STONE COLD SOBER

by

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EXT. FACTORY CAR LOT - NIGHT

In a dark corner a sedan waits. Inside sits NATALIE (30's). She stews as she eats candy, tossing the wrapper onto a pile of others.

A side door opens on the factory. Out walks RENÉ (30's), his head down and an idle slump to his step. Natalie sits up and watches him like a hawk.

He climbs into a truck and fires up the wheezing engine. He sighs to himself and pulls away. Natalie follows.

EXT. LIQUOR STORE - NIGHT

At an ATM, René jabs at the keys pissed off. With the cold blue glow of the screen on his face, he lets out another sigh. Across the street, Natalie watches from her car.

He enters the store. She sits watching in silence, observing him making his way down an aisle and buying some malt liquor with what little cash he has on him.

EXT. APARTMENT BLOCK - NIGHT

René's truck pulls to the kerb. He honks the horn. Natalie pulls up a way behind. He hops out, a beaming smile on his face as he greets a young WOMAN.

Natalie's expression darkens as she watches René lead the Woman to his truck.

As the truck pulls away, Natalie glowers exhausted, wrestling with her conscious. She shuts off the engine, forces herself to relax, and closes her eyes.

EXT. APARTMENT BLOCK - LATER

Natalie sleeps. She awakes as an engine and headlights approach. She ducks as René's truck passes.

René and the Woman get out and kiss goodnight. He watches her leave, a besotted look in his eyes. Natalie shows a conflicted look of sympathy.

Returning to his truck, René pauses and looks round, his gaze drawn to Natalie's car. She slides down low and peers over the dashboard. He stares for a few moments and leaves.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

The truck swings into a parking area and clatters to a halt. René drops out, liquor bottle in hand, and trudges over to a bench.
He sits. A chorus of crickets in the air, the moonlight on his face. He thinks hard and drinks harder.

Within woodland, Natalie creeps between trees, rustling through bracken. She stalks René, drawing in with a glower.

He gasps into tears. She pauses surprised. He howls and hurls the bottle away as hard as he can.

She hesitates conflicted and leaves the way she came. CRACK. She steps on a branch and freezes.

René snaps round, eyes glistening. He stares into the darkness of the woodland, he can tell someone's there. He strolls back to his truck, and gets in. The engine fires up and the tires kick up gravel as it roars away.

EXT. LIQUOR STORE - DAY

The mid morning sun bakes the pitted sidewalk, the decaying liquor store even less appealing in the daylight. René strolls inside.

Moments later he exits clutching a bottle in a brown paper bag. He clocks Natalie stood waiting. She looks like she wants to approach him but seems too timid. He tries to walk by ignoring her but--

Fuck it. He's got to have a word with this girl.

RENÉ
Do I know you? You seem familiar.

She stares up at him with a scolding glare.

RENÉ (CONT’D)
You a cop? Reporter? I know you're following me.

She offers something over.

NATALIE
I'm your guardian angel.

He takes it. A lottery ticket. He pockets it.

RENÉ
Go guard someone else.

He stares meanly for a moment and leaves.

INT. APARTMENT - LATER

The TV plays loudly. René sits watching, finishing off a bottle. He flicks through the channels. Bullshit, adverts, bullshit, infomercial, lottery, bullshit... hang on.
He flicks back to the lottery and watches the numbers come up. He rustles out that ticket he was given. 25 on screen, 24 on the ticket. No dice.

But wait. 32 on screen, 31 on the ticket. The announcer calls 9, he reads 8. He's a little taken. 17 rolls on screen, there's 16 printed right before him.

He stares at the next number on the ticket, 12, and looks to the TV. The chaos of tumbling balls fills the screen. The tension builds. A ball rolls out. 13.

He sits shocked for a moment, grabs his jacket, and leaves.

**EXT. LIQUOR STORE - DAY**

René paces to the store with greed in his eyes. He checks around but no Natalie. He waits impatiently. Nothing. He stares into the store and rubs his jaw. When in Rome.

With a fresh brown bag in his hand, René exits to find Natalie waiting for him.

**RENÉ**

You know, you look just like my Aunt Sally.

**NATALIE**

I know.

**RENÉ**

You family? We got a few psychics in the fold. I could really use one right now.

**NATALIE**

I'm your daughter.

**RENÉ**

Ah, so that's what you are, crazy. We got a lot of those too. I hate to be the one to tell you this, honey, but you look my age.

**NATALIE**

My date of birth is April tenth, twenty twenty-one.

**RENÉ**

Fuck you.

He strides away, no time for this bullshit. She tails him.

**NATALIE**

I'm telling the truth.

