, his wife, GIA, sits on one end of a well-worn couch with a stack of bills in front of her.

On the other end of the couch is DANTE, their son. He is curled up watching television.

They greet Sergio warmly then return to the couch. Sergio hangs his coat then relaxes in a La-z-Boy on the other side of the room.

GIA
How was business?

SERGIO
Slow. Tomorrow--

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! VIOLENT BALLS OF FIRE EXPLODE upward from basement before the family can possibly react.

The furnishings are in shambles, walls imploding. The floor between Sergio and his family is replaced by intense fire and smoke.

Sergio is dazed for a moment, then shakes it off. He stares at Gia and Dante who have taken the brunt of the explosion. They are unconscious and bloody, motionless.

SERGIO (CONT'D)
Gia! Dante!

He calls their names repeatedly in hope that they would awaken. They do not.

He wobbles toward them, but cannot pass through the fire. He coughs and wheezes after the smoke begins to rise. He holds his mouth and nose. He falls to the ground.

In a small pocket of air, he is able to breathe. He scans the room to find a way to save Gia and Dante.

He spots an area that appears unaffected. He manages to crawl around the flames until the FLOOR COLLAPSES in front of him.

He looks at his family, then he looks behind himself to the door that has a clear way to escape.

He looks back and forth again and again, agonizing over whether he has a chance to save his family.

The path in front of him has become obscured by smoke. He breaks down and cries, imploring --

SERGIO (CONT'D)

Gia! Dante! Please! Wake up!

The THUNDEROUS, ROARING fire spreads throughout room, enclosing the house. With great hesitancy and reluctance, he heads toward the door.

He looks back and calls their names repeatedly in hope that they would come to. They are unresponsive.

He stumbles to the door, puts his hand on the door knob.

He freezes. He stands at the doorway. He looks back one last time at his family. (END FLASHBACK.)

INT. TAXI - NIGHT - (PRESENT)

SERGIO

It was a gas leak near the furnace.

Mara is nonplussed, ashamed of what she said to Sergio. Tears begin to drip down to her chin. She softens.

MARA

How cruel can life be to force you to choose?

SERGIO

I had only one choice: I could save them or I could save myself.

MARA

Didn't it eat you up inside?

SERGIO

Of course. I was devastated. I went into seclusion. But time passed. The memory was never forgotten but it moved into the rearview mirror.

He turns his head toward Mara.

SERGIO (CONT'D)

You could do the same.

Mara looks surprised.

MARA

How do you know what happened to me?

SERGIO

You made the best decision you could at that moment. I can live with my decision. I do not believe you can.

MARA

I tried to forget it, but I became obsessed, remorseful. I buried it and tried to move on. It was hard for me after it happened.

SERGIO

Was it so hard that you forgot to forgive someone?

MARA

Forgive who? Gerard?

SERGIO

Not Gerard. You know the person intimately.

MARA

You're talking about me, aren't you?

Sergio's noticeable silence is deafening.

An intuitive thought dawns on Mara.

MARA (CONT'D)

You weren't trying to play some sick game, you were trying to help me.

SERGIO

There is no shame in making a decision at that moment and regretting it. It is a shame not moving on with your life.

MARA

Sergio... did you decide to die in the fire to save your family?

SERGIO

That decision does not matter. It is whether you want to live with it in peace or carry it with you. I am at peace.

MARA

It's true, Sergio, I can't move on.
I'm stuck in purgatory.

SERGIO

You can continue to visit the
dimension that you just went to
over and over. I chose to leave
that very same dimension.

MARA

I can't go back there. Ever again.
I'll go with you.

SERGIO

We're getting closer to your
home... or did you change your
mind?

Mara deliberates.

MARA

No, I haven't changed my mind. I
want to go home.

Mara begins to tears up again.

SERGIO

There is no reason to be sad. Life
moves forward after many mistakes
and many regrets. Your penance has
been paid.

Sergio pulls the cab to the side of the street and stops.

SERGIO (CONT'D)

I cannot go any further.

MARA

What do you mean?

SERGIO

You have arrived at your
destination.

The cab is parked in front of Mara's apartment. Mara tries to
recover from her frightening experience.

She gathers her thoughts, appears concerned, she touches
Sergio on his shoulder.

MARA

What do I do now?

SERGIO
You sleep.

 MARA
How can I go to sleep?

 SERGIO
Dream. Dream of all the things
unseen, dream of things to come.

Mara deliberates on Sergio's words. She reaches for his fare.

 MARA
What do I owe you?

 SERGIO
You already paid.

Mara looks at Sergio in a curious manner, then manages a knowing smile.

 MARA
Thank you.

Mara exits the cab, looks back at Sergio.

 MARA (CONT'D)
Are you calling it a night, Sergio?

 SERGIO
Yes, Mara, I am going home too.

Mara climbs the steps, stops at the stoop. She stares directly at the front door, then walks through it.

Sergio's taxi moves on.

FADE OUT.

THE END