

ADRIFT

Written by

Michael Covello and Elizabeth Schneider

MCESFilms@gmail.com  
845-416-8805

FADE IN:

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

A hand reaches out to pull a lamp cord, revealing a cluttered New England style living room. Furniture is dated and tattered. ZINNIA (mid-70's) comfortable, set in her ways, stubborn, is inside her home, sitting in her old rocking chair. She is thinking back on her life, distracted, as moths buzz outside her living room window. Her face is lit harshly by the lamp.

ZINNIA (V.O.)  
(dreamily looking out the window)

You had my pock-marked face. I won't deny that at first I was horrified. I mean, my whole life I was ashamed of these ugly little specks. I didn't want that for you. So I made up a game. I can still remember your tiny hand hovering by my face, tracing along every speck, connecting the dots. My face became constellations to you. Under your finger, I was the universe, and when you looked in a mirror, so were you.

Zinnia shifts in her chair. She moves her hands over her face. The T.V. plays in the background. It shows a weatherman, gesturing to an approaching hurricane.

ZINNIA (V.O.)  
I lost you when you were so young, and now I'm so very old. Sometimes I look at myself in the mirror, trying to see the me that you would remember, and I can't find her. But I know deep down that one shared look into our speckled faces and we'd be speaking in hieroglyphics just like before.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN - DAY

Aerial shots of a New England coastal town. Beautiful rolling pastoral setting, landscape, maybe houses and trees sporadically.

Blocky text is embedded into the landscape and other types of surrealist iconography, especially eyes watching, confronting the viewer.

ZINNIA (V.O.)

Yeah, this used to be Ahab's town, until I came along. Looking at it now you'd never believe what a destination this town used to be! Boutique hotels and soft sand beaches. Tourists from across the world AND all their money. Later, when the flooding got really bad, the rich people started making plans, decided what was worth saving. Brick by brick they made a whole complex of brand-new "historic" buildings way back inland. I tell you what, I'd never heard of such nonsense... Nia told me this same thing happened to an Ancient Greek ship named Theseus. Each piece replaced by something new, until nothing from the original was there anymore. Seems silly to me.

CUT TO:

EXT. ZINNIA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Slowly narrowing focus onto Zinnia's house, with an alter on the front porch. Clouds behind house turn to spiraling storm.

Zoom into front porch, light is on, windows glow with light.

ZINNIA (V.O.)

Whatever... none of this helped my neighborhood anyway. We became a permanent flood zone, a swamp. The tourists sailed off on the Ship of Theseus. And when you're one of us, you're on your own. You can't just rebuild your life plank by plank on higher ground. So we just stayed. Some rich folks stayed too, I guess, but their houses were made to float.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ZINNIA'S TOWN/STREET - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Caterpillars squirming up tree trunks and making abstract but vaguely text-like designs on the trunks. Various shots of people panicking and reacting, Picasso-esque line drawing style, simple visual vocabulary but ornamental line and detail work and with emotional heft.

ZINNIA (V.O.)

Picasso drawing style continues, leaning more into Guernica references. Exaggerated violence, warlike feeling.

ZINNIA

When I was a little girl, I learned to spell through caterpillars. All anyone could talk about back then was an invasion of Gypsy Moths. One summer morning we woke up to find our trees with bare winter arms, not a single leaf left on them. All along their trunks was the wriggling calligraphy of caterpillar bodies, and boy, were the adults scared. It was war.

ZINNIA (V.O.)

Their response was fast and furious: they started spraying before we lost anymore ground. And soon that wriggling calligraphy was wiped clean.

Surreal depictions of open mouths becoming portals, caterpillars and cocoons inside, seeing into the body, through the layers of anatomy into some hollow interior space - body becoming a place of sanctuary.

ZINNIA (V.O.)

When I was that little girl, I was Noah and his ark, not Ahab on the Pequod. I loved every animal, even those little spelling bugs. I tried to sleep with my mouth open, thinking that all those caterpillars might need a place to hide. And I think one day it worked! I woke up and I knew my belly was just full of cocoons. And then, many years later, when I needed them, when we all needed them, they started to hatch.

Open mouths, abstracted and stylized gestures and textures, moths emerging with exhalations from mouth.

ZINNIA (V.O.)

