

Until The Levee Moves

Chloé Bergeron

UNTIL THE LEVEE MOVES

EXT. SIDE OF A WINDING ROAD - DAWN

SOPHIE, a blonde haired free spirit walks along a winding road. She looks back and exhales heavily. She kicks the ground. She *screams*.

She turns her head right toward 2 deer walking together in the tall grasses to the right. A coyote appears prowling slowly towards the deer.

The coyote pounces and attacks one deer. The uninjured deer runs away, leaving the other to die with the coyote. Sophie screams into the fields at the deer that is running away.

SOPHIE
Coward!

The coyote feasts on the deer. Sophie watches from the roadside before continuing to walk.

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE - THE NEXT DAWN

Sophie walks into the gas station and to the counter. There is a WOMAN with heavy makeup covering eye bags, smelling of cigarettes, wearing a cashier's vest.

WOMAN
You look bad.

SOPHIE
(Sarcastically smiles)
Thanks. A bus ticket to New York. How much is that?

WOMAN
New York? Honey, where do you think you are?

SOPHIE
Um, I'm not really sure. I caught a flight from New York to Vegas for a job, but it fell through. I managed to catch a few rides east, I know that.

WOMAN
You're in Albuquerque. New Orleans is about as East as you're gonna get with a bus from here.

SOPHIE
Guess I made it less far than I
thought.

She mumbles to herself with raised brows. She takes a deep breath.

The woman scans the shelf of cigarettes.

SOPHIE CON'T
(Mumbling)
I'm goin' home?

Woman grabs a box of cigarettes. She fumbles with the box, trying to open it.

WOMAN
What's that, hun?

SOPHIE
That's just weird for me to say. I
came all this way just to go back
home, and I don't even know if I can
call it that anymore.

The woman looks at Sophie with a forced half smile.

SOPHIE
Yea, sorry, I know you don't know what
I'm talkin' about. I'm goin' home.
Gimme one to New Orleans, please.

Woman rings her up and hands the ticket to Sophie. Sophie pays in cash.

WOMAN
Sometimes it's good to go home.
Remember why you ever left in the
first place. Get some sleep.

Woman gives Sophie change.

SOPHIE
Yes, ma'am.

WOMAN
You see that little girl over there.
That's my daughter.

Sophie leans across the aisle to see GIRL.

Distracted by box, woman works on opening it. She finally opens it and grabs one out. Woman puts cigarette in her mouth.

At the same time, Girl spills icecream. Sophie notices. Woman does not. Girl quickly picks it up and throws the whole cone away in nearby trash. She wipes her eyes and walks slowly down the aisle to the front.

WOMAN
(cigarette in mouth)
Ice cream's gone already? You ate that fast! Was it good?

GIRL
(smiling)
Yeah.

Girl looks at Sophie and Sophie turns her head away. Girl then looks back at her mom.

GIRL CON'T
Thanks for buying me it.

Sophie watches the conversation. She looks at the girl, at the ground and then at the garbage can.

Melted ice-cream residue paints the scene from ground to bin. The mom does not notice, too consumed with her cigarettes.

WOMAN
Glad I could. I never got that typa thing when I was little you know that. I gotta work for that money little girl.

GIRL
I know mama.

WOMAN
Good. Don't forget your backpack now (to daughter). And you, get some sleep (to Sophie).

Girl walks out to bus line.

SOPHIE
(looking out, mumbling)
When did kids get this hard.

Woman shakes head in approval, still smoking, looking out at

busses.

SOPHIE CON'T
 (releasing a slight chuckle,
 looking out window)
 New Orleans.

Sophie nods goodbye and walks out to the busses. She fiddles with her nails, reading the bus destinations. One of bus's doors open to reveal an old, friendly BUS-DRIVER.

EXT. BUS STOP- MORNING

SOPHIE
 New Orleans?

BUS DRIVER
 Sho is. Thas where you gon'?

SOPHIE
 Yes, sir.

INT. BUS - MORNING

She walks on the bus.

BUS DRIVER
 You lookin' tired nah. Imo try an
 getcha ta sleep. Imma play us summa
 dat good music, sha.

Bus Driver raises the volume on the radio that plays "I'm Walking to New Orleans" by Fats Domino.

SOPHIE
 I can tell you're from home. I like
 the music very much. I could use a lil
 nap.

Bus Driver hums along in pleasure.

She walks through the crowded bus. Everyone is on their phone. No one talks to each other. Sophie finds the last open spot next to a hipster-looking BOY, 20, with headphones.

