

VENICE by Oriol Viu Duran

STAGE 1: Here But I'm Gone [Denial / Black / The Neighbourhood]

CURRENT DAY

Venice is on a bus, reading a letter from her grandfather Henry. In it he wishes her a happy birthday and tells her he has prepared a little scavenger hunt in which she has to find five of his most beloved vinyl records. The first clue he gives her is "Without darkness there cannot be light".

Venice exits the bus and the first thing she sees is the sign that spells the name of the neighbourhood she's in; the same name as hers. Some metres beyond the sign she sees the beach, filled with people walking up and down the boardwalk, having fun. She then looks to her left, at a bunch of strange-looking street performers. And finally to her right, where there's a huge homeless encampment. She walks east, passing along canals and mansions until, eventually, she reaches her grandfather's apartment; a decaying three-story building that seems abandoned compared to the surrounding complexes.

She begins exploring the building's surroundings in search of clues. In the back alley she scavenges through crates and boxes filled with forgotten trinkets, such as old postcards. There are two street lights, one of which is not working and, upon closer examination, she spots something written on them; "1234" on the broken street light, and "4321" on the other one. In the side alley she finds an old locker that requires a four digit combination to be opened. Remembering the clue she's been given, she tries the combination "1234". However, to her surprise, it doesn't work. She tries to take the numbers literally, so she inputs "2444"; one two and three fours. The locker opens immediately and there she finds the record "Here But I'm Gone" by Lee Crowfield.

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FLASHBACK

It's a month earlier, and Venice is knocking on a door labelled 2A. The door opens and Henry, her grandfather, greets her with certain resentment. Venice asks him how he is feeling and he answers negatively. They sit down and talk about the current state of the neighbourhood. Henry mentions that the record store where Simone – Venice's late mother and his daughter – used to work in is closing in a month and that, soon enough, the last "relic from Venice" will be him, despite not having much time left either.

Venice says she is worried about him and is there to help, but he confronts her by accusing her of abandoning him and never making contact for the last few years. He adds that she's waited until he's on his deathbed and it's too late. Venice dismisses him.

STAGE 2: Expressions [Anger / Red / Henry]

CURRENT DAY

Venice reads the note inside the locker which comments upon Lee Crowfield once doing a small gig in Venice's record store, where Henry met him. The next clue he gives her is "There's no smoke without fire".

Not far from the locker, she instantly spots a bright red fire extinguisher and she sees some keys hanging from it. They are her grandfather's car keys. Upon arriving at the garage and seeing the car, a red 1970 Ford Mustang that hasn't run for some decades, Venice recalls it being one of her grandfather's most prized possessions, since he had to work many extra hours to pay for it.

She opens the car's boot and finds a briefcase that requires another combination. On top of it there's a sticky note with the clue "no smoke without fire" written on it. After inspecting the car, she finds a small paper with the numbers "310" inside the exhaust pipe. She tries the combination on the suitcase and it cracks open. Inside of it there is the record "Expressions" by Rhett Scarlett.

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FLASHBACK

Venice and Henry are arguing with each other. He is mad at her for abandoning him, but she is defensive about it, saying that he wasn't present for her either as he was always working for his stupid car. He answers by telling her that he only was working extra hours to afford living in Venice, and the car was only a little gift for himself. She responds by complaining about her own name even being tied to that awful neighbourhood and how she would dread to end up being stuck there forever like her grandfather and her late mother, Simone.

That comment about Simone really triggers him, as it's also his daughter Venice is talking about. He confronts her, telling her that she can't imagine what that loss was for him. He tells her she's never experienced a grief like that because she didn't even get to meet her. Venice is very hurt by those words, so she insults Henry, who immediately apologises because he "didn't mean it in that way". She's still too angry, so she says that she is leaving for work. Henry tells her that she's always avoiding conflict and running from her problems. She asks for the apartment keys, but Henry doesn't respond; so she takes Henry's keys and exits the apartment, slamming the door behind her.

STAGE 3: Nurture [Bargaining / Green / Simone]

CURRENT DAY

Venice reads the note inside the briefcase. In it Henry talks about how hard he worked to buy his car and how he dreamt about owning it since he saw Rhett Scarlett driving it. He mentions it being a bit of a waste of money, but that “we all need a bit of joy in the struggle”. The next clue he gives her is “Cultivate your own garden”.

The first place she thinks about is the little shed next to the garage, where Henry keeps his gardening tools. She searches through it but finds nothing of interest, only dead plants and flowers. Seemingly out of options, she remembers the nearby gardening store where his grandfather bought his supplies from.

She enters and introduces herself to the clerk, asking for help. The clerk seems surprised to meet Venice and tells her there is something for her. The clerk enters the store’s backroom and, after a couple of minutes, comes out with a square box. The clerk gives Venice the box, she opens it and finds the record “Nurture” by Alan & Emerald Greene.

