

FUNERAL ROAD TRIP

A Short Film
By

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EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

Dirt, in a dying garden, weeds, dried plants line the flowerbed. A garden shovel sticks out in the middle of a shallow hole, filled with a closed shoebox.

Inside the house, a WOMAN in a wide brimmed hat stares out at the garden shovel for an uncomfortably long time.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

This is ANNMARIE CARTER, 50s, African-American, sallow. The hat hides her unkept hair. Pieces of cardboard at her feet, a hamster cage on the table beside the door.

She looks up at the position of the sun then down at it's shadow not yet covering the dirt and shovel.

ANNMARIE

Alexa, what time is it?

ALEXA DEVICE

It is twelve thirty-five pm, happy Saturday Annmarie.

Annoyed, she gathers the cardboard, counts them, once, twice, trice. This is her thing.

She props them against the door, takes off her gloves, hat...

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Annmarie sautés mushrooms and onions, adds a cubed steak. She's a wiz in the kitchen thanks to a cooking group she is joining on zoom on her iPad.

She plates as the Chef instructs, shows off her masterpiece.

Before she eats, she opens a cabinet full of prescription bottles, opens one, downs a pill, then eats.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Annmarie checks in with the sun, the shovel fully shaded now. She grabs her cardboards and heads out.

EXT. BACKYARD - LATE AFTERNOON

Annmarie crosses the grass laying the cardboard in the most direct path to the mound of dirt she dug earlier.

She makes it halfway, realizes she forgot her gardening gloves, retracing her steps back to the house. Behind her the last cardboard piece blows across the yard.

She races inside grabs the gloves and turns...the cardboard "stepstones" are askew, she panics...

...zigzags across the yard to the last piece. She considers jumping the great leap to the mound of dirt.

Her heart races, her breathing labors, she sits on the cardboard, big enough for a foot.

She weeps.

Her long list of phobias winning the day.

EXT. BACKYARD - EARLY MORNING

Sitting on cardboard, in the fully shaded backyard, Annmarie finishes covering the box with dirt. She marks the mound with a collection of stones, bows her head.

ANNMARIE

My dearest friend. We had good times. It wasn't all ideal, you're a little standoffish. But. I'll miss you. At least you didn't die alone.

Realizing the sun is about to make it's way over the yard, she follows the stone wall of the flowerbed, careful not to step on the dirt or the grass, around the side of the yard and takes the stepping stones back to the patio door.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

SHEKINAH GLORY CATHEDRAL plays church service live on the television. Annmarie sings along, worships. She sees the congregation fellowshiping at a distance.

ANNMARIE

Everyone seems to be back to congregating as usual. No masks. I don't know about that.

She sits, enjoying the service, so comfortable having conversations with herself.

INT. LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Annmarie on a zoom with her childhood friends, GAIL TEMPLETON, JANICE HOWARD, CONNIE ABRAHAM, all around Annmarie's age.

GAIL

Oh, I was going through a box in the attic and look what I found.

She pulls out a picture of the four of them fifteen years ago, arm-in-arm, looking sassy as ever.

ANNMARIE

Oh look at us.

GAIL

I miss us all together.

JANICE

These zooms are getting exhausting, might be time to get together IRL as the kids say.

CONNIE

You talking reunion? I look forward to seeing you filter free.

They all laugh.

JANICE

Don't you throw your genetics in my face girl!

GAIL

A reunion might be nice!

ANNMARIE

That would be sweet.

JANICE

You know I need to get the heck out of Portland.

CONNIE

Road Trip!!!

They all screech with delight. All but Annmarie, her heart starts to race, she starts to panic.

ANNMARIE

I could host?

She waits, trying to calm herself.

JANICE
Cali vacation!!!

CONNIE
Yes, yes, yes!!

GAIL
Let's zoom coordinate next week.
I'll DM everyone.

Annmarie smiles broadly and enjoy's her friends.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

By the dim lights of the television screen, Annmarie watches the "Bucket List" as she eats her gourmet meal. She takes a line of pills on napkin then back to enjoying the movie.

A little loneliness creeps in, she glances at the empty sectional sofa, gives the emotion it's due. She continues with the movie, enjoying it a bit less.

INT. OFFICE / WORKOUT ROOM - THE NEXT MORNING

Annmarie puts meticulous finishing touches on a graphic sales presentation. She submits the document for final approval, then moves on to the next item in her project management cue.

She turns her attention to a list of "reunion" chores to accomplish for her friends visit. Sleeping arrangements, food lists, reacquainting activities, ALL INDOORS at her house.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

The door bell rings. Annmarie opens the door to find a package delivery, it's been left in the grass instead of on the stepping stones or porch.

ANNMARIE
Are you kidding me. So rude.

She closes the door in a huff.

EXT. ANNMARIE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

We hear the lock click three times, then Annmarie opens the door with a grabber tool in hand. She steps down on the door mat, her breathing already labored. She looks out at the package, thankful it was left in the shady side of the grass.

She takes a deep breath, scurries to the edge of the stepping stones, leans over, uses the grabber to grab the package, almost dropping it.

Through labored breath she takes the package back inside.

ANNMARIE

It takes just a second to just walk
it up to the front door.

INT. ANNMARIE'S HOUSE - DAY - LATER

Annmarie spends her time cleaning, opening the package of sheets and washing them in the washing machine.

She lingers at the hamster cage then glances out the back door at the makeshift grave.

ANNMARIE

It's going to be a great visit. And
if anyone wants to see the sites,
well, I...I will arrange a tour
guide. It will all be fine.

She opens the cage, starts to clean it, but can't, closes it.

ANNMARIE (CONT'D)

(smiles)

I will be just fine. It will be
great to have company again.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Annmarie stares into the solemn faces of Janice, and Gail in their ZOOM BOXES.