SOPHIE
 (pointing to the seat)
 You mind if I sit there?
 (louder)
 Do you mind if I sit there?

Boy does not hear the first time. He is playing a game on his phone. Sophie climbs over him and into the window seat. He looks over, finally noticing her.

BOY
(without looking up from phone)
Oh, my bad.

SOPHIE
Yeah, it's fine, I'm used to being invisible in New York. I have this lousy get-my-coffee job I keep sayin' is temporary, just a stepping stone to something that'll make my mom proud, y'know?

Boy does not look up from phone, still playing his game. She looks at him and pauses as he continues to play.

SOPHIE CON'T
Who'm I kidding? I'm still there. And when I finally find the courage to leave again, everything falls to shit.
(she trails off.)
Don't even know how I got here.
 Fucking Albuquerque, where even is that? New Mexico, Right?

She turns to look at boy. Still, he does not look away from screen.

SOPHIE
You're right. Why even try.

She lays her head against the window. She looks out at the countryside as it passes her by.

The Bus-Driver starts a jazz-funk album. He looks at Sophie through the mirror and then back at the road.

Everyone is on their technology except the Bus-Driver and Sophie.

EXT. TRAILER PORCH, PLAQUEMINE, LOUISIANA- MORNING

A an old woman SHIRLEY, 95, sits on her trailer's porch swing barefooted wearing a nightgown and sipping coffee. The trailer is positioned across the street from a levee adorned with trees at its base.

She *sips* loudly. She smacks her lips and lets out an audible exhale. She stares at the levee trees.

SHIRLEY

Ahhh

(smiling)

Now where is my squirrel at. Where is that damn son of a bitch. I know he's here.

The squirrel runs down the tree and up another.

SHIRLEY

There you are. Now what are you doin' ma foot-foot.

The squirrel comes back down and stops midway.

SHIRLEY

(laughing)

Now what are you doin', huh?

KYLER, Shirley's stalwart son, comes around the house onto the porch holding a shovel. She turns around and sees him. She jumps slightly.

SHIRLEY

Oo now! Don't do me that now! You scared me!

KYLER

Mama, whatchu been doin'? You been usin' this?

He points sternly to the dirty shovel.

SHIRLEY

Now why you worryin' bout that. You know that ain't nunna your business.

KYLER

Well, this is my shovel and you are my momma, so I think that makes it a little-a ma business, don't it? How many times I'm gon have to tell you; your backs gonna hurt!

SHIRLEY

That's right. If I don't use it, I won't have pain, but I won't have nothin. So hell no, shit on pain. I got me a garden.

Kyler exhales pitifully.

EXT. DINER PARKING LOT, NEW ORLEANS- NIGHT

A bright neon sign reveals the name "Mama Soph's Diner". Sophie looks up at the sign while standing in its cascading neon light. She exhales heavily.

SOPHIE

They kept the name.

She walks through the diner door.

INT. NEW ORLEANS' DINER- CONTINUOUS

Sophie walks in slowly and sits at the counter top. She observes the diner.

A muscular blonde GUY walks up and sits beside her.

An outgoing middle-aged chef in glasses, REMI, walks into the diner from the kitchen and notices Sophie. He playfully gasps and smiles.

REMI

(to Sophie)

Well, well, well, look what the cat dragged back in! Let me check you out now-

He walks over to Sophie and grabs her hand. He counts her fingers.

REMI

1, 2, 3, 4, 5- Five fingers still in tact. Face beautiful as ever. Shoot, where ever you comin' from, I might need to go! How you been, doll- wait, wait, wait- don't answer that just yet, I got something for ya.

He runs back into the kitchen. Sophie's gaze follows him into the kitchen. While waiting, she turns her head to keep

observing the diner and stops when she notices a framed memorial hanging on the wall behind the counter.

Framed memorial says "In Loving Memory of Mama Soph- Mother of our kitchen forever" with a photo of a plump woman stirring a pot in the kitchen laughing.

Sophie bites her lip. She continues staring at the memorial. Remi storms out of the kitchen dramatically holding a plate with grits and boudin links on it.

She turns and smiles at Remi. He places the plate down in front of her.

REMI

I remember your order. "Three big scoops of grits", you'd say, "and more boudin than momma gives me." I'd always hook you up, huh.

Sophie laughs and takes a bite. She rolls her eyes in pleasure.

SOPHIE

(eating grits)

Just like Ma's! Thanks so much Rem. Y'all haven't fell behind, huh? The place looks great, tastes great.