Now, when the atmosphere is just right, when the barometric pressure drops to just the right level and the wind picks up to just the right speed, I close my eyes, concentrate, and exhale clouds of moths. That's how I fight my battles. Ahab used harpoons, but like I said, now-a-days this town belongs to me. My name's Zinnia. Some call me Moby Mama. Some call me Mother of Moths.

Depicting faces unraveling into various blinking eyes, fluttering wings, etc. Fever dream style, abstract and ephemeral and highly visceral.

ZINNIA (V.O.)

You know, moths have so many eyes. And their eyes are also wings, so they see and they fly together. Those soft fluttering bodies propel themselves through the night, through danger and trauma and darkness.

Now more realistic moths begin to emerge from the abstract fever dream from before. Eyes and wings fluttering. They flutter right to the glowing candle flame and the flame erupts. One moth becomes a candle wick, lit on fire, transforming, burning. Maybe something happens with smoke (does it become an image?)

ZINNIA (V.O.)

And of course, we all know the moth can get too close, burn themselves by their obsession. Honestly, though, I don't think it works like that. In our world, you get emboldened by the flame, you reinforce yourself against the encroaching night pushing in on all sides.

Zooming out from the burning moth to bring the viewer back to our home site.

END FLASHBACK

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. PORCH - NIGHT

Outside Zinnia's house looking at the altar on her front porch with moths circling around the candles. Montage of various shots of the front porch altar and the statues, etc.

ZINNIA (V.O.)

That's who I am here, to my town,  
to my friends and neighbors. They  
need me. They pray to me. They  
built a whole damn altar for me.  
They carved statues for me. I am  
their last stand. And I won't  
abandon them.

Zinnia through the window.

CUT TO:

Phone ringing, screen is still black.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ZINNIA'S HOUSE - EVENING

Zinnia in her house on the phone talking to her daughter NIA (early 30s, voice only, off screen/not depicted). Various shots of Zinnia around her cluttered house as she talks. Shots of her with Moths in background, and towards the end of the conversation, shots of Zinnia with boxes of stuff. The boxes are being personified, anthropomorphized, and coming alive/taking the shape of people (but mutated, non functional people). All the box people have sharpie writing with the name "Raven" written on them.

ZINNIA

Nia, baby, how are you?

(Gasps)

Oh, sweetie! You should see all the  
moths I'm cooking up. Oh god they  
are brilliant. The window's just  
crawling with them.

NIA

Mom, this is getting ridiculous.  
You need to leave now, it's not  
safe.

ZINNIA

Safe? Since when do I care about safe? You know what's safe? Me. I make it safe. And you're telling me to go?

NIA

Mom, I need you to listen. They're evacuating.

ZINNIA

Evacuating? Who's evacuating? No one out there gives a damn about us down here. No one's coming around knocking on my door except the de la Cruzes, except the Biancos. The people who need me. The people I care about.

NIA

The Biancos?

ZINNIA

Oh, come on! Rosemary Bianco? A saint! She used to watch you while I -

NIA

I know who the Biancos are, mom, but the Biancos left last Fall.

ZINNIA

Rosemary wouldn't do that. She's such a thoughtful woman... Just left me some Jordan almonds at my door. Oh and Nia, did I tell you, someone brought me the most beautiful yellow candles, if you could get a load of my altar -

NIA

Oh my god, Mom...listen to you...you're not a god. And I know for a fact the Biancos left. They're out in Minnesota.

ZINNIA

OK...well...then the Biancos deserve to freeze up there. Miserable place. And what - you want me to just run away? Ride off to the Minnesota sunset with my tail between my legs?

NIA

You know what, no, I'm not doing this with you right now. You need to get out. They're evacuating all the inland towns. If they're scared of the storm all the way up there then the coast is gonna get totally smashed -

ZINNIA

Well, Nia, just tell all those scared little rich folks to park their asses right next to Mama Moby's house. Hurricane's don't just waltz on by when I'm on watch. My front yard is as far as the bastards gonna go.