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FLASHBACK

After a week of little to no talking, Venice and Henry seem less angry at one another. He asks her about her job, but Venice doesn’t seem too enthusiastic about working in a convenience store. He asks her if she has any plans for the future and she reveals that she is saving up money to go to college and study Sociology. Henry immediately refuses the idea of college, telling her it’s a waste of money, to which Venice responds by saying that his car was also a waste of money. He still disagrees.

She opens up and expresses her desire to “make a change”, especially in Venice. He tells her that she resembles her mother a lot, as she used to do everything in her power to take care of the neighbourhood. She says she wishes she could’ve met her. Henry feels sorry for Venice, so he offers to tell her stories about Simone, how ambitious and strong she was and how much she loved music, gardening and the neighbourhood. He mentions that, after Simone passed away during childbirth, he decided to name Venice like this due to her mother’s desire to care for the neighbourhood. Venice admits she actually likes her name and the neighbourhood, but it just “needs a little refreshing”.

Conversation is flowing and they seem to be getting along again. Henry mentions that Venice should have a copy of the keys to the apartment, just in case. She tells him that he shouldn’t worry about it right now. He suddenly remembers that her birthday is in a couple of weeks, so they have to do something special. Venice is thankful but says she doesn’t need anything special.

STAGE 4: Remember Me [Depression / Blue / Venice's Plans]

CURRENT DAY

Venice reads the note inside the box. In it Henry mentions Simone's passion for gardening again and says she used to listen to "Nurture" while taking care of the plants and flowers. He also mentions that it's been a while since he's watered them, due to his current condition. He adds by saying that plants have never been his thing, as he is more of a "hammer and wrench" kind of guy. The next clue he gives her is "Like a bolt from the blue".

Her first thought is to go back to the garage, where Henry kept his tools and equipment. There's not much there, but she spots a drawer that requires a key. She looks around again but doesn't seem to find any useful clue. Eventually, something catches her eye; an electrical box with a blue lightning bolt pictured on it. She opens it and finds the key inside.

She goes back to the drawer, puts the key in the hole and opens it. She finds the record "Remember Me" by Grant Cobalt sitting on top of a sea of bolts and screws.

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FLASHBACK

Venice's birthday is in a couple of days and their relationship is back at its best. While at work, she gets a call and she is told she has been awarded a grant to fund her studies in Sociology. She applied for it in secret a while back, knowing that her grandfather wouldn't approve of her decision to go to college. Venice is euphoric.

She finishes her shift and rushes home, excited to share the good news with her grandfather. But all that goes up must come down and, upon opening the apartment door and not receiving the usual greeting from Henry, she begins to worry. She goes to the living room and finds her grandfather lying unresponsive on the couch. She immediately calls for help and in no time an ambulance arrives and takes them to the nearest hospital.

Venice is in the waiting room, her left leg bouncing impatiently. A doctor exits the operating room and Venice stands up. The doctor announces that Henry has sadly passed away and they couldn't do anything to save him. Venice's world begins to crumble around her.

STAGE 5: You Are Here [Acceptance / Yellow / Venice's Growth]

CURRENT DAY

Venice reads the note inside the drawer in which Henry mentions that when Venice was little she used to love to see him "attempt to fix the unfixable" in his garage while listening to "Remember Me". He says that he is very proud of the woman she's becoming, her "inside spark" and her desire to make a change and do something bigger, just like her mother. The last clue he gives her is "The sun will shine again".

Venice knows immediately where she must go; Sunny Records, the neighbourhood's record store. Upon entering, Otis, the store clerk who's worked there forever, gives her a warm welcome. He gives her his condolences and they talk about the store closing. Otis reveals that he helped Henry prepare the scavenger hunt and he mentions that her grandfather was very excited when he called him. Otis gives Venice the final record, "You Are Here" by Michael Ivory, along with a key and a note.

Venice reads the note which mentions her finally getting a copy of the apartment's key and how happy he is to have her back in Venice with him. Henry also says in the note that he wishes she's enjoyed the little hunt, even though he didn't have the time or energy to think about more complicated riddles and puzzles. He also says that he'll be waiting for her at home, ready to celebrate her birthday.

She says goodbye to Otis but, before leaving, he can't contain himself from mentioning that Venice looks so much like her mother Simone and that she would be very happy to see that the passion for music still runs in the family. She thanks him, exits the store and goes to the apartment, which she enters using her new key and, as expected, finds an empty home inside. Henry isn't there anymore, but there's all the things he left behind. Venice goes to his bedroom and, on the bedside table, she sees two photographs; one of Simone gardening, and one of Henry and Venice having fun on the boardwalk. She grabs the latter one and stares at it smiling. Venice's catharsis is complete and we are left to wonder if, eventually, she will make the change she longs for...

THE END