He keeps on walking.
NATALIE (CONT’D)
The beach, that’s where you plan to
propose to her. New Years Eve.
That's your big surprise.

He stops and looks back, she shouldn’t know that.

EXT. ALLEYWAY – DAY

René and Natalie walk into the seclusion of the alleyway.

NATALIE
I signed-up the day I turned
seventeen. Just like you.
Intelligence. Ten years working my
way up. Then this new project.
Black. Real black. They send us
back to watch people. Nothing else.
I shouldn’t be doing this.

RENÉ
Guess you sure outperformed your
old man. But then the bar was never
going to be that high.

NATALIE
This is the last photo I have of
you.

She shows him a photo of him, the Woman, and a young girl,
all smiling. He pours over it endeared.

RENÉ
Wait. Last photo?

NATALIE
You want to know what you do to
her, you sick bastard? Before you
run from us?

RENÉ
Wait, I-

NATALIE
-You want to hear her screams for
help? You want to feel her writhing
and kicking under you?

RENÉ
No! Look, I would never-

NATALIE
But you do! You do!

Boiling over, she sweeps out a revolver and aims point blank
at his head. Click. A dud. He flinches. She cocks the hammer.
Click. She cocks. He swipes the gun away. BANG!
He stumbles back and falls. She stares hopeless, the smoking gun limp in her hand and tears streaming down her face. She leaps on him and beats him as she cries.

He snatches the gun from her and forces her up against the wall by the scruff of her neck. She tries to fight him off.

    NATALIE (CONT’D)
    (terrified)
    NO! NO! DON'T TOUCH ME!

    RENÉ
    I would never, EVER, harm her, you hear? That's not me!

    NATALIE
    Is this you?

With his daughter up against the wall in his shaking hands, he struggles to refocus and appear sober.

    RENÉ
    You even thought about the repercussions of killing me? Right now, I'm saving you.

    NATALIE
    You think I haven't thought about that? Killing you might not just kill me, it might just kill everything.

    RENÉ
    Then why risk it?

    NATALIE
    Because it might just end her pain, forever.

She stares deadly serious. He releases her and storms away down the alley, the revolver in one hand, his paper bag in another. She slumps to the ground sniffs back tears.

EXT. DEMOLISHED BUILDING – MOMENTS LATER

René traipses over rubble and rebar and sits on a pile of bricks. He pulls out the liquor and guzzles some back.

He wipes his mouth and thinks long and hard, his eyes startled as he tries to take it all in.

Shaking with disbelief, he pulls the gun on himself, winces and eases back the trigger. Click. He gasps a mixture of frustration and relief. He tries again. Click.

Crunch. He snaps round to see Natalie walking over to him, now composed, calm, and foreboding.
NATALIE
It won't work.

She sits beside him, and stares solemnly into the distance.

NATALIE (CONT'D)
It can't work. It's a paradox. The universe won't allow it. Watch.

She runs her hand to his to retrieve the gun. They connect for a moment as they touch. It's intense. She draws the gun to his face. He nods for her to do it. She shows a moment of regret. He closes his eyes. Click.

He opens his eyes. She aims to one side. BANG! He jolts. She aims for herself and stares back. He shakes his head and goes to stop her. Click. Nothing. She aims away again. BANG! The shot echoes off derelict buildings.

NATALIE (CONT'D)
It can't work if it isn't the answer.

RENÉ
Please, there has to be a way. I don't want to ever hurt her.

NATALIE
All these years, I thought you'd be a monster. But I don't see it.

RENÉ
I got no job, okay? They laid me off last night. Every day I wake up fighting, but life seems to kick back even harder. I'm trying, but I'm loosing.

He looks to the liquor with resentment. She moves to him, drawn into embracing her father. He flinches with shame as she lays her arms around him and rests against his chest.

He clutches at her and breaks down, bringing her in tight. She seems peaceful within his caress.

NATALIE
I can't believe what you become.

RENÉ
I'm so sorry.

NATALIE
I don't want you to die.

She cries. He gasps and hugs her tight.
RENÉ
I don't ever want to ever let you
go. But I'm so scared I'm too weak
for this world.

NATALIE
You're not. You're my father.

He winces with anguish. She looks to the old photo, she is
fading from the image. She knows what she's doing.

NATALIE (CONT’D)
I believe in you.

She means it. He believes her. They sob in each others arms,
pouring out their hearts, feeling deep love and--

René falls forward, Natalie gone from his arms and nowhere to
be seen. He sits worried for a few moments and looks solemnly
up to the sky. His sorrow turns to pride.

He takes the malt liquor and pours it all out into the
ground, letting it weep into the earth.

THE END