NIA

Who calls you Mama Moby? Mom, it's going to be worse than the last few, you can't ride this one out. I promised Dad -

ZINNIA

He didn't need your promise. You know what he used to say about me? I had a mind like a razor and a mouth that could destroy the world. That's what your father used to say-

NIA

God not this again, We don't have time-

ZINNIA

DESTROYER. OF. WORLDS. Don't make me say it a third time. I'm not about to let anything happen here that I don't like.

NIA

...you can't keep going on like this...it's time to leave...

ZINNIA

Leave what? My home? All my stuff? All Raven's stuff -

NIA

Raven's stuff? Mom, enough - you're just being stubborn!



ZINNIA

I'm not stubborn if I'm right, Nia!  
 Goddammit! I've looked every last  
 one of them dead in the eye and  
 sent them on their sorry way.  
 Category 5, Category 6, makes no  
 difference. And this one will be no  
 different.

NIA

...Oh my god...you don't know yet, do  
 you? Mom...the storm...they named it  
 Raven. She's coming right for you.

ZINNIA

What?

(Silence)  
 (Fumbles with remote,  
 clicks on TV)

NIA

Mom... Raven's gone. It wasn't your  
 fault... It's time for you to leave  
 too.

ZINNIA

(silence, with TV anchor  
 hazy in the background)  
 I can't, Nia, I love you, but my  
 home is here and I'm not going  
 anywhere.  
 (click of phone cutting  
 off)

DISSOLVE TO:

FLASHBACK EXT. ORCHARD - MORNING

Zinnia is walking through the orchard, it is springtime and  
 the trees are full of flower blossoms. There are shots of  
 people climbing up in the trees, hand pollinating the  
 flowers.

ZINNIA (V.O.)

Raven, when you were taken from me,  
 that spring was one of the warmest  
 on record. The disappearance of the  
 bees would have been news if we  
 hadn't seen it coming for years.  
 Once they were gone, the orchards  
 started to fail, so the farmers  
 hired all our kids to hand  
 pollinate.

(MORE)

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

I loved seeing you and Nia up there, my two beautiful honey bees in the flowers.

Nia and Raven in the trees pollinating the flowers.

ZINNIA (V.O.)

The air was wet and warm and full of floral sweetness. The sky was as pink as the blossoms. Your face, pock-marked and determined, and my face, smiling, catching what turned out to be my last glimpses of you in the triangular in-between of branches.

Darkening spirals in the sky, storms taking form. Abstract and gestural.

ZINNIA (V.O.)

They called the storm a "black swan". It was a category 6, which back then was unheard of! Sure, nowadays they say it was inevitable. But at the time, it was a complete surprise. And it knocked us hard on our ass.

Stormy spirals in the sky behind the trees. Shots of orchard trees exploding into shards.

ZINNIA (V.O.)

It appeared without warning. It was May, goddammit! May! And you were helpless in the almond trees. 250 MPH winds stripped the letters off your father's Toyota. Trees shattered into toothpicks.

Zinnia in the whaling museum, taking refuge, witnessing the sperm whale model getting sucked out into the sky.

ZINNIA (V.O.)

I was across town instead of right there with you, baby girl. I tried to get to you, but they dragged me into that shabby old whaling museum. When the walls were ripped away, I started to black out. The last thing I saw was a hideous, life-sized sperm whale model take flight, sucked into the turmoil of the sky.

Slow pans of post-storm wreckage. Disaster is everywhere. Floods, destroyed buildings. Dead bodies marked by flags.

ZINNIA (V.O.)

We found Nia catatonic, clinging to the crooked remnants of an almond tree. She was the only one left in the orchard alive. Red flags marked the resting places of dead bodies all over town. We covered them with whatever we had on hand. Oh god I looked and looked for you, Raven. We all did. But you were gone. Gone into the sky like that whale.

Zinnia metaphorically merging with the destroyed landscape.

ZINNIA (V.O.)

Not long after the Black Swan, your daddy got me a book on Buddhism. In it, I remember reading a story about transformation. One night, a lone traveler crossed paths with two body-swapping demons. These creatures worked the traveler over in unison. One of them hacked the traveler up, bit by bit, while the other demon patched him back together with corpse parts from god knows where. When the traveler returned home... I guess he was fine, physically at least, but he didn't know who he was anymore.

For years we've dismantled the whole world and now it's dismembering us. I'll tell you what, I've been torn apart and pieced myself back together and I know...I'm not the same.

