

Sing Happy Birthday Twice (excerpt)

written by

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FADE IN

EXT. RED BRICK HOUSE, SUBURBAN DETROIT, DAY

A modest two-story home lit in late summer haze, driveway full of car and front porch lined with balloons. A lone piano picks the opening notes of "Happy Birthday."

EXT. WHITE HOUSE, DETROIT, DAY

A small but well-kempt one-story, its front door covered in a child's hand-drawn birthday decor. "Happy Birthday"'s first line finishes playing.

INT. RED BRICK HOUSE

Young adults and children surround a kitchen table, singing MOS. At the table, CURTIS SCOTT sings to the embarrassed laughter of his wife, CALEY. The piano notes continue.

INT. WHITE HOUSE

A smaller gathering sings MOS to a woman in her 30s, led by her 9 year-old son SERGIO SILVA - the life of the party.

INTERCUT - RED HOUSE/WHITE HOUSE

Curtis, Caley, and co. fill the living room as a family member performs karaoke MOS. "Happy Birthday" plays on.

Sergio dances and belts out a tune MOS as his mom watches lovingly.

As the partygoers converse, CALEY slowly fades away amidst the smiling faces. Curtis' face turns somber. Caley is gone.

Sergio's one-man show ends, and his mom happily applauds - until she, too, fades away. Sergio's smile disappears. "Happy Birthday" concludes with final, lonely notes.

BLACK.

EXT. CURTIS' HOUSE, EARLY EVENING

A red hatchback pulls up to the red brick house. The driver door opens, headlight alert blares. The driver mutters. Door closes. Headlights shut off, both front doors open. Curtis and Sergio exit the car, each grabbing large duffel bags from the trunk, and enter the house.

INT. CURTIS' HOUSE

Curtis enters with Sergio's personal bag, clumsily bumping the entryway table.

CURTIS  
Oof. Well Sergio, welcome to Casa  
de Curtis.

Sergio huffs his hockey bag of goalie gear behind Curtis. He sees photos of Curtis with a young woman and others with several children on the entryway table.

SERGIO  
(sets down bag)  
These kids aren't all yours...?

CURTIS  
(turns, trying on a smile)  
Family looks different than you  
planned. Gotta get a pic of you on  
there. But first - grub!

Sergio lugs the hockey bag like a ball and chain, following Curtis into the kitchen. Boxes of cereal, pasta, and snacks line the counters. Sergio studies the fridge door, covered in magnets of photos and scrabble letters; Curtis notices.

CURTIS (CONT'D)  
I'll make dinner. Go ahead and sit.

As Curtis sets the duffel bag on the floor by the dining table, Sergio stares at the fridge photos a moment longer; he sees the same young woman in most of them. He finally retreats, dropping his hockey bag on the table with a thud.

SERGIO  
Got any Cheerios?

Curtis calmly relocates the hockey bag to the floor.

CURTIS  
Got better: tri tip. Ever try it?

Sergio shakes his head, disinterested.

CURTIS (CONT'D)  
(opens the fridge,  
gestures a chef's kiss)  
Soooo good. You're gonna love it.

C.O. On Curtis' hands at the sink. He quietly hums a tune as he turns on the faucet, lathers up foam soap on his fingers, and washes. Repeats the tune a second time, then finishes up to reheat the tri tip...

SERGIO

Yeah...but, I really love Cheerios.

CURTIS

(pauses, his hand on the  
microwave door)

Whelp, that's on the menu, too!

Curtis grabs a gallon of milk from the fridge and prepares Sergio's "dinner." Sergio glances up and spots a tiny, deflated balloon taped to the ceiling fan, until Curtis joins him with a bowl of cereal and a plate of tri tip. Sergio smells studies the cereal, looking doubtful.

SERGIO

These are Cheerios?

CURTIS

They look like 'em.

SERGIO

I don't see the yellow box...

CURTIS

They're the special kind at the end  
of the cereal aisle. (a beat.) They  
come in a bag.

Both of them begin eating. Curtis glances up at Sergio, who's staring at the photos on the fridge again.

CURTIS (CONT'D)

You want to know about her.

Sergio's eyes dart back to his bowl.

CURTIS (CONT'D)

It's okay. Well, it's...we can talk  
about it.

Sergio spears the cereal with his spoon. Curtis rises from his chair and picks a photo magnet from the fridge door.

CURTIS (CONT'D)

That's Caley. Married 8 years. Real  
firecracker. Great taste in food;  
she loved Cheerios, too.

Sergio scratches his head and purses his lips.

SERGIO  
Who are the kids in the other pics?

                  CURTIS  
We took them in, like you. Caley  
and I couldn't have any of our own.

                  SERGIO  
Where did they go?

                  CURTIS  
Went back to their families, or to  
other homes.

                  SERGIO  
          (points to photo magnet)  
Where did she go?

Curtis sets down his fork and knife, choosing words.

                  CURTIS  
You know how your mom got sick?

Sergio nods reluctantly.

                  CURTIS (CONT'D)  
Same thing.

                  SERGIO  
Sorry.

                  CURTIS  
Nah, Don't be.