ANNMARIE

No, no. No. This can't be
happening. There must be some
mistake.

GAIL

It's not, I'm afraid. I know it's
sudden. Connie's daughter said she
just dropped. By the time they got
her to the hospital she was gone.

JANICE

This is not right. Damn it. We are
way too young to have friends just
dying on us!

GAIL
Ain't that the truth.

ANNMARIE
Dear lord. We were just messaging.
This can't be...

GAIL
I know it's hard to hear.
(pause)
Listen, I was thinking we still
take the trip.

JANICE
Like what, a funeral road trip.

ANNMARIE
That's morbid Janice.

GAIL
It's insane, but I like it. We
haven't seen each other in fifteen
years, cause life just keeps
getting in the way. I don't want to
go to your funeral regretting not
taken the time to see you while
you're living.

JANICE
Well, I'm not wearing black, not
once. God damn it. This is not how
it's supposed to be!

They take a collective breath.

JANICE (CONT'D)
Right now is the time that Connie
would say something hopeful.

ANNMARIE
And funny.

JANICE
She had mad comic skills. She...Oh
damn, damn, damn.

GAIL
The country is opening up. We could
drop in on Ernestine and Franklyn
on the way to Atlanta. And Carol
too. Heck, let's just take this
time to reach out to everyone.
Reconnect.

JANICE
I have a few weeks vacation.

GAIL
Ann?

Ann pauses, reflects, fights the anxiety welling up inside.

ANNMARIE
I. I'm sorry. I can't.

JANICE
Come on Ann, you work from home on a computer, for Christ's sake. All you need is high speed internet and an iPencil.

ANNMARIE
Leave Christ out of it, Janice. I can't just pick up and leave. I have responsibilities. And I have to be here--for work--

Gail private messages Annmarie "breath".

GAIL
Look, how about this...Janice and I will swing by on Friday before we head out of town. If you can join us, you'll...join us. It's okay if you can't.

Annmarie lets the tears fall. The three sit in the silence, disconnected.

INT. BEDROOM - THE NEXT MORNING

TODAY LIVE plays on the television as Annmarie dozes in bed.

HOST (V.O.)
I know everyone is tired of being cooped up at home. As the country starts to open up we have a few tips to get you back in the office and feeling safe.. Next, after the break.

Solemn, she turns over the will to get her day started gone. Her phone rings.

ANNMARIE
(on phone)
Hello? Yes, hi, Dr. Kramer.
(MORE)

ANNMARIE (CONT'D)

I know I just, couldn't get there to the office. Oh, I see. Yes, I understand, Matastersized, that means it's spread...no, don't Be sorry, it's not your fault. Um, what happens if I do stop the treatment medications? Just the pain killers then. No, that won't be necessary. I'll have someone look in on me periodically. Thank you Dr. Kramer. You have done more than enough. Yes, I will come in on Friday. Okay. Bye.

She looks around the empty room. Drops the phone by the pillow. No tears for bad news.

INT. LIVING ROOM - ANOTHER DAY

Annmarie settles down with a cup of tea.

ANNMARIE

Alexa, lets chat.

ALEXA DEVICE

Would you like a new social bot?

ANNMARIE

Yes

ALEXA DEVICE

Okay. Annmarie. How are you today?

ANNMARIE

I'm just, okay today.

ALEXA DEVICE

Okay. That's great.

Annmarie sighs. This is getting old.

ANNMARIE

This is certainly not a replacement for interacting with friends.

ALEXA DEVICE

I'm sorry, I didn't under stand your reply. Would you like continue our discussion on comedy movies?

She struggles up...

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

She pulls a container of medications out of the cabinet, throws all but two in the trash. Now she weeps.

INT. GARAGE - THE NEXT DAY

Annmarie sits in her car, taking calming breaths.

ANNMARIE

Okay. You just need to make it down the driveway.

She starts the car, pulls out a bit, stops.

ANNMARIE (CONT'D)

(breathing labored)

Then what? You get out in the blazing sun and walk across the grass or dirt to a hotel room.

Disappointed in herself, puts the car in revers and pulls back into the driveway.

INT. OFFICE / WORKOUT ROOM - THE NEXT DAY

Annmarie works. A list of tasks for the "reunion" torn at her feet. She closes the browser, the picture of her and the gals is the background wallpaper.

In a frustrating moment she looks at herself in the picture.

ANNMARIE

You're going to die alone in this house. Is that what you want?

She looks into the eyes of her younger self. Shakes her head.

INT. ANNMARIE'S HOUSE - FRIDAY MORNING

The house is quiet, still. The dirty hamster cage still on the table near the patio door overlooking the makeshift grave.

EXT. ANNMARIE'S HOUSE - DAY

An SUV pulls up to the driveway, two quick taps on the horn.

INT. SUV - DAY

Janice fiddles with the radio.

JANICE

I told you she ain't coming.

GAIL

Give it a second.

JANICE

I want to be in Sedona by sundown.
I'm not missing those free massages
the hotel is giving up. That's a
sweet deal.

GAIL

I'll make up the time.

Gail hops out, rushes to the front door. Rings the bell.

INT. ANNMARIE'S HOUSE - SAME

The house is quiet, still. By the door is a small roller
suitcase, with a purse propped on top.

The doorbell rings throughout the house.

GAIL (O.S.)

Ann? You there?

The car horn toots.

GAIL (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Janice, please. Give me a minute.

Annmarië shuffles to the foyer, a stack of letters in hand.
One last glance to the hamster cage and the grave beyond it
in the backyard. She releases a weighted sigh.

Annmarië approaches the door, clicks the lock once, twice,
three times. She opens the door and takes the first step out
the front door in ages.

THE END