

LADYBUG or STILL HERE

FADE IN:

INT. KITCHEN - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Warm, soft lighting blankets the room. The kitchen is full of life. MOM, DAD, and DAUGHTER sit around a small table, laughing over a homemade meal.

DAD

That was best thing you ever gave me!

DAUGHTER (LADYBUG)

Besides me, Papa?

Mom smiles, the grin stretching up to her ears. Happiness is plastered on her face.

DAD

Of course, Ladybug. First, my little girl – and then your mama's spaghetti.

DAUGHTER

Mama, what's the secret? You have to teach me or give me your recipe. Please!

MOM

It's just love... and a little salt.

Mom winks. Laughter fills the room. The camera pans around them, capturing the joy. A warm, golden tone fills the frame.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT (PRESENT)

Cooler tones. Same table. Now, just MOM and DAUGHTER. They eat in near silence. MOM tries to make conversation.

MOM

Want some more before we leave?

Daughter nods.

DAUGHTER

Yes, Mama.

Mom gently places food on her plate. The chair once occupied by Dad is now empty.

MONTAGE - PASSAGE OF TIME

– Daughter smiling, cheesing at high school graduation. – Mom is coming home late from work, tired, yet still gets up early to cook breakfast and wash her daughter's clothes.

(She hides the stress on her face, working hard to provide.)

– Mom drops daughter off at college. They hug tightly.

MOM

Promise me you'll call me every day.

DAUGHTER

I promise.

Mom watches her daughter walk away into her new life of being an adult, and subsequently on her own as the mom begins to tear up and cries to herself.

Mom sits at the kitchen table alone. An extra plate sits untouched. – Daughter studying... – She gets a job and ignores a text from Mom: "*Thinking of you...*"

(A photo of her favorite dish)

"When are you coming by to grab a piece? Miss you, Ladybug." – No response. – Mom is watching TV alone, glancing at the phone beside her.

– Mom is taking medicine with water, alone. – Mom sits in church quietly, hands folded.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DAUGHTER'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Daughter is watching TV, studying, and scrolling on her phone. Unread texts from Mom. She silences a call.

DAUGHTER

(to herself)

I'll call her later...

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Daughter gets hungry and thinks about finding something to cook. She looks through a drawer and finds an old recipe book. She opens it – a piece of paper falls out.

It reads: **"With love and a little salt..."**

She freezes, emotional. It's her mom's spaghetti recipe.

Her mother's voice and presence flood her memory. She stands there in silence, guilt creeping in.

She picks up her phone and dials.

INT. DAUGHTER'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

ON SCREEN: CALLING MOM...

INT. MOM'S HOUSE - SAME TIME

The phone buzzes on the table. It rings and rings. Mom's hand is nearby... but still. Unmoving.

INT. DAUGHTER'S APARTMENT - SAME TIME

Daughter leaves a voicemail, her voice trembling.

DAUGHTER (V.O.)

Hi Mama... I'm sorry for not checking up on you as I promised. I don't know why I waited...Thank you, Mama, for everything you've done for me.I love you.

(MORE)

DAUGHTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I miss you.
Please call me back.

Tears fall down her face. She holds the phone to her chest.

FADE TO BLACK.

Sound of phone ringing... then silence