Sergio falls silent, shifting side to side in his chair.  
Curtis resumes eating, trying to act casual.

                  CURTIS (CONT'D)  
Caley got sick, but not super sick  
at first, you know? But her job was  
at the hospital. One bad week  
and...one day, she wasn't here.

Sergio slowly lifts another spoonful of soggy cereal, takes a  
bite, swallows hard.

                  SERGIO  
          (quietly)  
Mom got sick after one of my games.

Curtis recognizes the guilt immediately.

CURTIS  
Listen, that's not on you. She  
didn't get sick because of you. Do  
you understand?

Sergio's shoulders begin to shake.

CURTIS (CONT'D)  
Sometimes you do all you can, and  
bad stuff still happens...  
(glances at Sergio's  
hockey bag)  
...like...when Chicago wins the  
Stanley Cup.

SERGIO  
(surprised)  
We didn't talk about that team in  
my house.

CURTIS  
Good. Neither will we.

Both of them resume eating.

CURTIS (CONT'D)  
(cheerfully)  
We should put all that goalie gear  
to good use. I got a net in the  
garage, and it's not dark out yet.

Sergio says nothing, eating absentmindedly.

CURTIS (CONT'D)  
I've heard you're a really good  
goalie. I don't play anymore, but  
we can sign you up for fall league-

SERGIO  
...Stop.

CURTIS  
What?

SERGIO  
I don't want to play again. Ever.  
These aren't Cheerios. You're not  
Mom. And I don't want to stay here.

CURTIS  
That's valid, man. We've both been  
through it.

SERGIO  
But you're the only one pretending  
it doesn't hurt.

Curtis lets out a nervous chuckle, which doesn't help;  
Sergio's spoon lands with a splash into the cereal bowl as he  
strides toward the hallway, stopping just short.

                  SERGIO (CONT'D)  
                  (over his shoulder)  
Can I go to my room? Where is it?

                  CURTIS  
S-sure. Upstairs, second door on  
the left.

Sergio opens his mouth, hesitates, then trots through the  
hallway to the stairs near the front door, bounding up the  
steps. Curtis hangs his head.

                  CURTIS (CONT'D)  
How do you screw up *cereal*, Curtis?

Curtis glances at the photo magnet on the table.

                  CURTIS (CONT'D)  
You didn't want me to be alone,  
Cay. But you were better at this.

                  SERGIO (O.S.)  
Um, can you bring me my stuff, Mr.  
Curtis, sir?

Curtis smiles sadly. Taking aim, he sends the photo magnet  
spinning across the kitchen, sticking to the fridge door.  
Hoisting both duffel bags on his shoulders, Curtis' knee  
catches the doorway as he exits the room, stifling a yelp.

                  CURTIS (O.S.)  
Oof. Concierge service on the  
way...I hope you tip well...

INT. CURTIS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Later that night, Sergio has emptied both of his duffel bags  
in a white, sparse room. Nothing sits in the nearby dresser  
or closet - it's all on the bed. He admires a robot action  
figure - as Curtis pops into the doorway.

                  CURTIS  
You have one of those?

Sergio, startled, starts to put the toy away.

CURTIS (CONT'D)  
Machines of the Earth, nice. Those  
were hard to get for awhile.

SERGIO  
Do you watch cartoons or something?

CURTIS  
I dabble. I was up for a voice role  
in it.

SERGIO  
Ah, bet.

CURTIS  
You bet what?

SERGIO  
Nothing.

Curtis wanders into the room, looking for common ground.

CURTIS  
Huh. Voices are what I do. Cartoons  
are the big show. But I've done  
movies and ads.

SERGIO  
Done anything I've heard of?

CURTIS  
Chipperoni's.

Sergio is aghast.

CURTIS (CONT'D)  
I never said I liked 'em! Pizza  
potato chips, c'mon.

SERGIO  
Wait. Did you do their Super Bowl  
ad, with the Pizza Monster?

CURTIS  
I *am* the Pizza Monster.

Sergio looks mildly impressed.

CURTIS (CONT'D)  
(voicing the Pizza  
Monster)  
Now I will snack on you,  
Flavortown!

Sergio laughs for the first time. Curtis joins in.



CURTIS (CONT'D)  
Sorry about this room. Never got to  
decorate much.

SERGIO  
It's better than the last place.

CURTIS  
Deck this place out how you want.  
Just don't make an escape rope from  
bedsheets. (Beat.) I should stop  
talking.

SERGIO  
Kids tried to escape?!

CURTIS  
No, my relatives stayed over once.  
I had the bedsheet rope idea.

Sergio shifts on the bed, testing its comfort.

SERGIO  
How long do I need to stay?

CURTIS  
As long as it helps you, bud.

A quiet moment. Curtis' phone starts ringing.

SERGIO  
Is that work?

CURTIS  
Yeah. And then I gotta find out how  
late I can get Cheerios delivered.  
Need that fiber and protein!

Curtis leaves. Sergio thrashes around, knocking enough  
belongings off the bed to get comfy. He picks up his goalie  
mask, sees his mom's handwritten message on the back: "*Big  
dreams for my little man.*" Eyes red, he lays amidst  
everything he owns.