REMI

We still know how to cook, yeah, but the kitchen's never the same without your mama's singin' and dancin'. It's not as alive anymore.

Listen, you better go see your maw soon. Your ole man's worried bout her. Says she's doing too much.

SOPHIE

He's not my ole man. Lost that title when ma died. Besides, you know her. She's always done too much. She was hauling banana trees to the front yard at 88.

REMI

Yeah, well she jus misses you. You leavin' nearly broke her heart. Your

daddy's, too, even if you don't wanna believe it. She was pickin sticks and plantin em for you. We said no way those sticks would make trees. Ain't we the fools now. You should see em. Five or so years, they're bloomin' now.

SOPHIE

She always did have a way with plants.

REMI

Go visit them, Soph. Maybe give your Pop a chance. He's on the community board now, substitute teaches, too. He smokes less. Shit, last I heard, he even gave up drinkin. He's trying Soph, maybe you should, too.

SOPHIE

I'm here, ain't I?

A woman at another table waves her hand to signal Remi. He looks at Sophie with a heartfelt smile and then walks off. The blonde guy sitting beside Sophie leans over and points to her plate.

GUY

So, what's that called?
(pointing at grits)
Don't mean to be intrusive. I just see them everywhere.

SOPHIE

No problem, they're grits. It's essentially corn meal with butter.

GUY

And it's that good?

SOPHIE

In New York, no. Here, most definitely.
(she pauses)
So, my turn to be nosy. Where are you from?

GUY

Estonia.

SOPHIE
(Surprised)

See, I've traveled a lot and I've
never met anyone from Estonia, and now
here I am on the outskirts of New
Orleans, and I meet you.

(mumbling)
Makes me wonder if I ever should've
left at all.

GUY
We don't get out a lot.
(they laugh)

SOPHIE
So why are you out?

GUY
Kambo ceremony. Just finished a week
of it.

SOPHIE
Kambo? As in the frog poison?

GUY
Exactly.

He points to the dots where the poison was injected into his skin. Sophie examines them and rubs her finger along the dots.

SOPHIE
Damn, that's intense. I admire the
blind faith, sacrificing everything
for what you believe in. People have
died doing that. It's hard to find
that faith in people today. It's hard
to find in myself.

GUY
I'm not spiritual.

SOPHIE
What?

GUY
I mean I'm not- that's not why I did
it. I'm not spiritual.

SOPHIE
So why did you-

GUY
I wanted to test my limits. I wanted to push my body to the breaking point. I wanted to feel so deeply that I couldn't think about anything else but what I was feeling. I wanted nothing else to matter.

SOPHIE
And did it?

GUY
No. Turns out you can tune things out but it doesn't make them go away. Changing your focus doesn't change things. Changing things changes things. Sometimes you just gotta do it.

SOPHIE
(Softly)
Yeah.

GUY
But I've never felt pain so strongly in my life.
(He smiles to himself)

SOPHIE
And you like that?

GUY
Vomited for 9 hours straight. Thought my organs had stopped working. I felt so fucking bad. so fucking bad.

They both start laughing.

GUY
But so fucking alive.

SOPHIE
Yeah?

GUY
Yeah. To feel is to live.

SOPHIE
 Cheers to that.
 (she raises her coffee cup)
 To feeling even when the living seems
 too much.

GUY
 Or when the frog poison sets in.

Laughing, Estonia guy lifts his cup. They *clink*. Remi walks by dancing and singing towards the kitchen.

EXT. SHIRLEY'S TRAILER PORCH - NEXT MORNING

Shirley sits at her kitchen picking thorns from her left leg. As she is picking, Sophie is seen walking down the street to the house. She approaches the porch.

SOPHIE
 Maw Mere?!

SHIRLEY
 Well!
 (Rubbing her eyes in disbelief)
 My baby! Oh my baby!

Maw Mere limps toward Sophie and Sophie runs toward Maw Mere to hug her. They hug and Sophie starts to cry. Maw Mere lets go of the hug.

SHIRLEY
 Now you can't cry! Then I'mo cry!

SOPHIE
 I know. I just missed you so much.

SHIRLEY
 You always been knowin' where I am.
 I'm sittin' right here on that porch
 waitin' for the day that levee gon
 move and the water's gon take me. Na
 come on over, let me sit you down and
 look at you.

She leads Sophie to the rocking chairs on the porch. They sit. Sophie looks around.

SOPHIE
 Everything's the same.

SHIRLEY

No it ain't, baby. My garden was dead
for most the time you was gone. Your
daddy's helpin' me. He don't like me
usin' the heavy shovel cuzza ma back.
But he's been shit outta luck in
stoppin' me. So I get him out there to
help.