Oh god, I miss you baby girl.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ZINNIA'S HOUSE - EVENING

Zinnia is calmly reading in her chair. The house is flooding and the windows all have waterfalls pouring in calm streams.

The personified Raven boxes are all dragging themselves around through the soaked living room in a tizzy. Suddenly, there are loud thumping knocks on the door.

RAVEN BOXES

(Scared and startled)

It's here! Mama Moby! Mama Moby!

ZINNIA

Stay here, you little sweeties,  
you'll be safe. I have to leave for  
just a minute. You'll be fine.

Zinnia walks outside to the porch. Depending on who is speaking, the POV swaps between a cowboy shot from behind her looking up at the storm and then from the storm looking down at her.

STORM RAVEN

(unintelligible noises)

ZINNIA

(Screaming over the wind  
and rain with Moths  
fluttering out of her  
mouth)

Oh you're a feisty one, aren't you.  
That anger you feel, that rage, I  
know it's strong, and for that I'm  
sorry.

Zinnia begins to walk straight out towards the storm, chaos unfolding all around and she is getting pummeled with rain, wind, and horrible weather.

STORM RAVEN

(unintelligible noises)

ZINNIA

Enough of this. I stand before you,  
constellations on my face and  
calligraphy in my mouth. You're no  
match. It's time to go home.

STORM RAVEN

(unintelligible noises)

Zinnia continues her death march, but is slowly becoming more graphica and dropping into a backlit black silhouette with diagonal slashes of rain cutting through the composition.

Water is rapidly filling the bottom of the composition.

ZINNIA

(Screaming over the wind  
and rain with Moths  
fluttering out of her  
mouth)

Believe me when I say that I am not  
here to fight you. You can see for  
yourself - I'm not Ahab. I have no  
harpoons. But nevertheless, you  
won't make it past me. There's  
nothing for you here. Go.

CUT TO:

EXT. FLOODED STORM LANDSCAPE, NIGHT

Tone shift, maybe lean into black graphic composition from  
before and turn the drawing into white-line on black ground.  
The imagery becomes a bit more surreal and a bit less  
illustrative.

Zinnia starts buckling over and falling into the stormy flood  
waters. Her reflection is coming alive and things are  
appearing to her in the water. She seems to get lost looking  
deep into it.

ZINNIA (V.O.)

This place got rich off of whale's  
oil. It would burn long and bright  
and clean. One town could be lit  
from a single whale. And then  
think... think of how many towns  
there were... Jesus, we devoured the  
whales! They didn't stand a chance.  
Each one turned to oil, each one  
brightening one town and then  
another, until all their warm  
bodies were just...gone. I'm sorry we  
did that to you, Whale, leaving you  
swallowed in the near complete  
darkness of extinction beneath the  
bright industrial glow of man. But,  
even then, the sea rolled as it  
rolled five thousand years ago.

Zoom out from Zinnia, and it turns out she is in her flooded  
and destroyed house, not outside. The zoom-out slowly pulls  
us back, back, back away from the house through the flooded  
underwater townscape.

ZINNIA (V.O.)

I told Nia, you stare long enough into an abyss, the abyss will take notice and stare back into you. She was too much like her daddy, she thought like a whale. I wanted her to be a moth and find the fire. When you're a moth and your eyes see a flame, something in your whole body takes hold and moves you. Your eyes, fluttering like wings, draw you towards the light until suddenly the light is all around you, holding on to you. Maybe this embrace becomes a sarcophagus, but if you're careful, it'll be your fortress. And if your strong, it will be your harpoon against the darkness.

The zoom out is now pulling us further out to the water, further from town and into the ocean. Rich people float by in their bobbing little modernist houses. They should be depicted like they are see-through (visual device so viewer can see inside). The houses are like traps that have encased the humans, like little bobbing coffins. Overlaid audio of a phone call as we watch the rich people float off to sea.

911 DISPATCHER

911, this is Julie, can you hear me?

NIA

Yes. Please help. My mother, she's trapped in her house. Everything is underwater. I think she's trapped in her basement and she-

911 DISPATCHER

OK one second here, let me get you mapped. Do you know where you're at?

NIA

I...I don't think it's on any maps anymore.

FADE TO BLACK.