

FADE IN:

1 **EXT. CAPITAL CITY -- NIGHT**

1

A post-apocalyptic cityscape. A miasma hangs in the air.

We approach the landscape of this rotting city from amongst the clouds, passing through contaminated air. Deteriorated buildings, inhabitants trudging somberly to industrial revolution-esque factories. Even from above, we understand that the Capital City is in decay, as if the survivor of a medieval plague. It seems our hope of a technologically advanced future failed at some point, and any grandfather would think he was back in the forties.

2 **INT. CAPITAL CITY, BARTON AND REGINE'S FLAT -- NIGHT**

2

Christmas in Barton and Regine's drab but spacious penthouse flat, decorated in a mid-century socialist style. Oppressively heavy curtains cover the windows, as though trying to keep the outside atmosphere from seeping in.

FINLEY DA GAMA, 40s, nervous, with Anglo-Saxon features, walks to a window and peers out through the curtains, the weight of the world on his shoulders.

An anemic Christmas tree sits in the corner -- a few light bulbs flashing -- waiting to hatch its presents.

BARTON AND REGINE, 60s, sit at the dining table with their daughter EMILY, a cheerful, almost beautiful woman, 30s, and her son, EWAN, 12.

BARTON

I want to propose a toast.

Four hands hold their glasses in the air, prepare to clink them together. Emily looks over at Finley, concerned.

EMILY

Wait a second.

She calls to her husband.

EMILY (CONT'D)

Darling.

A beat.

EMILY (CONT'D)

Finley.

He's lost in thought.

Emily sighs, rolls her eyes, smiles sheepishly at her parents, walks over to Finley. She knows which way the wind is blowing.

EMILY (CONT'D)

I can't do anything about all those Christmases.

No response.

She touches his arm.

FINLEY

Could you just leave me alone for...

Now she's furious.

EMILY

Come to the table. It's important for Ewan.

FINLEY

(hint of Scottish accent)

I...Of course. I'm sorry. This time of year...

He trails off, manufactures a smile, which Emily does not return. They rejoin the group.

BARTON

I want to propose a toast.

(To Finley)

To Finley. Now you're a part of us.

Finley feigns happiness.

FINLEY

Yes, I'll...I'll drink to that. To my new family.

He raises his glass high, focuses on the amber liquid swishing around inside, rather than on the faces of his new family.

The others raise their glasses in an obligatory manner, then lower them quickly, watch as little Ewan quickly places his glass on the table, runs to the Christmas tree. Finley alone holds his glass aloft.

Ewan, under the Christmas tree, takes one of the presents and gives it to Emily. Emily opens her present. It is a hot water bottle covered with fur. Emily hugs Ewan, who smiles at her adoringly. She looks at Finley, then nods for Ewan to go back to the tree and get his stepfather's gift. This is hard for Ewan and Finley.

FINLEY (CONT'D)

That's OK.

Finley goes to the tree, hands Ewan a present. Ewan retreats to his mother's side, opens it slowly. It's a book: Moby Dick.

FINLEY (CONT'D)

My favorite...when I was your age.

The disappointment shows on the boy's face. Emily reads his emotion, goes to the tree, retrieves another present, hands it to Ewan. He tears the wrapping off joyously, takes out -- a nightflyer boomerang. A boomerang-shaped smile takes over his face. He swings his arm, and the motion makes the boomerang light up.

Emily nods back to the tree. Ewan lowers the nightflyer, grows melancholy again. He goes to the tree, retrieves a gift, hands it dutifully to Finley.

Finley opens it with a smile. Inside is an impeccable pair of black shoes. On the sole, a stamp of good quality.

FINLEY (CONT'D)

(Nostalgic)

How did you find them?

BARTON

They crossed the sea to get here.

Finley rubs the edge of the shoe with his thumb. He smiles at Emily, knowing she's behind the gift. He goes to Ewan, embraces him awkwardly. The boy stiffens.

FINLEY

Thank you.  
(to Ewan)

EMILY

What do you say?

But Ewan pulls away, pretends not to hear, and reads the instructions for his new toy. Emily looks at her mother with a glimpse of despair for the child's behavior. Regine, makes a peaceful gesture expressing "give him some time".

BARTON

(to Ewan, smiling)  
Don't try it in here.

Ewan races off, imagining he's throwing the nightflyer, then catching it.

Finley goes to the tree, picks up a small box, hands it to Emily. Regine and Barton wait anxiously while Emily unwraps her present.

She looks puzzled as she lifts a tin of canned fish from the box.

On the wrapper there is a monochromatic portrait of Mr. Keith Langston and the caption: "Langston & Sons: Selye Exporters". The mustachioed Mr. Langston is nattily-attired, and sports a jaunty beret.

Barton takes the can from his puzzled daughter's hand, examines it.

BARTON (CONT'D)

Selye, huh. Only fish immune to the pollution. Very expensive. You didn't like it as a little girl, too bitter.

He hands the can to Regine, who turns it, revealing the logo for "Bedroom City".

Close on logo -- printed in colourful letters on a billboard: "Bedroom City." It's a sunny day at the harbour city. We see high-rise buildings surrounding a water tank. A grotesque white fish leaps out of the water.

FINLEY

I've been sent to Bedroom City to update the census.

Emily looks at him upset, questioning.

FINLEY (CONT'D)

Last year's drought caused forty percent of the outlying towns to evacuate for lack of water. Anything left is polluted, undrinkable. Bedroom City has an underground reserve of fresh water, uncontaminated. The census is the first step in relocating the displaced. We have to know how many can be accommodated.

Emily looks down, she is going to miss him.

FINLEY (CONT'D)

(With a smile)

Of course, I could see about bringing you and Ewan. Sunshine. Beaches

Emily raises her head, hopeful.

FINLEY (CONT'D)

I already asked for permission. The director approved it.

EMILY

(To Ewan)

Did you hear that, Ewan? What a lovely surprise!

Ewan shrinks back.

EMILY (CONT'D)  
A family vacation!

Ewan grows more uncomfortable by the second.

EMILY (CONT'D)  
Finley can take you fishing!

Ewan's look: he'd rather die.

FINLEY  
Well, I'll be working mostly. But  
we'll have some time to ourselves.  
A proper New Year's Eve!

3 **EXT. STREET IN CAPITAL CITY - NIGHT**

3

Finley, Emily and Ewan leave the apartment, emerging into the streets of the Capital City. Hundreds of citizens crowd a market: food vendors, bursts of smoke, bicycle taxis that wander without direction. Garbage bags are piled against walls and malnourished dogs peruse the waste. Policemen try to keep order, largely to no avail. Gentlemen in three-piece suits mingle with the ragged men, desperation having fashioned a makeshift equality.

Finley and his family walk amidst the tumult to a public transport stop.

Finley removes a LETTER from his pocket and hands it to Emily.

She opens it with curiosity. As she begins to read, she stops walking. Ewan stands on his tip-toes to catch a peek at the mysterious letter.

FINLEY  
(whispering)  
The postmark is Bedroom City.  
The sender didn't put a name.

Emily's expression transforms. She smiles adoringly at Finley, trying to hold back her tears. She hugs him tightly.

EWAN  
What is it?

But Emily is clutching her husband's neck.

EWAN (CONT'D)  
(agitated)  
What is it?

Emily takes out the Selye tin she's been given and passes it to Ewan.