SOPHIE

Yeah, I went to the diner. Remi told
me Pop was gettin' better. I didn't
believe it.

SHIRLEY

Your daddy never learnt how to live
without nursin' on your mama's tit.
He's had to start over. We all did.

SOPHIE

He drained her, Maw. And she was
always there. Where was he?

SHIRLEY

Ma fille, your daddy's far from a
perfect man. But if I know one thing
bout my boy, he loved ya mama. And he
loves you. Maybe death wudd'n the best
way for him ta wake up, but it really
shook him.

SOPHIE

It shook me, too. I thought makin' it
on the other side of that levee would
make Mama proud. That livin' in hot-
shot New York would make me something
special. But I'm back here. I guess I
failed her, huh?

SHIRLEY

When I look at you, you know what I
see?

SOPHIE

What?

SHIRLEY

I see the day your mama put you in
these arms. She looked at me and said

"that's your baby" and I cried 'cause
I knew one day you'd be leavin' me.

Sophie begins to cry.

SHIRLEY CON'T
One day you'd be too big-shot for
these lil ole arms. Ya mama and me
both knew you were special, fille,
just in bein' who you are, not where
you are.

You see them trees out there
(she points at 6 trees planted on
the levee's base)

SOPHIE
Uh-huh.

SHIRLEY
I planted em a month after you left
with some sticks. Everybody said I was
crazy. Said nothing good gon' come out
of a bunch of twigs. But I told myself
if somethin' did come from 'em, I'd go
back to tryin'.

SOPHIE
And so you did?

SHIRLEY
I kept on waterin' and they came.

SOPHIE
That's incredible.

SHIRLEY
Go check that levee risin' for me.
Last time I went up there, me and Edna
came rolling back down.

SOPHIE
(laughing)
Okay, Mere, I'm goin'.

EXT. LEVEE - CONTINUOUS

She walks out the house and across the street. She walks up the levee and looks over to see the water almost to the top. Her head moves as she follows the cracks in the levee with her eyes.

She rubs her hand against a crack that has multiple colors of concrete on it showing that the crack has been fixed multiple times.

A boat passes and the water flows over her hand. A little water flows over the levee onto the other side.

EXT. TRAILOR PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

Sophie walks back to porch. Maw Mere tries to get up and winces.

SOPHIE

What's the matter? What's wrong?

SHIRLEY

I got them rose thorns in me. I been playin' in the rose bushes. And everybody knows, whoever fool around a rose bush gon' get stuck.

They walk arm in arm to the bedroom. Sophie tilts her head on top of Maw Mere's as they walk off. The garden is seen through the window back-lit by the porch lights.

SOPHIE OS

I think I'll talk to Daddy again.

SHIRLEY OS

That's good, ma fille. He'd like that.

Sophie and Maw Mere sit on the rocking chairs. They face the street. Across the street are the 6 trees, squirrels, and birds. The animals are all making beautiful nature noises.

SHIRLEY

Fa-foot!

She looks around and squints her eyes.

Fa-footsie! Now where is that little shit ass.

SOPHIE

Who?

SHIRLEY
Our squirrel, watch. He gon come out.

SOPHIE
Is it the same one as when I was a
little girl?

SHIRLEY
Oh yeah, ma fille. He's the same.

They sit on the bench and watch, waiting for the squirrel to be seen. The camera cuts to a far away shot, revealing the beautiful blooming garden on the levee and birds flying throughout it. Shirley and Sophie are seen on the rocking on the porch.

Kyler stomps angrily from the back yard around the house holding the shovel which is once again full of dirt. He walks toward the porch.

He stops abruptly when he sees Sophie and Maw.

KYLER
(lowing shovel)
Soph?!

SOPHIE
(anxiously)
Dad!

The wide shot shows Kyler, Shirley, and Sophie all in the same shot. Shirley takes loud sip of coffee, smacks, and releases a sigh while the two hug.

The camera closes on a close up of Shirley rocking with sly smile and her coffee mug.

EXT. FIELDS BESIDE WINDING ROAD - FLASHBACK TO FIRST NIGHT

The deer leaves the other to be feasted on by the coyote, Sophie stops looking at the deer and walks away down the road.

The deer runs into the Forrest and comes back moments later with the herd of deer who stampede the coyote and make him leave the hurt deer.

The group of deer stand around licking the wounds of the hurt deer.

El Fin. "I'm Walking to New Orleans" plays as credits roll.